


<p>CMT</p> <p>29th October 2024</p>	
<p>Report of: Darren Reynolds, Interim Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing Integration</p>	<p>Classification: [Unrestricted]</p>
<p>Consultation report and feedback from the Consultation on the council's new Council Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy</p>	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the key findings from a 6-week period of consultation and engagement with council tenants and leaseholders on the council's new Council Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy.
- 1.2 The consultation exercise began on 5 July 2024 and ran until 19 August 2024. The consultation aimed to canvass the views of a wide range of council tenants and leaseholders. The consultation period was lengthened to maximise response rates, allowing for School holidays and the inclusion of our Summer Fun Day events held across the borough.
- 1.3 This report details:
- How council tenants and leaseholders were invited to respond to the consultation.
 - The responses of council tenants and leaseholders to the questions posed in the consultation which have been used to inform the final version of the strategy being brought to Cabinet for approval and;
 - Officer's responses to the feedback garnered from the consultation.
- 1.4 Further, the findings of this consultation and views of residents will be used to develop an Action Plan post Cabinet approval which will set out the key activities that the council will undertake to engage with council tenants and leaseholders in Tower Hamlets.

2. Method of consultation

- 2.1 The consultation was open to council tenant and leaseholders.
- 2.2 An on-line survey was published on the Tower Hamlets *Let's Talk* portal, which was also translated into Bengali and Somali, with a summary version of the draft strategy also made available on this platform.
- 2.3 The council's Communications team promoted and publicised the consultation via its Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media channels. Details and links to the consultation were provided for in the summer edition of the council's *Our Eastend* resident's newsletter.
- 2.4 The recently established governance structure *Tenant's Voice* discussed and had the opportunity to provide their views on the new Strategy at their meeting on 31 July 2024.

- 2.5 In addition, the survey was sent out to targeted groups such as TRAs and the 1,400 residents who had indicated (during the consultation on the insourcing of Tower Hamlets Homes) they would be interested in further engagement with the council.
- 2.6 Copies of the survey were completed by residents at four Community Fun Days at different locations in the borough over the summer of 2024.

3. Responses to the central questions of the consultation

- 3.1 In total, the council received of **215** responses to the consultation.
- 3.2 In summary, the protected characteristics of those who elected to disclose this information are as follows:
- 156 tenants (73% of respondents), 55 leaseholders (26%) and 3 tenants of leaseholders (1%) with one respondent who chose not to provide this information.
 - 54 male, 128 female respondents
 - 33 respondents identified as having a disability
 - 145 of Muslim faith, 17 Christians
- 3.3 Further information can be found in section 4 of this report.
- 3.4 The three pivotal questions posed in this consultation together with the feedback received, as well as officers' responses to the feedback are set out below:

1. Was the purpose of the Strategy easy to understand?

- 3.5 **86%** of respondents felt the draft Strategy was easy to understand showing support for how the strategy was written and presented. Out of the 215 who responded to the survey overall, 184 said that yes, the strategy was easy to understand, only 24 (11%) of those responding said no, while 7 (3%) completing the survey chose not to answer this question.
- 3.6 Where residents were not in support, they felt that the strategy lacked specific objectives (SMART), and some felt that the strategy provided too much detail.
- 3.7 In terms of how women and men agreed with the purpose of the strategy being clear and easy to understand, 88% (113 out of 128 respondents) of women and 78% (45 out of 58 respondents) of men who responded to the survey agreed. While only 10% of women (3 out of 128 respondents) and 9% (5 out of 54) men disagreed.
- 3.8 Of those who agreed that the strategy was easy to understand, the breakdown by age group is shown in Table 1 below (the percentage is out of the 184 respondents who agreed).

18-24	1%
25-34	15%
35-44	35%
45-54	13%
55-64	4%
65-74	1%
75 plus	1%
Other	32%
Total	100%

Table 1: Level of Agreement across age groups represented in the survey – note: ‘Other’ is where the respondent chose not to provide their age.

3.9 From the 184 (86%) of all respondents who agreed that the strategy was easy to understand, their racial identity is set out in Table 2 below:

Race	Percentage of those who agreed
Any other mixed race	1%
Arab	1%
Asian or Asian British	3%
Bangladeshi	63%
Black	2%
Indian	1%
Pakistani	2%
White British	15%
Prefer not to say/chose not to disclose	12%
Total	100%

Table 2: Racial identity of respondents who agreed that the strategy was easy to understand

3.10 In total, from the 184 respondents who agreed that the strategy was easy to understand, 67% identified as Muslim, 18% declined or chose not to say, 9% identified as Christian, 7% held not religion or belief and 1% identified as Sikh.

