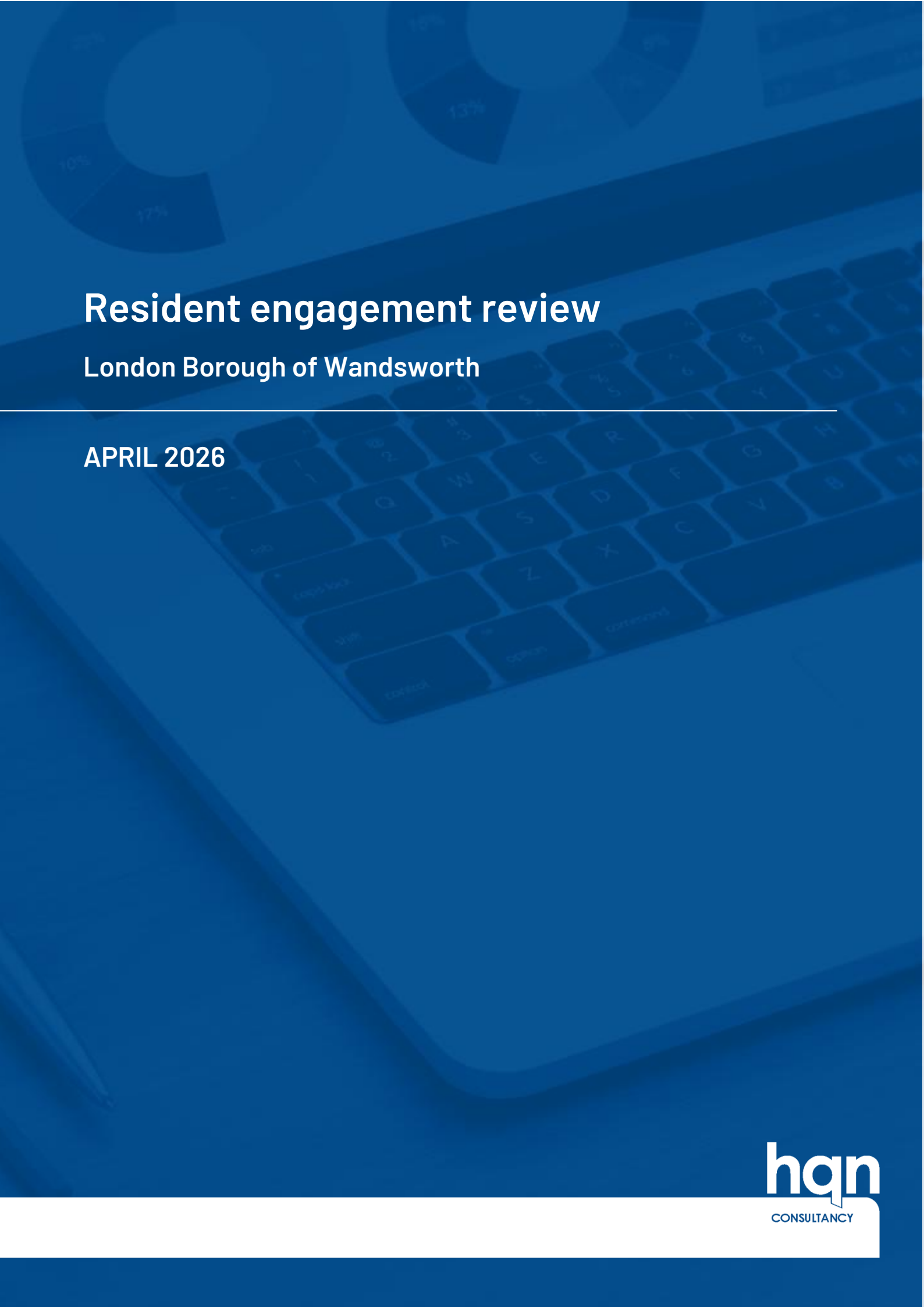




Resident engagement review

London Borough of Wandsworth

APRIL 2026

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1 Introduction

In February 2025, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) published a regulatory judgement for the London Borough of Wandsworth (referred to as “the Council” throughout this report) following an inspection. The RSH “concluded that there are serious failings in LB Wandsworth delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement is needed, specifically in relation to the outcomes in our Safety and Quality Standard. Based on this assessment, we have concluded a C3 grade for LB Wandsworth.”

