



Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Code of Conduct For the Tenants Panel

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council is committed to giving all tenants¹ a say in the housing services they receive and how they are planned and paid for. This agreement known as the 'Tenants Compact' is built upon years of tenant involvement and is informed by current government thinking. It is also seen as a renewed commitment to provide the best possible services which reflect the often unique circumstances in Welwyn Hatfield.

Our vision is based upon four general principles:

- The involvement of tenants in the services they receive in order to encourage personal and community development. By doing this the quality of services can be improved.
- The support and encouragement of involvement at a level and pace decided by tenants themselves.
- That tenant involvement goes beyond looking at the landlord and tenant relationship. It is about identifying and helping to set the agenda and working in partnership with others on issues concerning homes, neighbourhoods and environments - helping to create communities where people want to live.
- In developing our Tenant Participation Compact we will continue to challenge existing arrangements, compare with others, involve tenants fully and look at how we can deliver tenant participation most effectively.

To achieve this vision we all need to work together with mutual respect, trust and co-operation. Most people usually want to work this way. However, on occasions, possibly because of strong feelings about a particular issue, people might forget the right ways to behave towards one another. The Tenants Panel and staff have worked together to agree this code of conduct, as a guide to how we expect everyone to act and behave at all times when involved in activities supported by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

This code of conduct applies to:

- all meetings, events and activities to which tenants or other members of the public are invited
- all members of tenant and community groups that the council supports including Resident Associations
- any tenant representing a group supported by the council at external events and meetings²
- all staff attending meetings and events
- any other person or representative of any other organisation attending council meetings and events

It includes:

¹ Throughout this document, the term 'tenant(s)' is taken to include renting tenants as well as leasehold tenants.

² This includes tenants representing groups supported by the Tenants Panel and should comply with the code whilst present at a meeting or event, whilst travelling to or from it in the presence of other members, and whilst carrying out other duties as a tenant or community representative.

- responsibilities that apply to everyone
- responsibilities that apply to individuals
- how people should behave at meetings
- what happens if the Code is breached

Everyone involved is expected to:

- adhere to the values and principles of the code of conduct
- work in partnership to achieve the best possible results
- do all we can to ensure that people who are involved reflect the people living in our communities
- ensure that everything we do positively promotes involvement and does not bring any group or the council into disrepute.

Group members³ are expected to:

- only speak or write on behalf of the group when specifically asked to do so by the group
- feed back in writing any business carried out on behalf of a group and submit any related correspondence
- not raise personal issues at meetings or expect favourable treatment as a result of involvement in a group
- give apologies for absence in advance of the meeting
- contribute positively towards meeting the aims of the group and operate within the group's rules / constitution and action plan
- consider the needs and priorities of the people represented, and wherever possible gather views through discussions and wider consultation methods

Where a member does not attend meetings of the Tenants Panel for a period of two consecutive meetings, without a valid reason being given, the Tenants Panel shall consider the continued service of the Tenants Panel member involved and any extenuating circumstances, and may remove the Tenants Panel member.

Staff are expected to:

- be honest and open about the matters under discussion
- provide the relevant information in the appropriate style and format and make every effort to send information out in advance of the meeting
- listen to, respect and take into account people's views
- give prompt feedback to issues raised
- provide regular information on how involvement has made a difference

³ Group member refers to anyone present at a meeting or event hosted by council representatives attending external events

Meetings and events

- Treat others with respect, courtesy, sensitivity and protect individual confidentiality
- Understand and support the role of the Chair, speaking only when asked to do so
- Remember the purpose of the meeting and stick to the agenda
- Contribute positively and constructively to discussions and decisions
- Attend regularly and give apologies in advance if necessary, reporting the need to leave early in advance or to the Chair at the start of the meeting
- Prepare for meetings by reading beforehand and bringing the relevant papers
- Be friendly and welcoming to others
- Be on time, and not disrupt meetings by arriving late or leaving early
- Switch off mobile phones
- Listen to whoever is speaking and do not talk to others at the same time
- Consider the needs and views of all tenants and local communities
- Keep comments brief, clear, to the point and free of jargon
- Refrain from using offensive or abusive language or behaviour
- Work to reach decisions by consensus where possible, or by majority vote
- Abide by group decisions

Equal opportunities and diversity

The council will be proactive in developing resident involvement activities which can be accessed by anyone who wishes to engage with us. Anyone attending these activities, regardless of their race, colour, ethnicity, gender, marital status, age, sexuality, or religion has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Racist, sexist and other personally abusive remarks or actions will be challenged and not tolerated. Everyone involved is expected to remove any barriers to involvement and help others to participate and be particularly sensitive to people who may not be used to speaking in public, first language is not English, may not read or write, or have a disability.

The council will monitor the involvement of customers to ensure they reflect the make-up of the wider community and whenever possible provide practical assistance to people attending meetings. Advice and support is available from the Chair and Community Development Team.

Confidentiality

We will all respect and treat all matters relating to individuals as confidential, whether an individual is present or not, and refrain from mentioning specific cases which may cause embarrassment or identification of an individual. Members of a group may receive confidential information. If so, they should not discuss that information with anyone outside of the meeting. Usually it will be made clear if information is confidential, but if in doubt the advice of the Chair or the Community Development Team should be sought before information is disclosed. If at any point an individual needs identifying at a meeting, consent to share must be provided in writing.

Political affiliation

Although Tenant Panel members may be affiliated to or be members of a political party, all of the activities it supports are entirely non party-political.

Gifts

Tenant Panel members should not accept gifts, favours or hospitality. Tenant Panel members should seek the advice of the Chair or the Community Development Team.

Conflicts of interest

Any private interests (such as a family, business or financial involvement) in a matter under discussion should be raised with the Chair. Tenant Panel members may be asked to leave a meeting whilst the issue is discussed, and/or not to take part in the discussion, and/or not to vote. If it is the Chair who has a private interest, they should declare this to the meeting and stand down during that particular item.

Breaches of the code

If things are getting heated during a meeting, a short break can be called for at the discretion of the Chair. If a group member fails to abide by the Code, the Chair may ask them to leave the meeting. If, despite a warning, a group member continues to breach this Code, or in more serious breaches, a member can be suspended from meetings or expelled by the Chair of the meeting or the committee. Any case of gross misconduct within Tenants Panel membership is covered by the Tenants Panel Constitution.

How the council will support the effective running of meetings and the following of this Code

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council through the Community Development Team, will provide advice and support to individuals and groups to enable meetings and events to be managed effectively and within the framework of this code of conduct. Bringing a code of conduct matter to the attention of a group meeting is intended to be a positive method of resolving any issues that arise effectively, and in a fair and open manner. However, as a last resort, the council may withdraw formal recognition and support from a group if the code of conduct is not used effectively to satisfactorily resolve any matters that arise. Any group supported by the council is required to include adherence to this Code of Conduct in their Constitution and distribute a copy to every member. Any Tenants Panel member attending an involvement activity hosted by the council or a group supported by the council agrees to abide by this code.