3.11 In terms of sexual orientation, 75% of those who said that they agreed that the purpose of the strategy was easy to understand identified as heterosexual, 22% preferred not to say or disclose this information, 2% identified as a gay man, 1% as a gay woman, 1% identified as bisexual while 1% identified as ‘other’.

3.12 The 24 respondents (11%) who said that they did not find the purpose of the strategy easy to understand were asked why they felt this way and the key themes that emerged from their comments include:

:

- Lack of Clarity and Detail:** Many respondents felt the strategy lacked clear objectives, goals, and concrete information about how changes would be implemented or measured. They expressed frustration that the document was vague and did not offer sufficient details to understand the council's intentions or the tangible outcomes it aimed for.
- Communication Issues:** Several comments highlighted poor communication, both in the document and in their previous experiences with the council. There

was a desire for better engagement, particularly for leaseholders who feel neglected or unheard. Some mentioned long waits or no responses when trying to contact the council, undermining the credibility of the "listening council" claim.

3. **Complexity and Accessibility:** Respondents mentioned that the strategy was "wordy," "hard to digest," and had "too much information." This suggests that the strategy may be overwhelming or too complex for some audiences. A few called for simpler language and better accessibility, especially for elderly residents and those with language barriers. Requests for different formats (e.g., audio or translations) were also noted.
4. **Lack of Trust:** Some respondents expressed scepticism or dissatisfaction with the council's ability to follow through on its commitments, referencing past difficulties in communication or unresolved issues. This lack of trust undermined the perceived effectiveness of the strategy.
5. **General Frustration:** There were blunt criticisms, with some respondents labelling the document as a "waste of resources" or "useless," reflecting deeper dissatisfaction not just with the strategy but with the council's overall approach to fulfilling its responsibilities.

3.13 In summary, the sentiment from these responses is predominantly negative, marked by confusion, scepticism, and dissatisfaction with both the strategy's clarity and the council's communication and responsiveness.

3.14 In response, we will ensure our Action Plan has SMART objectives with clear KPIs so residents can hold us to account in terms of the effectiveness of our Resident Engagement activity.

2. Will the proposed methods make it more convenient and accessible to have your voices heard and influence decisions?

3.15 **78%** of respondents (168) agreed, showing support for the proposed methods of engagement. Where residents did not agree (16% or 35 respondents), their responses were concerned with the operational performance of the service (Repairs, Call Wait times). Of those who completed the survey, only 13 respondents (6%) chose not to answer this question.

3.16 The strongest age range of those who agreed that the proposed methods would make it more convenient and accessible to have their voices heard and to influence decisions, were those aged 35 – 44 (37%), followed by those aged 25-34 (17%), respondents aged 45 -54 (13%) with those aged 55 to 64 (2%) indicating their agreement. All other age groups provided 1% agreement respectively.

3.17 In terms of sex, of those who agreed, 65% were women, while only 25% of men agreed (of the 78% overall who agreed with the proposed engagement mechanisms, 12% declined or preferred not to disclose this information).

3.18 Analysis of the religious or belief identity among those who agreed, shows that those identified as Muslim (72%) had the highest percentage of approval, followed by those who did not identify with a religion or belief (8%), and 7% of those who identified as Christian. Overall, 13% chose not to provide or elected not to disclose this information.

3.19 Again, of those who chose to disclose their racial identity, who agreed that the proposal would make it more convenient and accessible for council tenants and leaseholders to have their voices heard and be involved in decision making, 112 identified as

Bangladeshi, while 23 identified as White British, 13 respondents chose not to provide their racial identity.