However, it also identified weaknesses in respect of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. In their published report, they stated as follows:

“We identified weaknesses in how LB Wandsworth takes tenants’ views into account in its decision making and communicates how tenants’ views have been considered. LB Wandsworth has a well-established formal framework of engagement opportunities; however, we found that opportunities to become involved were not open to all tenants (only those who were members of a residents’ association) and there was limited evidence of tenant-led engagement. While there were other opportunities for tenants to be involved, we saw evidence that these were generally focussed on local changes or improvements. LB Wandsworth has recognised that it needs to improve informal routes of participation and to involve more tenants.”

The RSH did note, however, that the Council had “been engaging constructively with us and has put in a place a programme to rectify these failures...making improvements to its tenant engagement...processes.”

In summary, to address the RSH's findings, the Council needs to do the following, as a minimum:

- Ensure that access into the formal engagement mechanisms is more democratic
- Provide the opportunity for tenant-led engagement
- Ensure that the voice of the tenant feeds into the governance structure and there is clear evidence that councillors hear the tenant voice and are influenced by it.

2 Our approach

HQN has been commissioned to review progress against the Council’s improvement plan to ensure it is addressing in full the RSH challenges in this area. To make this assessment, we have carried out the following activities:

- Carried out a desktop review of relevant documentation
- Met with staff, a key councillor, and involved residents to gauge progress since the inspection

- Considered evidence about broadening engagement
- Assessed the impact of resident engagement on service standards and decision making.

We would like to place on record our thanks to all those who gave up their time to speak with the author. Their time and honesty are appreciated. We recommend that they are all kept up to date with the outcomes of this review.

3 Regulatory expectations

Rather than simply focussing on the published findings following the Council's inspection, we have reflected on what the RSH is expecting providers to do to comply with the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard on engagement. We have also reviewed what the RSH said in reports on providers who were successful in achieving a C1 rating.

To comply with this element of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, providers must evidence that they do the following:

- Take tenants' views into account
- Provide a wide range of meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise
- Assist tenants who wish to implement tenant-led activities
- Provide accessible support
- Consider ways to improve and tailor their approach.

The RSH Code of Practice, which sits behind the consumer standards, provides further guidance on how to comply, including the following:

- Genuine consideration of tenants' views should be at the heart of decision-making
- Boards and councillors should assure themselves that tenants' views have been actively sought and considered
- All tenants have an equitable opportunity to be involved
- Consultation with tenants must be meaningful.

The inspection scope for a recent RSH inspection of a local authority requested the following documents in respect of engagement:

- Reports to councillors/senior officers on tenant engagement activities, the extent to which these are successful in facilitating tenant influence and scrutiny and whether there is sufficient accessible support that meets the diverse needs of tenants
- Reports to councillors/senior officers and other communication that sets out the impact of tenant views on service delivery

- A list of tenant scrutiny activities undertaken in the previous two years and the forward programme
- Evidence of reporting to councillors/senior officers on progress and outcome on the current Tenant Engagement Strategy

As part of this review, we have considered what similar documentation you have been able to provide.

We have reviewed the inspection reports, produced by the RSH and, for the purposes of this report, have looked at what the RSH has highlighted in terms of compliance within C1 assessed providers. However, we note the following comment in the recent inspection of Connexus Homes, a registered provider (awarded a C3 rating):

"Connexus' tenant engagement arrangements have primarily drawn on a small group of highly involved individuals. We gained assurance that the work of this group covered a broad range of areas, was independent and resulted in meaningful changes to policies and service delivery. Improvement is needed to ensure all tenants have a variety of opportunities to influence the landlord."

