

# Tenant's Handbook

## Getting involved

Introduction

# Introduction

Please note there is currently a Resident Engagement review underway and this information is subject to change.

This chapter tells you how you can get involved with your community.

We know that your involvement helps us to improve the services and the homes we provide, and build stronger and more supportive communities. We are committed to engage as widely as possible with all our tenants and to

## 1. Different ways to be involved in how we manage your home

There are many ways to become involved with your housing:

### You choose

You can choose your level of involvement and we have a team to help you get involved in everything we do. If you want to find out more about any of the activities mentioned below, you can get more information from the community engagement team on 020 7525 3326, or you can email or you can email [resident.involvement@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:resident.involvement@southwark.gov.uk).

### Joining your local tenants and residents association (T&RA)

Many tenants choose to get involved by joining their tenants and residents associations. T&RAs meet regularly and talk to the council about issues affecting your estate like repairs, grounds maintenance, cleaning and antisocial behaviour. If you have an issue about your home or area they would be good place to get help to solve a problem. Often T&RAs organise community events and activity as well.

If there is no T&RA on your estate we can help you and your neighbours set one up.

Your local T&RA will send representatives to Area Forums. There are currently 12 covering the borough and they act as an advisory body on housing. The council consults the Area Forums on a wide range of its policies that affect housing and its estates, before it makes a decision.

Each area forum sends a representative to the Tenant Council. Tenant council also advises the local area housing forums and the council on matters that affect tenants.

Area forums also send representatives to the Homeowner Council, which advises the council on matters that affect our leaseholders and freeholders.

work with you and your representatives to achieve these goals.

There are many ways to become involved in the life of your community and we already work with lots of different groups to make this happen. We provide a range of ways for you to get involved in what we do and have a say in the decisions we make.

### Tenant Fund

We set aside a small percentage from every tenant's monthly rent to support the groups that represent tenants. This fund is managed through the tenant council who make recommendations on how the money should be spent.

Some of the money collected is used to support your local T&RA and some is used to support Southwark Group of Tenant Organisations (SGTO) an independent and campaigning body representing the interests of local tenants. The fund is also used to provide training for tenants groups and resource centres.

### Tenant halls

You will probably have seen a community building in your neighbourhood. You may be able to use the tenant hall, community centre or other premises for community events, local weddings and birthday parties, or to run an activity for the community. You can ask at a customer contact point for information about what facilities are available in your local area and who to contact about events, activities and hire. Most of these halls are managed by your local T&RA

### Estate inspections

You can take part in estate inspections to improve the repair and cleanliness of shared areas. If you would like to get involved in estate or block inspections please contact your Resident Services Manager.

### Performance review groups and focus groups

You can take part in performance reviews to improve the services provided to your local area. From time to time we set up focus groups to look at a particular service, for example lettings or antisocial behaviour. If you have a particular interest in one of the services we provide let us know and we will make sure you are involved in our discussions about improving that service.

## Mystery shopping

We think it is important to know what the service is like for our customers. We organise mystery shopping exercises to find out. You can volunteer to be one of our mystery shoppers. We offer training and a small reward to our volunteers for carrying out this service on our behalf.

## STAR survey

Every year we survey a sample of our tenants to find out how satisfied they are with the services we provide and their area. This survey helps us to know where we need to improve our services. It also helps us to compare the quality of our services with other housing providers. You can participate by completing this survey.

## Estate action days

We hold events on our estates where we bring a range of services and organisations to the estate for you to raise your concerns, find out more, and participate in consultations. This is an informal way for you to let us know what you think, and find out more about how we do things. These are organised by your Resident Services Officer.

## Tenant conference

Each year there is a tenant conference. This is open to all tenants who wish to attend and is a good way to find out more about council plans for your home, meet other tenants, share and learn about what is happening on our estates.