- 3.20 86% of all survey respondent (of 29 respondents) who indicated that they had they had a physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more, agreed with the proposed methods of engagement while 14% of those who identified with this characteristic disagreed.
- 3.21 In response, we have factored in this feedback into our overall service improvement plan. An end-to-end review of the Repairs Service is already underway with an expected delivery date of December 2024.
- 3.22 From the 16% of council tenants and leaseholders who disagreed, they explained why - their comments reflect a strong mix of cynicism, frustration, disillusionment, and concern:

1. **Cynicism Toward Engagement Efforts:** Of those who disagreed, they expressed a cynicism about the council's willingness or ability to genuinely engage with residents. This is rooted in previous experiences where engagement seemed ineffective or where there was a disconnect between what was promised and what was delivered. For instance, one respondent noted, "what the Tower Hamlets Homes said they did and what they actually did were two different things," signalling doubt that the council will act differently.
2. **Lack of Trust in Action:** Some respondents said that they don't want more engagement—they want action. They feel that the council should simply fulfil its basic responsibilities (e.g., repairs, management) without needing constant input from residents. One striking example is the sentiment: "I don't want 'my voice heard'—I just want you to do the things I pay you to do." This shows frustration that engagement might be seen as a distraction from the council's core housing management duties.
3. **Long Wait Times and Impersonal Processes:** Some of those respondents who disagreed voiced that they felt that communication with the council is cumbersome and impersonal. The use of call centres and the difficulty in getting a direct response are major points of frustration. Suggestions such as having a named contact person with a direct line and personal email show that respondents feel existing channels are inadequate and disengaging. The lack of accountability in current systems fuels the belief that new engagement methods will continue to be ineffective.
4. **Lack of Tangible Outcomes:** Some respondents noted that the proposed methods of engagement, such as the "Tenants Voice," don't seem to offer anything new or substantial. They felt that these methods already exist but have failed to produce meaningful results in the past. This makes the respondents feel that the council is simply repackaging old ideas without truly addressing the core issues.
5. **Digital Divide:** While some respondents preferred online engagement (for convenience or time-saving reasons), others highlighted that this might not work for elderly residents or those less tech-savvy. There's concern that online-only engagement excludes vulnerable groups who need more personalised, in-person support. This suggests that current engagement methods are not accessible to all council tenants and leaseholders
6. **Face-to-Face Interaction:** Several respondents expressed a desire for more face-to-face or in-person meetings, as they felt this would facilitate clearer, more direct communication and accountability. However, these

meetings are perceived to be limited or poorly advertised, making it hard for residents to participate meaningfully.

7. **Vagueness in the Strategy:** Respondents criticised the engagement strategy for being vague and lacking in specific, actionable steps. Many noted that it didn't clearly outline how engagement would be improved or what tangible changes could be expected. Without concrete details, the methods feel empty or performative rather than truly empowering.
8. **No Clear Improvements:** Respondents expressed frustration that the strategy lacks accountability measures (e.g., specific goals or timelines) and doesn't explain how residents' feedback will lead to real change. This creates a sense of hopelessness or indifference, as they cannot see how their participation will make a difference. One respondent suggested that the council should set itself targets, like "responding to all repair requests within 12 hours," to demonstrate clear accountability.
9. **Unequal Treatment:** Several respondents felt that there is a disparity in how tenants and leaseholders are treated, with one noting that the methods "apply one set of rules for you and another for the leaseholder." This perception of unequal treatment undermines trust in the proposed engagement methods and leads to the belief that certain groups are excluded or disadvantaged in the decision-making process.
- 10 **Lack of Tailored Approaches:** Some respondents also expressed that the proposed engagement methods fail to address specific issues that leaseholders face, such as the high cost of service charges or limited avenues to query or challenge these charges. They feel the engagement is too generalised and does not adequately cater to their unique concerns.
- 11 **Engagement Fatigue:** Several respondents expressed a degree of fatigue with the engagement process, with sentiments like "I don't have time" or "I'm too busy" to participate. This highlights a broader issue where council tenants or leaseholders feel overwhelmed or disengaged from council processes, possibly due to a history of unresponsiveness or a perceived lack of real impact from their participation. This disillusionment is captured in sentiments like "I just want you to change" or "It never changes," reflecting a belief that no matter how much they engage, the outcomes remain the same.
- 12 **Reluctance to Engage:** There is also a strong sentiment among some council tenants and leaseholders that it is not their responsibility to help the council "do the basics." They feel the council should be competent enough to manage without constantly involving residents in the process of making things work, which suggests a weariness or reluctance to engage in more dialogue unless concrete actions are seen.
- 13 **Diverse Engagement Preferences:** While some council tenants and leaseholders prefer online engagement due to its convenience, others prefer face-to-face meetings for better accountability. This indicates that there is no one-size-fits-all method for engagement, and any successful strategy needs to offer multiple, accessible ways for tenants and leaseholders to participate. The council's failure to adequately accommodate these diverse preferences is a recurring theme in the feedback.