A typical comment, which appears in several C1 reports is "Tenant engagement and scrutiny arrangements provide a wide range of meaningful opportunities for tenants to influence and scrutinise its strategies, policies and services. We saw evidence that tenant insight has positively impacted service delivery in a number of areas including repairs and complaints services."

Reports have made specific references to:

- Improvements made as a result of scrutiny
- Feedback has positively impacted service delivery
- A forum where tenants can work alongside the board and executive team
- A mix of formal and informal engagement opportunities
- Digital engagement.

Engagement should be a golden thread throughout the services delivered to tenants, and RSH reports cite several areas as profiting from engagement, including:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Communication on stock condition surveys
- Mutual exchanges
- Repairs and repairs reporting
- Complaints handling.

The RSH has also positively mentioned the following types of engagement:

- Tenant scrutiny
- The use of digital platforms
- Mystery shopping
- Activities in the community.

In January 2026, the RSH concluded a C1 rating for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. In the report, particular note was made around the extent of engagement within the Council, namely:

"BCP Council takes tenant insight into account in its decision-making and communicates how tenants' contributions have been considered. It offers tenants a wide range of meaningful engagement opportunities that align with the Council's wider governance arrangements. At the meetings we observed, it was evident that BCP Council welcomed tenants' input and considered the representatives' views. Tenant insight impacts BCP Council's policies, services and its wider approach. Tenants have been actively involved in reviewing the performance of the call centre, the development of a new fire safety policy and contributed to BCP Council's new tenancy agreements. BCP Council communicates how tenant insight is shaping landlord services through a regular 'you said, we did' section in tenant newsletters."

In London, Barnet Council achieved a C1 rating in October 2025 and the RSH commented:

"LB Barnet gathers tenants' views in a range of formal and informal ways and provides tenants with meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise strategies, policies and services. The Resident Board is the main resident-led scrutiny body, and we observed that this board was able to effectively influence strategic priorities, policies, and service improvements."

An almost identical statement was made about the London Borough of Sutton, another C1 rated London borough.

All the above has shaped our review of the Council's approach to engagement. In summary, we look for the following when assessing whether an engagement framework is comprehensive and compliant with the regulatory standards:

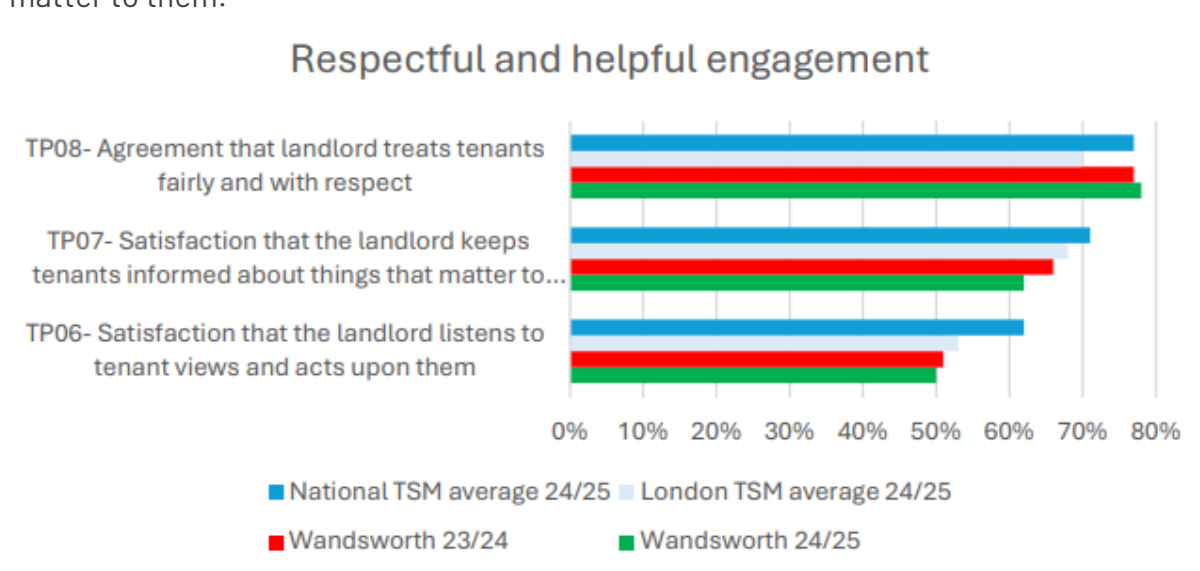
- An up-to-date strategy and action plan
- Engagement is with many and is diverse...or a plan is in place to improve
- Opportunities are appropriate to circumstances – eg, geography, demography
- Opportunities for the time-rich and time-poor
- Rigorous approach to evidencing outcomes

