



Building Independence

FCHA Tenant Participation Strategy

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Established in 1988, First Choice Housing Association provides quality accommodation solutions across Wales, Shropshire and Telford. Many FCHA Tenants have a disability or additional complex needs. We also provide housing for veterans. We aim to be the provider of choice for local authorities to deliver well-designed homes in which people and families with a range of specialist needs and disabilities and veterans can lead fulfilling lives.

Our mission is to improve quality of life through provision of quality, bespoke accommodation that enables tenants to achieve independence, fulfil their potential and optimise enjoyment of life. As part of our Tenant Talk consultation, tenants highlighted the importance of health and wellbeing to them. This was no surprise considering the impact and restrictions of a global pandemic.

First Choice currently works in 20 Local Authority areas throughout Wales and also in Shropshire and Telford with over 30 support provider organisations that provide care and support to Tenants. We currently have 356 properties and provide housing for 911 Tenants.

Hearing the Tenants' voice is a key factor in ensuring that our services are tailored appropriately to their needs. Tenants are involved in the strategic decision making by way of a variety of consultation methods. We provide a wide range of participation options for tenants and this strategy sets out the Association's plans to reach as many of them as possible in a way that is suitable for them as individuals.

1.1 FCHA Commitment

First Choice believes that Tenant Participation and consultation should be at the heart of everything we do and that Tenants should have a say in all matters relating to their home, their neighbourhood and the services they receive.

We realise the importance of understanding tenants' needs and that to do this we need to know who FCHA tenants are. We aim to ensure services are tailored and drive future strategic thinking about the way services are managed, ultimately helping us to better respond to tenants' needs. To this end we have recruited a new Health & Wellbeing post and are developing a health and wellbeing strategy based on feedback from tenants.

We will work with other organisations to tackle the barriers that tenants face and eliminate discrimination by promoting equality of opportunity.

As a specialist provider of accommodation for vulnerable people we aim to ensure that everyone is treated fairly. We will work towards ensuring that the services we provide are accessible to all.

First Choice has an ambition to involve all tenants despite the difficulties this might pose. There is a logistical difficulty of the widespread geographical

spread of tenants with a smaller proportion of general needs tenants. We will provide a flexible and tailored approach to reflect the diverse needs of tenants, as well as ensure all tenants have ample opportunity to participate.

First Choice will regularly monitor the progress and impact of Tenant Participation activities and feedback using a variety of communication methods suitable to the audience.

First Choice Housing Association is passionate about Tenant Participation and is committed to taking this strategy forward. Alongside this will be our stand alone Digital Inclusion Strategy and Health & Wellbeing Strategy which will be intrinsically linked to our Tenant Participation Strategy.

1.2 What is Tenant Participation?

The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Cymru describes Tenant Participation as:

“A way in which Tenants and landlords share ideas and co-operate. It is a way for the Tenant to be involved in the decision making progress that occurs during discussions about improving the standard of housing conditions and services”.

First Choice recognises that this is a beneficial practice for both tenant and the landlord, whereby:

- Tenants are given the opportunity to voice concerns, share opinions and contribute positive ideas about the housing service they are receiving.
- As Landlords, we can improve services and increase customer satisfaction by listening to tenants; as well as offering tenants opportunities for partnership working and supporting them to access improved links with their communities.

1.3 Regulations guiding TP Engagement activities

The Regulatory Framework, put in place by Welsh Ministers, places clear expectations on Housing Associations to demonstrate tenants are involved and shape services and decisions taken by the Association.

Standards within the Regulatory Framework

Tenants at the heart of regulation

Tenants are involved and shape services and decisions taken by the Association and ensure that services provided are of a high quality and continuously seek to improve. We will engage with tenants in the submission of our Self Evaluation and compliance statement ensuring that they share our views and their input is included as part of the document.

- **The Regulatory Board for Wales**

The Regulatory Board for Wales is an advisory Board set up by the Welsh Government that reports directly to the Welsh Ministers on the way in which the Housing Regulation Team and Housing Associations carries out their work.

- **Co-regulation**

The Welsh Government Regulatory Team and Housing Associations will work closely to raise and address any matters of concern about risks, issues and challenges that we may face in the future.

As well as following the principles of the regulatory framework Welsh Ministers set out Regulatory Standards in accordance with Section 33A of the Housing Act 1996. Welsh Ministers expect Housing Associations to meet the Regulatory Standards but it is the Association's job to decide how it will achieve them, working with Tenants and other stakeholders.