## Online

We offer a number of different ways for you to keep in touch with us and find out more about opportunities in your area, and to let us know what you think. You can:

- Sign up to My Southwark, for news about what's on in your area, to let us know what you think, participate in our consultations, and much more
- Like the resident involvement Facebook page to find out the latest in resident involvement, and join our chats
- Follow us on Twitter

## Joint security initiative

The council provides grants for residents to deliver projects that involve residents in making a contribution to social improvements in their areas.

## 2. Different ways to get involved in your community

There are many ways to be involved in the life of your community.

## You choose

You can choose your level of involvement and we have a team to help you get involved in your community. If you would like to find out more about any of the opportunities mentioned below, you can get more information from the **community engagement team** on 020 7525 3326, via email at [communityengagement@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:communityengagement@southwark.gov.uk) or visit our website at [www.southwark.gov.uk/getinvolved](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/getinvolved)

## Community councils

Community councils are open to all members of the community to air their concerns with their elected ward councillors and for the community council to consider as a whole.

Southwark has five community councils meeting throughout five times a year consulting with local people on:

- Traffic issues
- Community safety
- Environmental improvements.

## Local community groups

The council supports a range of groups: if you would like to get involved or set up your own please contact the community engagement team.

If you would like to get involved with people who have similar concerns as you there are a number of forums such as faith forums, disability forums, pensioner forums, LGBT forums and youth forums. To find out more please contact the community engagement team.

## Volunteering opportunities

There are hundreds of different organisations in Southwark where you could help out or learn new skills and meet new people through volunteering. If you would like to find out the latest information please visit the website.

## Online:

We want to know what residents think about services and run online consultations to help find out. To learn more about how you can tell us your thoughts about particular services sign up to *My Southwark* and look for the online consultations page.

Each community council produces an email newsletter. If you want to be added to the mailing list contact the community engagement team.

There are two online forums, SE1 and East Dulwich, which are run by local residents to discuss local issues, events and activity.

### **3. Getting involved in managing your home through a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO)**

Another way to get closely involved in your local community is to be part of a TMO. Thousands of local people have set up TMOs to manage their homes and neighbourhoods.

The 'right to manage' is a legal right and any organised and recognised group of tenants can apply to take over the day-to-day management of the local estate.

Under a TMO we continue to be the landlord and your tenancy rights are not affected. This includes your security of tenure, the right to exchange, the 'Right to Buy' and the rent you pay. We also continue to be the freehold landlord for leaseholders.

For more information you can contact the TMO team by telephoning 020 7525 7712 or emailing [tenantmanagement@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:tenantmanagement@southwark.gov.uk).

### **4. The Council and democracy**

Choosing your local councillor is an important way to get involved in the decisions about your area. Local council elections take place every four years.

The way you register to vote is changing. Every member of your household who is eligible to vote will need to register individually from June 2014. If you want to find out about your local political ward and your voter registration you can contact electoral services on 020 7525 7373 or email [electoralenquiries@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:electoralenquiries@southwark.gov.uk)

#### **Elected councillors**

account when decisions are made. Councillors hold advice surgeries to deal with specific concerns and problems you may have about anything that concerns you. You can find out more details by telephoning electoral services on 020 7525 7373.

#### **Elected members and the cabinet**

Southwark has 63 councillors, representing 21 wards. The 63 councillors meet every month at the council assembly, chaired by the Mayor of Southwark. Ten of those councillors form the cabinet which decides on how we are going to deliver our services and what resources are needed.

Most council meetings are open to the public and you have a right to go to these meetings and see the agenda and papers to be discussed prior to the meeting, except when confidential items are being discussed. If you want to find about future meetings please telephone 020 7525 5000.

#### **Making decisions**

A forward plan is prepared for the cabinet Leader every month. It contains details of all important decisions to be taken in the next four months and who will take them. For information about these meetings look on the council and democracy pages of our website.

#### **Overview and scrutiny committees**

Overview and scrutiny committees provide challenge and review of council decisions, to contribute to the overall effectiveness of the council's governance, together with scrutiny of external agencies, particularly local NHS services and the Metropolitan Police Service in Southwark.