- Reporting to all relevant parties, including engaged and non-engaged residents, senior management and councillors.

4 Context

There are over 32,000 homes in the borough, owned by the Council, with a broadly even split of tenants and leaseholders (52/48%). There are 10 co-operatives/resident management organisations (RMOs) that manage nearly 3,000 properties.

The percentage of tenants that are satisfied that the Council listens to them and acts upon their views has dropped between 2023/24 and 2024/25 and is below the London average. There was also a fall in satisfaction that the Council keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them.



5 Strategy

When reviewing engagement, the first thing we look for is an up-to-date resident engagement strategy. The strategy should be the key driver of activity, defining what your engagement framework should look like, provide a clear set of actions to achieve the relevant short- and long-term goals by guiding decision-making, allocating resources effectively, and setting milestones.

The current Resident Participation and Consultation Strategy, though undated, appears to have been produced in 2023 and signed off in early 2024. It therefore predates the current regulatory framework and references the now defunct Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

The strategy contains an action plan, which is positive, but all actions had a target date for completion of 2024. We were advised that, while there is an intention to review and revise the strategy, there is a wish to consider the outcomes of this review and use them as the driver for a new strategy.

Although much of the strategy may remain relevant, and includes, for example, a range of informal participation activities, we recommend that it is reviewed, in consultation with engaged and non-engaged residents at the earliest opportunity following consideration of this report. The new strategy can then be used as the key driver for, not just compliance with the consumer standards, but also excellence in engagement.

Following the adverse RSH grading, a Social Housing Improvement Task and Finish Group (T&FG) was set up to carry out a review into social housing improvement. It reported to Cabinet in January 2026, and resident engagement was a key focus of the project.

The T&FG was informed by feedback from the 2025 residents' conference, which held some relevant workshops. However, there was a recognition within the report that the conference had been "dominated to an extent with leasehold issues."

The main outcomes of the T&FG appear to be a recognition of a need for a "cultural shift that places residents first and people at the heart of decision making" (which was also found to be in an issue in a root cause analysis piece of work undertaken following the adverse inspection finding), and the need to ensure the tenant voice is heard within the governance structure. However, the T&FG also recognised certain challenges, such as residents' associations tending to be leaseholder-dominated (and therefore so too the other elements of the formal engagement structure).

The T&FG did also note some positive outcomes of less formal engagement, such as:

- The increase in numbers of residents (especially tenants) engaged, via the participation register
- Four roadshows, attended by 200 residents in total
- Readers panels, which had looked at accessibility of information
- The development of a domestic abuse (DA) policy in collaboration with DA survivors.

6 Resources for engagement

We expect a modern, effective housing service, which meets with regulatory expectations around engagement, to be well-resourced, within the obvious budgetary constraints facing local authorities, in particular. Resources should be a mix of specialist officers, supported by other customer-facing colleagues having engagement as a key priority within their job roles.

In respect of specialist officers, the Council has a resident participation manager post (who reports to the assistant director of resident and estate services), which is supported by four resident participation officers (RPOs) and two community clubroom managers.

The RPOs are located within different area teams but are managed by the resident participation manager (a new role created following the inspection). The job profile contains a significant focus on developing and supporting resident groups (such as residents associations and resident management organisations) but does contain other duties around

“informal participation”, including the establishment and management of bicycle storage areas (more on this later).