3.23 Many believe the council's past actions do not inspire confidence in the new engagement methods, and they view the proposed methods as either superficial or ineffective. Key concerns include a lack of tangible results, inadequate communication channels, unequal treatment of tenants and leaseholders, and the absence of concrete, specific details in the strategy. There is a clear desire for **more accountability, action, and accessibility**, with many calling for direct, face-to-face

engagement and simpler, clearer processes that result in real change, rather than further dialogue.

3. Is there anything missing from the Strategy?

3.24 **30%** of respondents made comments or gave suggestions to improve the Strategy. These included:

- **General issues of communication:** with too much communication online; the need for language assistance; the need for a named housing officer; not knowing who to contact to respond to their issue; lack of response to emails; the council perceived as not listening to residents
- **Service issues:** including call wait times; standard of repairs and lack of post-inspection; functionality of My Home; standard of cleanliness; cost of service charges & major works bills
- **Process:** lack of accountability or SMART targets; how can council tenants and leaseholders challenge and get involved
- **Engagement:** The council to hold more community activities/events especially for children
- **Stakeholders:** How the Strategy applies to s20 consultation, TRAs and TMOs

3.25 Many of the comments made by respondents relate to their experience of/and feelings about the housing service rather than suggestions to improve the draft Strategy per se. These have been fed back to colleagues to inform reviews and improvement projects and activities.

3.26 Improving communication with residents is a key element of the Strategy. The role of TRAs is already set out in the Strategy. More community events and activities are planned to be co-ordinated by the Community Partnerships Team.

3.27 Based on resident feedback we will ensure the following areas are included in the final strategy

- Signposting on how to get involved in different layers of engagement
- The role of Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs)
- References to statutory consultation including S20 consultation with leaseholders in advance of major works

3.28 190 of the 215 respondents expressed a wish to be kept in touch with following the consultation. Their details have been added to those who have already indicated a desire to be involved in shaping housing management services.

4. Equality and Diversity information of respondents

4.1 Our survey had additional Equality and Diversity questions which respondents chose to answer. A high number of residents elected to answer some, if not all these questions in addition to the three central questions posed in the survey. There is therefore a degree of confidence which allows the service to compare the responses of those surveyed with the protected characteristic data that the Housing Management holds on the council's tenant and leaseholder populations overall.

4.2 **Table 3** below illustrates the age ranges of respondents who elected to provide this information compared to the information held on all council tenants and leaseholders presently held.

Age	Survey	Overall council tenant and leaseholder population (from Housing Management Information System – June 2023)
	%	
18-29	21%	3%
30-39	23%	15%
40-49	23%	26%
50-64	26%	32%
65+	7%	25%

Table 3: Age range of respondents compared to information held on the age ranges across all council tenants and leaseholders.

4.4 In comparison to the ratio of 50:50 between female and male council tenants and leaseholders across the council’s housing stock **Table 4** illustrates that more females (70%) chose to respond to the survey than males (30%). **Note:** 191 responses to this question; 33 chose not to disclose this information.

Gender	Survey	Overall council tenant and leaseholder population (from Housing Management Information System – June 2023)
	%	
Female	70%	50%
Male	30%	50%

Table 4: Gender identity of respondents compared to the overall representation across male and female identified genders among council tenants and leaseholders

4.5 The representation among council tenants and leaseholders who responded to the consultation in comparison to the data that the Housing Management Survey holds differs considerably as seen in **Table 5**.

Tenure	Survey	Overall council tenant and leaseholder population (from Housing Management Information System – June 2023)
	%	
Tenant	73%	54%
Leaseholder	26%	46%

Table 5: Responses from Tenants and Leaseholders to the consultation in comparison with data held on proportion of actual council tenants and leaseholders

4.6 For disability, religion & ethnicity the profile of survey respondents was close to that of the overall council tenant and leaseholder population, according to equalities and diversity data that the Housing Management Service hold.

4.7 **Table 6** below shows those who responded to the consultation who identified as having a disability compared to the data held on existing council tenants and leaseholders almost mirrors each other.

