



Working together for positive change

**Draft Tenant Involvement
Strategy
2017 - 2020**



Endorsements of this Strategy

Group Chief Executive - Michael Mc Donnell

(narrative to be inserted post consultation)

Chair of Tenants Forum – Bill Jeffrey

(narrative to be inserted post consultation)

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1. Introduction and Background

Choice Housing Ireland believes that it is essential to consider the views of our tenants with regard to the services and housing schemes we provide. Choice is committed to placing our customers at the heart of service delivery and we believe that by listening to and taking on board tenant's views, we can ensure that policies and services are more responsive to changing needs and rising aspirations.

The Association recognises it is important to offer a range of involvement methods which are fit for purpose and appropriate to the needs of our tenants, providing the opportunity for tenants to get involved with us on whatever level best suits their lifestyle.

The purpose of this Strategy is to set out the Association's plans for increasing tenant involvement to ensure our services meet the needs of our customers and to support them in making a difference to the quality of service we provide.

Our Core Values are the building blocks of our culture, providing common language and acceptable standards of behaviour.



1.1 Context

Following the merger of Oaklee, Trinity, Ulidia, Open Door and SHAC Housing Associations, Choice has not only made progress in the development of our services, but has also continued to ensure our tenants are consulted on decisions which may affect them and the quality of service they receive. In partnership with Supporting Communities, an initial tenant consultation exercise was undertaken in 2015 to assist with developing this Strategy. Feedback from that process and, other consultation exercises, together with best practices identified of tenant involvement in other organisations have been incorporated within this document. This Strategy is also in compliance with the regulatory standards published by the Department for Communities.

1.2 What is Tenant Involvement?

Tenant involvement is an evolving two way process of communication between tenants and their landlord, whereby:

- Tenants are given a voice to help improve the services received from Choice
- Information and ideas are shared between tenants, Choice staff and Board/Committee members
- The quality of services provided are improved and the level of customer satisfaction increased.

1.3 Regulations Guiding Tenant Involvement Activities

The Department for Communities introduced a new Tenant Participation Strategy to its Regulatory Framework. This requires all housing associations in Northern Ireland to:

- Develop a Tenant Involvement Strategy by 2017
- Consult with tenants in the development of services and policies.

The Department for Communities has stated that:

“This strategy is not intended to interfere with existing good practice. Its aim is to build upon it and challenge all social housing landlords to increase the extent and effectiveness of tenant participation in their individual organisations”.



Guidance from Department for Communities sets out 10 key principles:

1. Tenant participation comes from and promotes a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, board members and staff at all levels. It exists when all these interests work together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.
2. Tenant participation is a continuous process. Participants share information, ideas and influence. They work towards a common understanding of problems and a consensus on solutions.
3. Good tenant participation is about sharing information. All participants need to have all the information available to consider issues properly. That information needs to be clear, timely and accessible. Information must be in a form that all participants can understand.
4. Decision-making processes should be open, clear and accountable.
5. Tenant representatives should have enough time to consider issues properly. They should have the opportunity to work out a common view before meeting landlord representatives.
6. The landlord must recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
7. Good working relations evolve gradually so must be flexible to adapt to local circumstances.
8. Tenants' organisations need adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
9. Tenant participation in rural areas must suit the particular circumstances and needs of rural tenants.
10. Tenant participation must meet the requirements of legislation on equality and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

As well as following these 10 principles landlords are also required to ensure:

1. Tenants/other service users have a choice in:

- The areas they want to participate in
- The level of participation
- Whether to be involved as an individual or part of a group.

2. Tenants have an opportunity to influence:

- Policy decisions that will affect them
- Decisions that will affect their general area or community
- Services that they receive as an individual user
- Their landlord organisation's business planning and identification of future priorities.

3. Tenants, particularly under-represented groups, are encouraged and supported to become involved through training and other support mechanisms.

Choice has therefore developed a Tenant Involvement Strategy reflective of the principles contained within the Department's Regulatory Framework.

1.4 Equality

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality between all the Section 75 groups. The Department for Communities is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Choice is committed to treating people equally and fairly and ensures our service is accessible to all, irrespective of a person's disability gender, age, race, religious or political belief or sexual orientation. Therefore:

- All groups and individuals involved in our Tenant Involvement Programme will have equal access
- Information is available in a variety of formats including languages, large print on request and is easily understood
- In return the Association expects those involved in the Tenant Involvement Programme to promote equality and welcome participation from all our communities.