Estate managers are (relatively) generic officers covering a range of tenancy and housing management activities. Contained within their job description is the following

“Assists the Resident Participation Officer in maintaining positive liaison with existing tenant, resident/ leaseholder associations/forum meetings as directed by the Area Housing Manager. Assists where appropriate in the formation of new associations and attends relevant evening meetings/weekend social events.”

The job descriptions for the RPOs do not really reflect the expectations of a modern engagement structure. Although there is some reference to informal participation, the roles are heavily focussed on the management and support of residents’ associations and resident management organisations, which currently cover around a third of the housing stock.

While it is positive that estate managers have a role in engagement (as per the job description), again, it is heavily focussed on residents’ associations, and, in practice, the managers appear to rarely be involved in engagement activities due to capacity issues and other priorities.

In addition to the above, there are four resident engagement officers (REO), who are based in the regeneration and development team. They play a role in promoting engagement and community development on Homes for Wandsworth projects (estates that are subject to regeneration). They are shortly to be brought into a single team under one manager. There are also two posts managing community clubrooms

While we have not carried out a detailed review of different officers' activities or capacity, the number of specialist roles appear reasonable for the number of homes. However, it appears that a significant proportion of the RPOs' time is taken up with a small range of activities, including:

- Supporting and monitoring residents' associations
- Supporting and monitoring resident management organisations (RMOs)
- Coordinating cycle storage arrangements, including key management.

In other local authorities, we have worked with, there is often a specialist officer or team that oversees RMOs.

The coordinating of cycle storage, we were advised, can be time-consuming and feels like an odd addition to the job role. In other providers, we often see this activity managed between surveyors, housing officers and an admin team or contact centre.

From our interviews, we understand that there is a degree of cooperative working between teams, but this is, in our view, not being utilised or maximised to its full capacity and there is scope to bring greater collaboration for the benefits of residents.

While it is not in the remit of this report to recommend specific changes to job roles, we do recommend that the roles are reviewed with the intention of identifying how the different roles can work better together for the greater good, and to ensure that the RPOs can focus on the key purpose of their role, namely, to develop a wider framework of engagement opportunities. We are aware of an upcoming review of the housing management structure, which will have a focus on the capacity of officers to deliver services, as well as the culture of the team. This would seem to be an opportune time to review the engagement roles.

Linked to consideration of roles and cooperative working, during our interviews, we perceived a certain level of scepticism about whether tenants want to engage and whether, therefore, this area should get any great level of attention. It is clear from across the sector that many tenants do want to engage with their landlord about the things that matter to them and in a way that suits them. And, of course, whatever one's views, the regulatory expectations are there. Linked to this view in relation to engagement (we stress that this was not a widespread feeling), was a sense that the RPO role is not valued across the service.

We therefore recommend that briefings are delivered to the wider body of colleagues to emphasise the importance of engagement, what the RSH expects, and the hoped for outcomes of engagement. This should be accompanied by a clear message of the importance of engagement specialists, alongside the aim that engagement is part of everyone's role.

7 Formal engagement

At the time of the inspection, the RSH found that the Council had “a well-established formal framework of engagement opportunities.” It is worth noting that “well-established” is a neutral phrase referring to longevity. We assume the word was deliberately used, rather than a more positive word or phrase, such as “high performing” or “effective”. The RSH also stated that “opportunities to become involved were not open to all tenants”.

In a presentation to the RSH in December 2025, the Council set out the current formal structures, namely:

- 38 residents' associations
- 4 area housing panels
- Co-op forums
- Borough residents' forum.

The current strategy sets out the engagement structure and how it feeds into the democratic process within the Council.