FCHA Tenant Participation Strategy aims to achieve:

Performance Standard 2: Effective and appropriate Tenant involvement and high quality and improving services:-

- ✓ Demonstrates how Tenants are involved in decision making and shaping services in ways appropriate for Tenants and the organisation.
- ✓ Demonstrates how the Board assures itself of current service performance, including Tenant satisfaction, and drives continuous improvement.
- ✓ Ensures that all homes meet required standards of design and quality.
- ✓ Meets all applicable statutory requirements providing for the health and safety of the occupants in the home.
- ✓ Ensure trust and transparency in all our engagement and communication with tenants

1.4 What we do now

Everything we do at First Choice is about giving Tenants a greater say in the delivery of services and providing a platform where Tenant engagement leads to actual change.

The majority of First Choice Tenants have a learning disability and receive support to live in their homes. Some Tenants have additional physical and/or behavioural needs, poor mental health or in need of day to day support. Some First Choice tenants, or a member/s of their family, have physical disabilities. Some First Choice tenants are ex-armed forces or have a family connection with the armed forces. Not all First Choice tenants receive tenancy related support. First Choice will ensure all events are accessible and inclusive of all Tenants.

The existing framework for Tenant engagement has two main strands; 'consultative' being formal communications and 'gateway' events being informal. Both strands offer a range of mechanisms for Tenants to engage with us on a formal and informal basis, to have their voice heard and are consulted upon.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, subsequent lockdowns and social distancing requirements from March 2020, the Association had an extensive programme of face to face events. Plans for new types of events were also in place. Due to Government restrictions these events could not take place but online events such as disco parties, quizzes and consultations were held online via Zoom.

CONSULTATIVE ENGAGEMENT		
Communication / Event	Occurrence of events	Purpose
Tenants Talk meetings	Events to be held throughout Wales, Shropshire and Telford throughout year	Review performance Consultative Consider new proposals/ideas Address inequalities & outcomes Informed decision making

		Improved health and wellbeing
Tenancy Rights & Responsibilities workshops	For tenants at newly handed over properties	Discuss, educate and address aspects of housing issues Feedback from Tenants on services
Newsletter	Quarterly (4 per year)	Communicating and updating Tenants about organisational news
Tenants Talks - What Matters To You Survey	Undertaken in 2019. To be reviewed as an ongoing consultation?	Establish whether FCHA is providing the right services and how we can improve/offer new services. Health and wellbeing issues to be taken forward by new role in FCHA.

GATEWAY ENGAGEMENT		
Communication / Event	Occurrence of events	Purpose
10 Pin Bowling	Throughout year in various locations	Social engagement Feedback on services Improved health and wellbeing Enjoyment
Tenant Discos `live` and online events	Throughout year in various locations	Social engagement Consultation Improved health and wellbeing

		Build Rapport Get to know staff & Tenants Enjoyment Feedback
Summer social event	Annually	Social engagement Feedback on services Improved health and wellbeing Enjoyment Community engagement
Gig Buddies Cymru	Ongoing	Work in partnership Integration Social engagement Improved health and wellbeing
Bingo & cinema events	Throughout year in various locations	Social engagement Feedback on services Improved health and wellbeing Enjoyment
Wellbeing events eg cooking, walking, barge trip	Throughout year in various locations	Social engagement Feedback on services Physical and mental health & wellbeing Enjoyment Increase social circle Increase independence Improve life skills

Our co-production events with Support Providers have included formal celebratory events and workshops and provide additional opportunities for us to engage with Tenants in a variety of settings.

1.5 Recognising and Overcoming Barriers

A SWOT analysis has been carried out on the current arrangements for Tenant engagement as a means for identifying future priorities:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Well attended sessions with high number of Tenants in attendance.</p> <p>Variety of events specific to Tenants` needs; good spread between formal and informal; consultative and gateways events.</p> <p>Reliable support staff.</p> <p>Sufficiently resourced – i.e. dedicated staff and healthy budget.</p> <p>Tenants take an active role.</p> <p>Digital connectivity -190 devices provided to tenants to enable increased digital inclusion opportunities.</p> <p>Virtual events reduce the logistical issues associated with the geographical spread of properties</p>	<p>Challenges associated with the geographical spread of properties, in terms of logistics, travel and ease of attendance.</p> <p>Tenants do not always take an active role in reviewing performance & testing services.</p> <p>Some tenants are dependent on appropriate levels of care and support in order to attend events.</p> <p>Tenants with children may be unable to attend events due to childcare commitments.</p> <p>Lack of training/confidence.</p> <p>Fear/anxiety around pandemic and social distancing.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Different tenure types and different client groups.</p> <p>Housing Management team to work collectively to promote tenant engagement from all client groups.</p> <p>Increased involvement in local groups and communities.</p> <p>Increased numbers of digitally included tenants.</p>	<p>Not meeting needs of diverse range of client groups.</p> <p>Tenant voice is not heard – ie does not feed into FCHA decision making process.</p> <p>Apathy – Tenants have busy lives and taking part may not always be a priority.</p>

What stops Tenants participating is the most important question, therefore identifying and understanding these barriers will help us understand how these can be overcome.