1.5 Barriers to Involvement

Tenant Involvement requires a commitment of time and resources from both Choice and its tenants. We recognise there are many barriers which prevent tenants from engaging with the Association including:

- Lack of training / confidence
- Understanding published information
- Transport
- Child care requirements
- Travel and other expenses
- Time constraints.

Choice is therefore committed to offering practical solutions to make tenant involvement a viable option for as many tenants as possible. These solutions include, but are not limited to:

- Providing training and support for tenants who are committed to engaging with the Association
- Providing information in alternative formats to ensure it can be understood by all
- Providing transport and covering the financial costs incurred by tenants in carrying out their roles
- Offering a wide range of involvement methods to suit all lifestyles
- Arranging meetings at times and locations most accessible to tenants
- Providing practical and financial support to establish resident groups.



2.0 Choice Tenant Involvement Strategy

2.1 Commitment to Tenant Involvement and why it is important to Choice

Choice has a dedicated Tenant Involvement Team to develop and take forward this Strategy, reflecting our commitment to the tenant participation ethos. This Strategy has been developed in consultation with members of the Tenants' Forum and Supporting Communities.

Choice believes tenant involvement and consultation should be at the heart of everything we do and it is essential to our success. Tenants should have a say in relation to their home, their neighbourhood and the services they receive.

The Association recognises that tenant involvement can lead to real, positive outcomes for residents, communities and indeed for Choice.

These outcomes may include:

- Better understanding of tenant's needs
- Improved services
- Increased tenant satisfaction
- Enhanced Community spirit
- Better quality of life for tenants
- Improved effectiveness and efficiency giving better value for money.

2.2 Our Strategic Aim

Customer Excellence is a key business objective for Choice. Our aim is to:

“provide customers with excellent services to meet their expectations and needs”

In Choice, we recognise the importance of working in partnership with our tenants both individually and through groups. The main aim of this Strategy is to place tenants “at the heart of everything we do” and to develop and promote positive engagement with our customers in the design and delivery of our services.

. We will do this by:

- Reinforcing our commitment to Tenant Involvement
- Continually engaging and consulting with our tenants

- Reviewing our levels of resources allocated to the Tenant Involvement Programme
- Raising awareness of tenant involvement
- Providing tenants with relevant and timely information
- Ensuring information and services are accessible to tenants
- Ensuring tenants feel supported and sufficiently trained to engage with the Association on whatever level best suits their lifestyle
- Providing Tenant Involvement training
- Listening and responding to issues raised by tenants
- Removing barriers that may prevent tenants from getting involved
- Increasing and promoting social activities in our local communities
- Developing relationships with other statutory agencies to address local issues across our housing stock
- Ensuring tenants are represented at Committee level
- Promoting Social Enterprise Projects
- Continually reviewing this Strategy to ensure it continues to meet the needs of our tenants.

2.3 Communication Methods

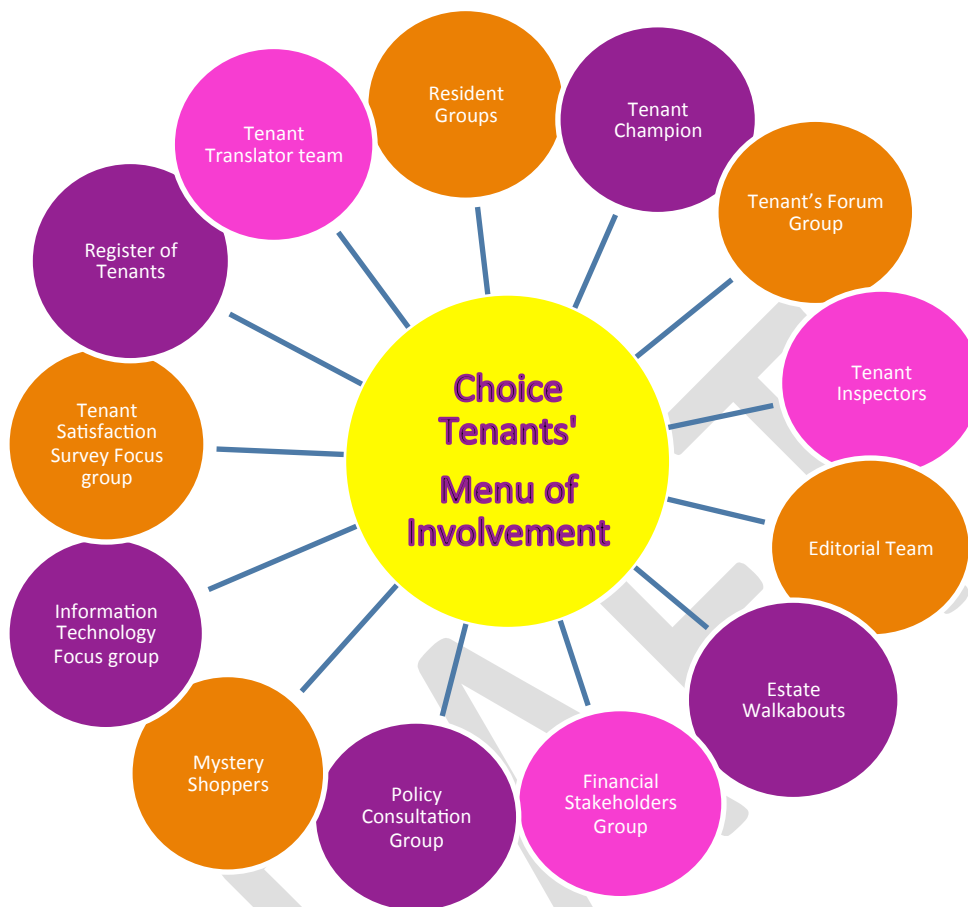
Choice uses a variety of communication methods to ensure our services and published information is fully accessible. These methods include:

- In writing to tenants
- Information leaflets
- Phone calls
- Home visits
- Email
- Text messaging service
- Social media such as Facebook and twitter to provide regular updates to tenants
- Choice Tenant Newsletter detailing services and local news stories
- Choice website.

2.4 How can Tenants become involved?

We want to encourage as many tenants as possible to have their say, become engaged and participate in our business. To enable this to happen and to fulfil the aims of this Strategy we have developed a range of options in our “Menu of Involvement” for tenants to influence decisions at whatever level suits their lifestyle.

2.5 Menu of Involvement



Details of the various engagement methods are listed below:

Resident Groups

Tenants are encouraged to represent their local community on a wide range of issues by being part of an informal Residents Group in their area e.g. steering group. The formation of the group will be supported by Choice.

Tenant Champion

Where no Residents Group exists, the role of Tenant Champion will be promoted. This provides a point of contact for local housing staff. Champions will represent tenants on issues and services that affect them, helping Choice improve and maintain service standards.

Tenants' Forum Group

Choice currently has one Central Forum and four Regional Forums to cover the province, (Belfast, North West, South East and South West), each discussing housing related issues and sharing best practice ideas.

- **The Central Forum**

The Central Forum consists of tenant representatives from the Regional Forums to ensure there is representation from all areas. The Central Forum's role is to consider policy, review service areas, participate in specific working groups / task groups and address outstanding issues from the Regional Forums.

- **Regional Forums:**

Each Regional Forum consists of members who represent the views of their local areas. They are the voice of tenants in a specific geographical area. Each regional Forum will elect a Chair, and one other representative, who will sit on the Central Forum

Tenant Inspectors

Tenant Inspectors will examine two service areas annually. The inspectors will report twice a year on services scrutinised and provide recommendations for improvement where necessary. Relevant training and expenses will be provided.

Editorial Team

The Editorial Team, consisting of Tenant Forum members and staff, will work together to produce a Newsletter four times a year. The Editorial Team will also help design and produce an annual calendar which will be sent to all tenants.

Estate Walkabouts

Estate Walkabouts enable tenants who live on our estates and schemes to identify common concerns or areas for improvement. Tenants will have the opportunity to come together and walk schemes, with Choice staff and Tenant Inspectors from within the Tenant Forum, to discuss and consider any important housing, environmental or social issue. Notification of Estate Walkabouts will be provided by letter, through our website, and in our Newsletter.



Financial Stakeholders Group

This Group provides a platform to offer tenants the opportunity to review the financial areas of housing e.g. Tenant Forum budgets, service charges and related financial matters.

Policy Consultation Group [PCG]

To assist with the development and review of policies and procedures, as and when required, members of the Tenant's Forum will be invited to participate in focus group workshops to discuss and develop specific housing policies. This will provide an important conduit from tenants to input into the development of new policies.

Mystery Shoppers

This facility allows tenants to examine the quality of the housing service provided by Choice and provide a strong customer based feedback mechanism. Feedback will then help contribute to the improvement of services. Appropriate training will be provided to tenants who participate.