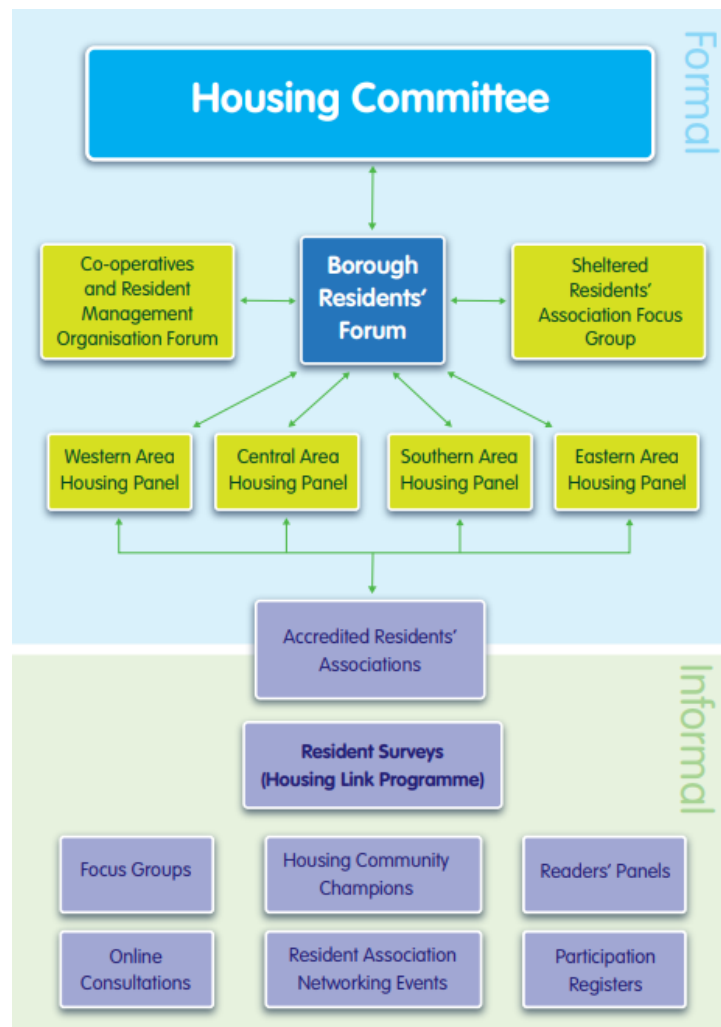


Fig. 1 – engagement structure

The presentation to RSH highlighted, however, that only one third of residents had access to a residents' association and stated a goal to ensure a "wider group of residents has the opportunity to have a meaningful influence on service delivery." The presentation did not set out how the Council aimed to achieve this.

There are 38 accredited and 4 associate residents' associations (RA) across the borough. Members of each RA nominate residents to be part of the area housing panels (AHP) and from here residents are nominated to be part of the borough residents' forum (BRF). The BRF is the most senior layer of resident engagement and reviews papers relevant to housing management before these are presented to committee.

As BRF members are elected from the four area panels, the TMO forum and the sheltered residents' association focus group (SRAFG), without change to this formal framework, the majority of residents will remain ineligible to be part of the formal engagement process. We believe that breaking the link between residents' associations and the governance structure is critical to satisfying the RSH's expectations.

The current strategy further incentivises the creation/existence of residents' associations (an opposing view would be that the strategy discriminates against residents not covered by a residents' association) by giving priority to a small improvements budget. Areas covered by a RA or a RMO are given priority for the funds, and decisions are made by AHPs and the co-op forum. In practice, we were advised that funds tend to be spent prior to any consideration of spend on non-RA estates.

While active, well-run and effective residents' associations are a positive aspect of many engagement frameworks, particularly within local authorities, they do not appeal to all residents (as is seemingly the case in Wandsworth). So, while they should be welcomed and supported, they should not be the only vehicle by which residents can influence at a more strategic level. Our view is that the RSH will expect that any formal engagement opportunities (such as membership of the BRF) are open to all (or at least the majority of) tenants.

We have worked with other local authorities that have similar bodies to the BRF. However, the eligibility route is normally different and more democratic. For example, Babergh and Mid-Suffolk Councils (two sovereign councils that have shared services across all operational teams), have a tenant board, comprising 12 tenants (two of whom can be leaseholders). Membership is open to all tenants, provided they are not in breach of their tenancy agreement or lease. They are elected for a period of five years.