2.0 FIRST CHOICE TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

2.1 Our Vision

Tenant Participation is firmly embedded within First Choice's strategic objectives. We believe this is the key to achieving the highest rates of satisfaction, ensuring we hear tenants' views and involve them in making key strategic decisions. The Association will actively encourage Tenant involvement and promote positive engagement with Tenants in the design and delivery of our services. We maximise tenant inclusion in the running of the Association.

Tenant Participation Objectives

First Choice will:

1. Hear tenants' views and act upon them

2. Support Tenants to understand the work of the Association

3. Provide a range of participation opportunities to meet the diverse needs of all Tenants

Tenant Participation Outcomes

First Choice hopes to achieve:

- 1.1 **Quality and inclusive services for Tenants**

- 1.2 **Accountability for Tenants**

- 2.1 **Increased skills, knowledge and confidence for Tenants to actively participate**

- 2.2 **Understanding of value for money i.e. what does my rent pay for?**

- 3.1 **Increased number of diverse Tenant groups (LD/PD, General Needs) being actively involved and having their say in the work of the Association.**

2.2 Our Investment in Tenant Participation

Involving Tenants in a range of different ways and going out to them, rather than expecting them to come to us, takes time, money, effort and skills on both sides. We see this as a crucial cost and essential to our core business.

First Choice maintains our commitment to Tenant Participation through the high number of participation events held each year, the amount of staff time dedicated and a healthy Tenant participation budget.

Staff are supported to understand how Tenant Participation underpins their role, work and the ethos of the Association. Tenant participation activities are prioritised by the Association in consultation with Tenants. Feedback has informed us that our diverse Tenant group prefers to maintain a balance between consultative and gateway events, enabling active participation.

The Association will continue to record each participation activity by cost and outcome. This information will be analysed and discussed with Tenants annually. We aim to ensure that value for money is achieved and understand the importance of social value alongside this.

In 2019, 85% of FCHA Tenants agreed that we are spending the 'right amount' and believe it to be value for money.

The Association is sufficiently resourced to continue with our current range of Tenant participation activities and undertake the actions outlined within the Tenant Participation Action Plan. We continue to consult with tenants on whether they think the amount we spend on tenant participation represents good value for money.

2.3 Management and Governance Support for Tenant Participation

First Choice recognises that successful Tenant participation can only be achieved by effective mainstreaming throughout the organisation. To ensure that staff recognise their role in contributing to participation:

- An overview of Tenant participation is included in inductions for new staff
- A commitment to Tenant participation is included in all job descriptions
- Staff from all departments attend Tenant participation events

Our Housing Management team focuses on how best to ensure all tenants can be included within the management and governance of the Association. This will be achieved by using both informal and formal platforms for discussion, enabling us to understand the preferred method of communication.

The link between Tenants and the Board is provided by both Senior Management and Board and they:

- Approve the Tenant Participation Strategy, Action Plan and budget
- Oversee the achievement of tasks within the Tenant Participation Action Plan
- Review updates from consultative meetings and use this information to assist with decision making
- Attend many of the Association's Tenant participation events

This acts to strengthen the link between Tenants and the Board, enabling meaningful two-way feedback between both parties.

Tenants subsequently increase their knowledge by learning about:

- ✓ How First Choice is run in relation to governance, finance and staffing
- ✓ First Choice's housing stock
- ✓ The Welsh Government's risk-based approach to regulation
- ✓ Partnership arrangements between First Choice, Local Authorities and support provider organisations
- ✓ Their roles within communities
- ✓ Improving their health and well-being




























Tenants are involved in key service and governance-related decisions which ensure:

- ✓ Early involvement in shaping and improving services and policies
- ✓ Increased accountability by offering opportunities to scrutinise the Association's performance
- ✓ The Association's Board of Management takes Tenants' views into account when making decisions
- ✓ Tenants are empowered and their confidence and skills are increased through consultation in relation to these decisions
- ✓ Tenants are provided with wider opportunities to gain an understanding of, and input into, the governance of the Association.