Information Technology Focus Group

To assist with the continual development of the Choice website and innovative self-service technology.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey Focus Group

Choice invites our Tenant Forum members to become fully involved in the design and delivery of its bi-annual Tenant Satisfaction Surveys. The results are evaluated and monitored by an independent company and tenants are advised of the results.

Register of Tenants

The Register allows tenants to become involved through responding to surveys or commenting on specific service areas which they are interested in. Contact can be made via text, post, email or telephone call.



Tenant Translator Team

This platform allows tenants to offer their services to other tenants in explaining documents or correspondence to help ensure they are understood.

Conferences and Training

Funding has been and will continue to be provided by Choice to allow tenants the opportunity to develop their skills by attending conferences, workshops and seminars. These are aimed at increasing tenant's knowledge and understanding of good housing service practice, sharing ideas and best practice from other parts of the UK and Ireland and increasing their IT and communication skills and general confidence levels.

Fun days and Community Events

Choice will support the work of local resident groups in our schemes and estates.

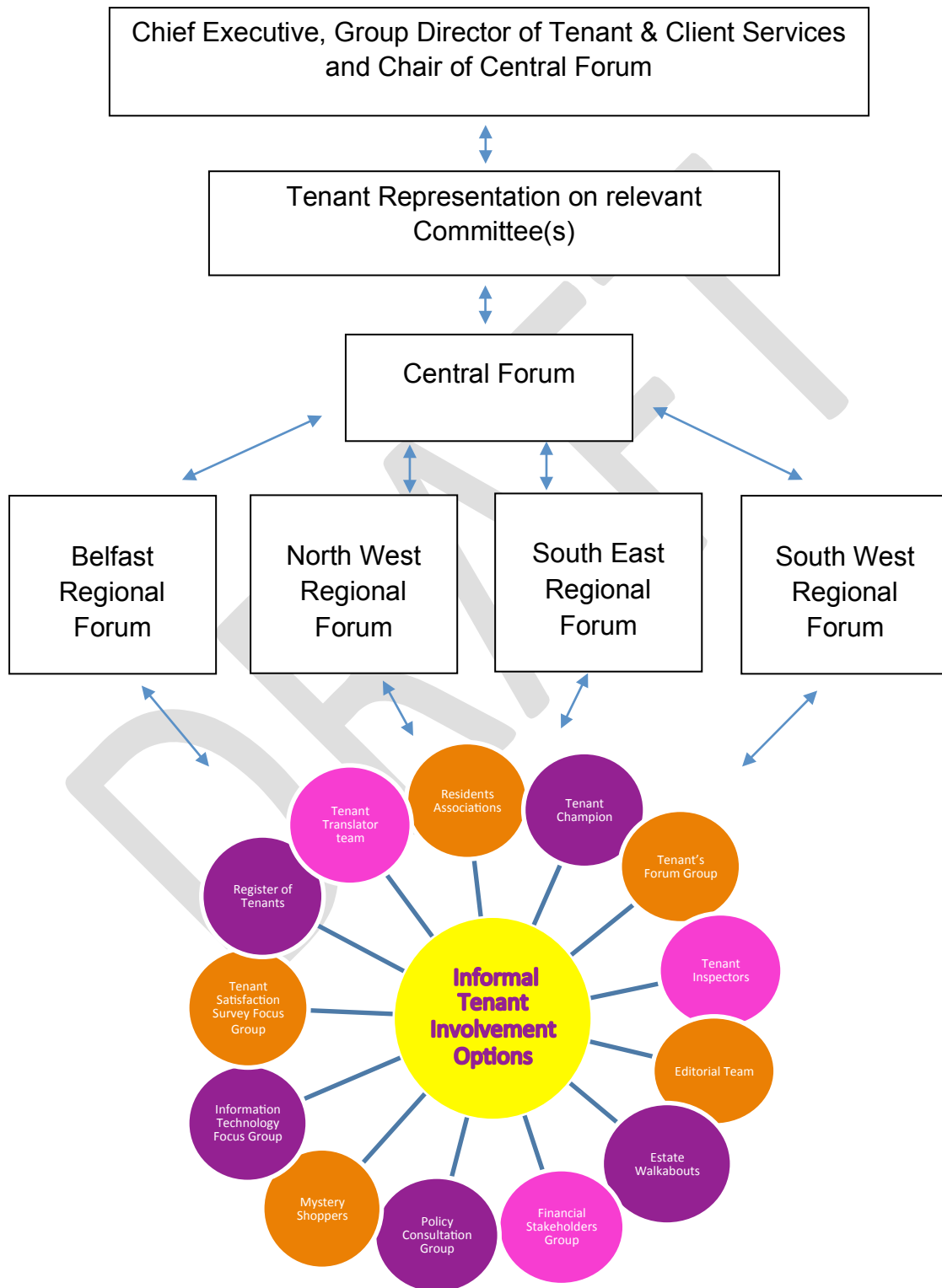
We plan to do this through the promotion of community events to encourage inclusiveness and good relations across our housing areas. The community events will be supported by:

- Choice financially
- Members of the Tenant Involvement Team
- Housing Management and Property Services staff will attend, where appropriate, to offer assistance and advice to our residents.

The community events will be appropriate to the needs and profile of the tenants in that area.

2.6 Choice Tenant Involvement Structure

The ethos of Tenant Involvement is promoted throughout the management structures of Choice. The diagram below outlines the current Tenant Involvement Structures.



2.7 Complaints

Choice operates a Complaint, Compliments and Comments Policy. A Tenant Representative is appointed to review complaints at Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.

2.8 How to Become Involved

Any tenant who is interested in working with Choice can apply to be involved by completing the Menu of Involvement. Participants are asked to sign a Code of Conduct.

Forum members have clear guidelines for meetings agreed by both Choice and Tenant Forum members e.g. Terms of Reference, Standing Orders and Code of Conduct.

The Central Forum host an Annual Conference where the achievements of the year are highlighted and Forum members have an opportunity to network and communicate with each other and staff members from various Departments of the organisation.

2.9 Investing in Tenant Involvement

Choice believes it is important to provide sufficient resources to achieve the aims of the Tenant Involvement Strategy. The Tenant Involvement budget is reviewed annually by the Financial Stakeholders Group.

Items that are covered include:

- Training to promote Tenant Involvement
- External conferences attended by Tenant Forum members
- Best Practice Conference visits
- Conference/Annual General Meeting costs
- Catering costs
- Transport, visits and out of pocket expenses
- Advertising/presentation costs
- Venue hire
- Tenant Forum Christmas event
- Translation expenditure
- Carer and child care costs
- Promotional work

The Housing and Property Services teams will continue to lend their support with the work involved in annual Estate Walkabouts, Interagency meetings, Housing Clinics and Community Fun Days and events in local areas.



Staff across all departments will be involved in achieving the aims of this Strategy including Housing, Property Services, Assets, Development, Finance, Governance and Communications.

2.10 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Tenant Involvement Strategy

The Strategy will be reviewed and monitored on an annual basis through:

- Residents meetings
- Senior Management Meetings
- Tenant & Client Services Committee.

A full detailed final evaluation will be carried out in the autumn 2020. This follows the Department for Communities guidelines. The evaluation will focus on the effectiveness of the Strategy as a whole and will make reference to future requirements. Central Forum Officers will assist with the review. The Association will also provide feedback to the wider Regional Forum Groups. The final evaluation will make reference to both the strategic targets and other output targets such as:

- The topics that are being raised by tenants
- Demographic profile of those taking part
- How we have provided feedback to tenants
- The number of tenants taking part in meetings, Estate Walkabouts and other areas of our Tenant Involvement Programme
- Number of community events in the year
- The number of any new resident groups
- Compliance with Department for Communities Tenant Involvement Framework.

2.11 Accessibility

The agreed Strategy will be available on our website and distributed widely through our Tenant Forum Groups. A copy will also be made available to all tenants on request.

Seeking your views

Choice is seeking the views of our Tenants Forum and the wider tenant group regarding this Tenant Involvement Strategy.

This Strategy will be placed on our website and discussed at meetings with Tenant Forum Members in March and April 2017.



We welcome all feedback

Please respond to us in writing, by telephone, by email or on our website.

Office address: 37/41 May Street, Belfast

Tel: 0300 111 2211

Email: info@choice-housing.org

Website: www.choice-housing.org

Appendices:

- 3 year Draft Action Plan
- Menu Of Involvement
- Code of Conduct
- Terms of Reference for both Central and Regional Forums
- Standing Orders

Acknowledgements:

Tenant Forum Members
Supporting Communities

Author: Claire Darby (Tenant Involvement Champion)