The only criterion for membership is that they must be a tenant or leaseholder with no tenancy breaches. Applications are advertised and promoted in several ways, such as newsletters, website and direct approaches.

The landlords try to balance the split between geographical areas so they don't have more residents from one district or the other on the board, but sometimes this is inevitable and they would rather have tenants engaged than not because they don't live in the right district. They informally interview them to make them aware of the commitment, understand their needs, interests, and any development opportunities they may want to take up.

We have no concerns about the structure for formal engagement. It is clear, simple and provides for access into the heart of the governance framework. However, we recommend that the Council considers making the access route into area housing panels and the BRF more democratic and allow any resident (not in breach of tenancy) to be eligible. A simple model could be one that is open to all residents, provided they are not in (serious) breach of tenancy, and one that ensures a balance of tenants and leaseholders within the membership.

The RSH also noted that in Wandsworth "there was limited evidence of tenant-led engagement". Although the report does not elaborate, it is highly likely that the RSH is referring to what is often termed tenant scrutiny, whereby a small group of tenants undertake scrutiny-style projects looking in detail at how well the landlord is delivering services in a particular area. The subjects for review are often chosen by the tenants, based for example, on survey data, and driven by the tenants, supported by officers as appropriate. To manage workloads, some providers have developed "scrutiny in a day" (sometimes called bootcamp scrutiny) style exercises. We recommend that the Council considers utilising the increased numbers on its involvement register to test interest in developing such an initiative.

We note that one of the outcomes of the T&FG was the establishment of a housing improvement board to oversee the change and improvement process. The board is in the process of being established. The intention is to have an independent chair.

8 Informal engagement

The RSH noted that there were some informal engagement opportunities, but they tended to be at local level. The inspection report notes that the Council recognised "that it needs to improve informal routes of participation and to involve more tenants". The current strategy sets out several ways in which residents can engage "informally". These include:

- Housing community champions – residents, who are active in their communities
- Estate inspections
- Focus groups and task and finish groups – the strategy commits to facilitating two each year, one of which will focus on the annual report
- Participation register
- Residents' conference – with good levels of attendance, but limited influence on service delivery
- Readers' panel.

The strategy sets out a range of other activities, more usually falling under the description of community development. Some of the above activities have taken place, but for the most part in an ad hoc way and with limited evidence of outcomes. For example, a residents' conference has been held in each of the last few years, but, while popular, we have not seen evidence of significant outcomes.

There has been significant activity recently to increase the numbers on the participation register, with some success. There are now approximately 700 members (500 of whom are tenants), but there is a recognition that the register remains under-utilised and there is not yet a clear plan for its use.

The Council has also run a number of community-based roadshows, where several teams have been present to informally meet with residents. Those run in 2025 were reasonably well attended, though the ones, so far, this year had few attendees. The roadshows have been linked to estate inspections and are intended to be linked to consultation exercises, where relevant.

The increase in numbers on the participation register is a positive, but one that must be further developed to keep up the momentum. We recommend that work is undertaken, perhaps by means of a survey, to understand, what services or service areas are of interest to residents, and how residents would like to be engaged. The outcomes of this work can then be used to inform the development of the strategy and focus in on the activities that are of interest to residents as well as ones that can be delivered and produce real outcomes for residents.

The 2026 calendar for engagement sets out several planned activities, as follows:

- Pulse surveys

- Online surveys
- Community panels
- Consultations
- Roadshows
- Focus groups and working groups – repairs, conference, annual report, underperforming TSMs
- Procurement.

These can form the basis for discussions with residents around the range of informal activities that residents may be interested in taking part in.

Transactional surveys (ie, surveys conducted following delivery of a service, such as repairs or ASB) are a common way in which providers engage with residents and get feedback, which can be used to inform service improvement. We were advised that the Council only carries out such surveys for responsive repairs. We recommend that the Council considers introducing such surveys across a range of relevant services to enhance engagement by means of transactional engagement. In the first instance, we recommend that the Council considers introducing such surveys for ASB and complaints. The Council should further consider what other services may benefit from engagement by means of survey.