2.4 Models of Tenant Participation

First Choice recognises that, in order to offer truly effective Tenant Participation, we must first understand the models of approach we utilise. All approaches come with their own advantages and limitations. It is therefore important to offer different and mixed approaches to achieve inclusive and wide reaching Tenant participation.

First Choice has set out our chosen models of Tenant Participation that we believe offer a wide variety of approaches, meeting the diverse needs of Tenants:

	Improving Communities	Improving services and VFM	Accountability	Individual and community capacity	Skills for employment	Health & Wellbeing
Data driven insight						
Service improvement & monitoring						
We will support you						
Digital Inclusion						
Focus Group						
Special Interest Groups						
Critical Friend						

Data Driven Insight

Tenant feedback and data helps to drive co-decision making, improve services, measure satisfaction and set priorities. This data is derived from:

- Annual Tenant surveys
- Post repair satisfaction forms
- Feedback at the point of interaction

Service Improvement & Monitoring

On-going service improvement and monitoring groups involve Tenants who meet to review and assess landlord services. The structure of such groups can range from informal (with very little in the way of management arrangements) to formal (where the group becomes independently constituted). FCHA will look into setting up the following groups:

- Tenant Inspectors
- Independent Tenant Representative
- Scrutiny of Service
- Service Panels

'We Will Support You' Approach

Community action via groups or projects is often a response to collective need. People coming together helps to improve a community and aid social inclusion, alleviates exclusion and increase the number of people directly involved in their community – all essential ingredients for a community striving to be sustainable. FCHA will support these initiatives:

- Source/Initiative Funding
- Signposting to other organisations
- Provide assistance to make things happen

Digital Inclusion

Digital participation can be adapted to incorporate a variety of methods of engagement. The Association has developed a Digital Inclusion Strategy to further enhance tenants' opportunities to be involved.

We have provided 190 devices to tenants in order to assist them to become more digitally active. Training has been provided for support provider organisations to help support the use of the devices. We have held various events with tenants via Zoom and will continue to do so going forward.

We will continue to develop the following methods as well as promoting Digital Champions amongst FCHA tenant groups.

- Social Media tools
- Online surveys & repairs
- Web chat / Webinars / Zoom / Teams

Health & Wellbeing

The Health and Well-being strategy will prioritise the voice of FCHA tenants, ensuring that the things they identify as key areas are included and invested in. To involve tenants as much as possible, a mixture of meeting people (face-to-face or digitally), questionnaires and focus groups (e.g. involvement in Tenants Talk meetings) will be used. In addition, the strategy will work in

alignment with Support Providers and Local Authorities, ensuring that our aspirations are the same and we have a cohesive approach to boosting the health and well-being of tenants.

Themes included in this are:

- Sense of belonging
- Independence
- Mental health
- Social value
- Use of space – internal and external
- Engagement and activities

Focus Group

Focus groups can provide insightful understanding of services, complex issues and situations. This goes further than the information gathered from standard multiple choice type surveys, such as STAR satisfaction surveys or large public meetings. Our focus groups include:

- Consultation groups
- STAR/Tenant survey follow up questions
- Longitudinal study measuring the impact of increased digital inclusion on tenants' health and wellbeing. This will be included in the Health and Well-being Strategy.

Critical Friend

The Critical Friend Model is a high-challenge and high-support approach to involvement. The focus is to work with the landlord in a constructive way by making recommendations for service improvement.

- Tenant auditors/inspectors
- Independent Tenant Representative

2.5 Opportunities for Participation, Wellbeing, Communication & Engagement Activities



Tenant Consultation Meetings

Tenants Talk meetings are held at various venues throughout Wales and Shropshire. Area or scheme specific meetings will be held for general needs tenants following consultation in 2021/22. Tenants are encouraged to speak to the Director of Corporate Services & Housing at our participation groups about First Choice and the services they receive. This ensures a link between Tenants and the Board, enabling meaningful two-way feedback between both parties.

Tenant Feedback

Feedback forms in an accessible format are provided to Tenants attending events. A senior manager of the Association undertakes visits to Tenants at newly developed properties, assessing their satisfaction with, and the suitability of their home.

The Association also requests feedback from Tenants in the following ways:

- *Tenant Satisfaction Survey*
- *Re-let survey (for new Tenants)*
- *Service standards satisfaction survey*
- *Repairs service satisfaction feedback forms*

All feedback is analysed to ensure that both Tenant participation options and the level of service provided by the Association meets the needs of Tenants.