Disability	Survey	Overall Council tenant and leaseholder population (from Housing Management Information System – June 2023)
	%	%
Yes	18%	15%
No	82%	85%

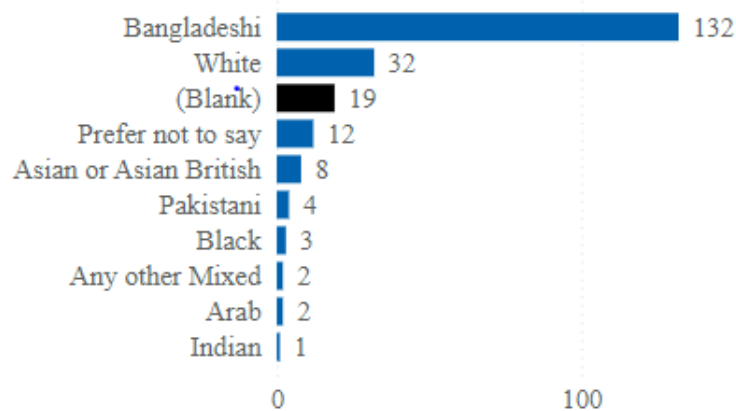
Table 6: Comparison between those who responded to the consultation who identified as having a disability compared to the data held on existing council tenants and leaseholders

4.8 Out of the 191 respondents who elected to disclose their religion or belief, the breakdown of how respondents identified themselves is shown in the table below.

Religion of respondent	% of those who identify with a religion or belief
Muslim	67%
Preferred not to say/chose not to disclose	18%
Christian	8%
No religion	7%

Table 7: Religion of consultation respondents

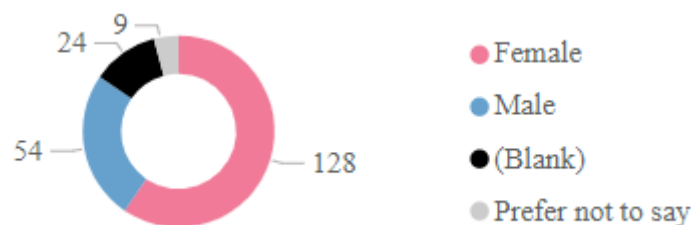
4.9 In terms of race, the graph below illustrates how respondents identified themselves in terms of race.



Graph 1: How respondents identified themselves by racial or ethnic identity

4.10 The greatest level of response was received from those who identified as Bangladeshi (132 or 61% of respondents), followed by those who identified as White British (32 respondents or 15%). 14% (51) of respondents chose not to respond or preferred not to say.

4.11 The number of council tenants and leaseholders who responded to the consultation survey had a greater level of participation among females (**128 or 70%**) compared to males (54 respondents or 30%) in comparison to the representation across these two sexes in the wider council tenant and leaseholder population in the borough, as demonstrated in Graph 2 below.



Graph 2: Representation of females to males in consultation responses

4.12 When respondents were asked if their gender identity was the same as assigned to them at birth 176 (82%) said yes, while less than 1% (2) of respondents said no. 17% of respondents chose to skip or preferred not to answer this question.

4.13 Only 4% of respondents indicated that they were currently pregnant or gave birth in the last twelve months, 78% responded 'no' while 18% chose not to answer this question.

4.14 The marital or civil partnership status of those who completed the survey is set out as follows: 59% identified that they were married or in a civil partnership, 21% declined to disclose or preferred not to say, 15% indicated that they were single, 2% divorced, 1% specified 'other' while 1% indicated that they had been widowed.

- 4.15 In terms of sexual orientation, 75% of respondents identified as straight/heterosexual, 21% preferred not to say or chose not to disclose how they identify, 2% identified as a gay woman/lesbian while 1% specified 'other'.
- 4.16 Of those who answered whether they had a physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more, 15% identified with this protected characteristic, while 68% said they did not. 17% of respondent preferred not to say or chose not to disclose this information.
- 4.17 Respondents were also asked if they look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems relating to old age (Table 8).

Caring responsibilities	Percentage of respondents with caring responsibilities
No	70%
Prefer not to say/chose not to disclose	23%
Yes, 50 hours or more a week	2%
Yes, 35-49 hours a week	1%
Yes, 20-34 hours a week	1%
Yes, 10-19 hours a week	2%
Yes, 9 hours a week or less	1%

Table 8: Respondents who look after, or give help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems relating to old age