9 Hearing the tenant voice

As highlighted above, the RSH expects to see evidence that councillors hear the tenant voice, whether that is in holding the Council to account on performance or when considering new and revised strategies and policies.

A Cabinet report (January 2026) states that “Members noted that consideration was required into how the Borough Residents’ Forum fits into the Council’s new decision-making model, as Cabinet papers were no longer required to first be considered at the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.”

It is essential to meeting regulatory expectations that the Council ensures that residents’ views are heard by councillors and are at the heart of the decision-making process. We noted a recommendation (six) in the Cabinet report that: “Tenant and leaseholder representation be included in the governance arrangements monitoring performance and delivery of improvements to the Council’s managed housing stock.”

However, it is likely that the new "Housing Improvement and Transformation Board will be at the heart of the new monitoring framework". We recommend that this matter is resolved as a priority.

10 Outcomes of engagement

Another critical consideration for the RSH is to see evidence of the outcomes of resident engagement, its "raison d'être". We saw, or were advised of, some outcomes of engagement, such as:

- Focus groups on repairs and complaints led to some changes
- The residents' conference – led to certain policy changes
- The readers' panel has led to some revisions in documentation
- An online survey contributed to the new tenant welcome pack
- Residents co-designed training on customer care and complaints
- The domestic abuse policy co-designed with survivors.

However, we did not see that the Council is reporting on or promoting the outcomes. For example, in respect of the focus groups on repairs and complaints, we saw a statement that "a copy of the action plan tracker will be made available on the Council webpage with clear timeframes. This will be monitored and updated regularly". However, we cannot see the tracker on the website.

We recommend that the strategy sets out how the Council will assess the outcomes of engagement.

11 Recommendations

Based on our findings above, we set out below our recommendations, implementation of which should ensure compliance with regulatory expectations as well as enhance the engagement offer to residents. We have prioritised the recommendations, as follows:

- Priority 1 - within the next three months (July 2026)
 - Priority 2 - within the next six months (October 2026)
 - Priority 3 - within the next 12 months (May 2027)
1. Carry out a review, in partnership with residents, of the current engagement strategy and produce a new strategy that reflects the requirements of the current Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard – priority 1

2. As part of the development of the new strategy, ensure there are clear terms of reference and/or objectives for each main activity offered, an example being what the plans are for the participation register – priority 2
3. Review the RPO and REO roles and responsibilities to assess whether there are opportunities to work more closely on engagement activity across the borough and to ensure their key focus is on enhancing engagement – priority 3 (provided you can deliver on the improvement actions without earlier review and action)
4. Carry out briefings for all relevant colleagues on the importance and potential outcomes of effective resident engagement – priority 2
5. Review and revise the eligibility for membership of the area housing panels and borough residents' forum to ensure that all tenants (not in breach of tenancy or lease) are eligible to sit on the bodies and that there is a minimum/maximum number of tenants and leaseholders that broadly reflects the near 50/50 split in homes – priority 1
6. To ensure no tenure is unduly influential, consider separate mechanisms for consideration of tenant-specific and leasehold-specific issues. These could take the form of sub-groups feeding into BRF – priority 3
7. Review how the small improvements fund is managed so that all areas and estates have an equal opportunity to access funds and that decisions are made predominantly on the benefits to residents of bids, rather than whether the bid is in an area covered by a RA or RMO – priority 1 (quick win)
8. Ensure the way in which engaged tenants can effectively feed into and influence the governance structure is clear and implement any structural changes as appropriate – priority 1
9. Ensure that appropriate reports on engagement activities and outcomes are presented into the governance structure to satisfy RSH expectations – priority 2
10. Consider establishing a tenant scrutiny function – priority 2
11. Carry out a survey of residents who are on the participation register to understand how they want to engage, and what subjects they want to be engaged on, and use in the development of the strategy – priority 2 (quick win)

12. Ensure that the new arrangements facilitate the critical relationship between councillors and the tenant voice – priority 1
13. Introduce post-service transactional satisfaction surveys across a range of relevant services – priority 3 – (potential quick win)

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