Tenant feedback is used as a service improvement tool in relation to the levels and types of services provided. This increases:

- *Accountability to Tenants*
- *Confidence that their views have been listened to and have helped shape services*
- *Involvement in strategic decision making.*

Tenant Workshops

Workshops enable Tenants to learn about First Choice and tenancy-related issues, the Association's work, and their rights and responsibilities as a Tenant. Outcomes include:

- *Increased accountability in relation to tenancy rights and responsibilities*
- *Increased knowledge and confidence in maintaining their tenancy agreement, as well as knowledge of maintenance and adaptations, Taking Part in First Choice and health and safety in their homes.*

Accessible Communication

The Association asks Tenants for communication and language preferences and has a comprehensive policy on this. The Association has a Welsh Language Scheme in place. All information sent to Tenants is in an accessible format, with the exception of the Tenancy Agreement which is a legal document. However, key tenancy rights and responsibilities are outlined in other accessible documents. Examples of First Choice's accessible information include:

- *The 'Getting Things Fixed' file (relating to the Association's maintenance services)*
- *Tenant Handbook*
- *'Your First Choice Home' DVD (supporting the Tenant Handbook)*
- *'Living in Your Home' interactive workbook*
- *'Tenants' Voice' newsletter*
- *Tenant Participation Strategy*

Accessible communication in a variety of visual and audio formats is a vital participation tool. To ensure tenants are benefitting fully from our consultative groups we engage with a speech and language therapist, reviewing how we can develop our Tenants Talk meetings to maximise tenants' voices in the running of the Association. The feedback obtained in this process will be incorporated into our Tenants Talk events.

By encouraging Tenants to participate via accessible communication tools, the Association aims to:

- *Increase Tenants' knowledge and understanding of their tenancy rights and responsibilities and ways to 'take part' in First Choice*
- *Reduce breaches of tenancy*
- *Increase 2-way accountability between Tenants and First Choice*
- *Facilitate Tenants' integration into their local communities*

Gateway Activities

We hold a number of gateway activities each year as well as regional ten pin bowling events throughout Wales and Shropshire. We also host discos, Tenant quizzes and online parties.

Future gateway activities will include more general needs specific events and provide opportunities for Tenants with varying support and non-support requirements to participate on an informal basis. Events such as canal-boat trips, sports events, zoo visits, skittles and karaoke are being considered.

These are important for the Association's Tenants as they:

- Increase social skills and confidence by meeting other Tenants within the First Choice community, transcending the boundaries of their own geographical communities in a relaxed and informal setting.
- Aim to improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Tenants.
- Encourage Tenants to discuss issues relating to their home and their tenancies in an informal setting with a range of First Choice staff and the Board of Management. Consequently, accountability to Tenants is increased
- May be encouraged to provide more formal feedback to the Association on services via attendance at consultative meetings and/or engaging with surveys
- Increase their knowledge and understanding of the Association's governance processes (via attendance at the Annual General Meeting, prior to the South Wales disco)

Community Involvement Grant

Local communities of First Choice Tenants do not generally exist in the geographical sense, due to the low density of our properties in a given area. However, many Tenants are involved in activities within their communities.

The Community Involvement Strategy outlines First Choice's commitment to supporting the delivery of community involvement activities which are appropriate to the geographical locations of First Choice's properties. The Association's Community Involvement Grant offers funding and support to

local community activities which are nominated by Tenants and other stakeholders.

The Community Involvement grant seeks to break down barriers between Tenants and other members of the community by raising their profile within their respective communities.

Biennial Inspections

Every two years properties are inspected by the Association's staff enabling tenants to speak directly to them and raise any concerns they may have about their home and the Association's services. Face to face interaction between tenants and First Choice staff is the simplest and yet most effective way to establish a bond that will hopefully feed into a greater sense of value and trust.

2.7 Monitoring and Review

The Association recognises that successful Tenant Participation can only be achieved through regular monitoring and review of the Tenant Participation Strategy, action plan and budget by:

- Input from Tenants, meetings and surveys to ensure that the action plan remains relevant and appropriate and key outcomes are achieved
- The Association's Board of Management continuing their commitment to participation

First Choice will ensure that the results of Tenant engagement and participation will continue to be fed-back to Tenants and their support staff.

The Association will continue to undertake detailed monitoring, analysis and action in relation to:

- Ensuring participation is representative of the First Choice Tenant population i.e. Tenants with a disability as well as general needs Tenants
- The Tenant Satisfaction Survey (annually)
- Tenant satisfaction with their new home (re-let survey)
- Tenant satisfaction that the Association is meeting its service standards
- Quality visits to all newly developed properties