
HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TENANTS & HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS



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Now, more than ever, effective communication strategies that engage tenants are critical differentiating factors for housing associations. Driving this is an alignment of planets that have placed good communication centre stage: In 2023, the [Make Things Right](#) campaign created a structure to handle and escalate tenant complaints. Also, in 2023, the [Tenant Satisfaction Measures or TSMs](#) came into force. To add fuel to the fire, the 2022-2023 [Housing Ombudsman report](#) found a staggering 323% rise in severe maladministration findings. The report highlights a 52% maladministration rate for health and

safety complaints alone, with a [wall of shame](#) showing the worst offenders. However, five landlords stood out from the crowd by offering an exemplary service. As a result, the Ombudsman wrote to them to recognise their [positive complaint-handling approach](#).

Positive communication is a core part of building better tenant-housing association relationships. Here, Intratone discusses five ways that help establish effective communication and positive relationships with tenants.

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FIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE TENANT-HOUSING ASSOCIATION COMMUNICATION

Effective communication with tenants benefits a housing association as well as being an expected element in social housing provision. In a climate of crisis in housing, having good tenant relations can help establish the housing association as a preferred landlord that cares about its tenants.

Tenants can be a housing association's eyes and ears. The input from those using your housing can benefit a housing association by providing a front-line view of the service.

This "in-house" perspective offers a glimpse of life on the other side of the tenant-housing association relationship. These insights are invaluable to help build and deliver a better service, improving security, and enhancing the tenancy experience. But creating an environment of insightful communication that provides positive outcomes requires thought. Below are five ways to help build better relationships and connect with your tenants.

" inherent and naturally effective communication is not always a given.."

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PLAN YOUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Benjamin Franklin reportedly said, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." This is excellent advice. Effective communication needs an effective plan. The strategies and policies contained within the plan should reflect how, why, and when you will engage residents. Once these foundation stones are developed, you should map them to the aims of your communication strategy. For example, communicate changes that

reflect the **National Housing Federation decarbonisation roadmap** to get tenants' buy-in. Or inform tenants of a regular maintenance day that all residents agree to.

Once you have a plan, you can find the most appropriate channels to contact tenants and discuss plans and events. An important point to remember is that plans must be regularly checked and updated.

TRAINING FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Inherent and naturally effective communication is not always a given. We all have methods of communicating, but not all are effective. Building a great relationship with tenants requires a transparent policy that encourages interaction openness. But it also needs

people to know how to communicate this policy. Housing association employees should be trained in how to communicate with tenants and tenant associations in a transparent manner that builds trusted relationships.



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CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLANNING

One of the issues identified in the Housing Ombudsman report was ineffective communication around complaint handling procedures. This poor communication led to Complaint Handling Failure Orders (CHFOs) issued to 146 landlords, with 73% issued to landlords with 10,000+ homes. Ensuring that complaints are collected and then handled quickly and respectfully is a vital aspect of brand reputation and

meeting the TSMs. Your response as a landlord must be measured and gracious, as effective communication is critical in minimising the impact for both the tenant and the housing association. Ensure that your communication plan includes a crisis management policy and that your staff are trained on its implementation.



COLLECT FEEDBACK AND BE A GOOD LISTENER

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Communication includes collecting direct feedback from individual tenants. Resident feedback is a great way to gather insights into how your service is being used and any issues. The act of collecting tenant views also helps to establish a relationship. By opening this communication channel and taking in tenants' views, a housing association helps build a culture of openness and transparency; in effect, the housing association becomes a good listener.

Designing a system that collects feedback, is simple to use, reliable, and upholds tenant privacy is critical. The Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) offer a standard way of collating this information in tenant perception surveys that collect tenant views on twelve tenancy areas, such as home maintenance.



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BUILD A COMMUNITY

Being a good listener and communicating effectively are essential ingredients in building a community that is inclusive. Tools can help to establish the communication bridge that connects the community. For example, a Digital Noticeboard is a central part of reaching out to tenants, allowing your team to generate notices publicising events such as community and street parties; this accessible method of communicating events ensures that everyone is included.

Another way to build group cohesion is to include your tenants in decision-making. Offer ways of collecting people's views and feelings on even small topics, this demonstrates your commitment to listening and taking tenants voices into account. Again, the Digital Notice Board is an ideal, and privacy-respectful way to engage with tenants.

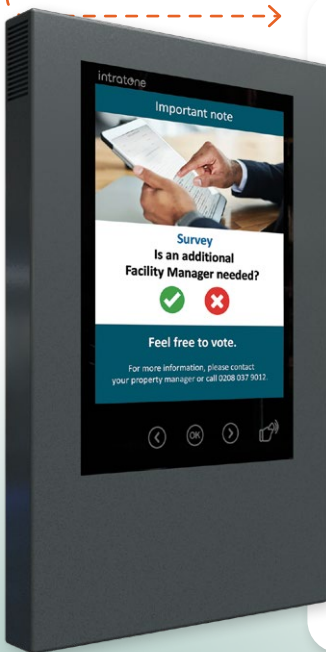


TECHNOLOGIES TO HELP TENANT-HOUSING ASSOCIATION COMMUNICATION

The channels of communication are where housing associations can ensure that tenant-housing association communication excels. Technology is a significant help in establishing these channels. Your communications plan will help you select which communication technologies suit specific situations.

For example, the collection of tenant perception surveys must be done using a channel that can be secure, and that assures the tenant's privacy.

Some of the technologies that can be invaluable in building effective communication channels include the following:



DIGITAL NOTICEBOARD

The notion of a notice board is well-established. Organisations worldwide use a notice board as a visual way to convey news and events to tenants. However, a modern version of the notice board has arrived, providing an interactive way for tenants and landlords to communicate. The "Digital Notice board" provides an interactive communication channel between landlords and housing association tenants; unreliable paper notices are no longer needed, and the on-screen information is easily read and accessible to everyone.

Intratone has developed an Interactive Digital Noticeboard that can be used to build relationships with tenants, providing them with easily updatable notes on events that affect them. The Digital Notice Board is designed to be accessible, vandalism-proof, and wall-hung. Security and privacy are baked in, and tenants can interact with the Digital Notice Board using various methods to sign-in securely. The Digital Notice Board is an ideal and secure way to present and collect tenant perception surveys.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms like Facebook are a good way to keep in touch with tenants. Facebook groups can be made private and invite only. This way, landlords can decide who is a member of the group. Facebook can be a great way to

encourage tenants to communicate with each other and the housing association. As a secondary communication channel for less formal announcements, Facebook can help build a community.

WHATSAPP AND TELEGRAM GROUP

WhatsApp can provide a similar broad-reach channel for your tenants. WhatsApp can be used as an invite-only channel to allow residents to connect and landlords to push out events such as maintenance notices.

Similarly, Telegram is a privacy-enhanced mobile-based app that can be used to create secure tenant-housing association groups to communicate events.

However, two important notes must be made about the use of social media:

- Social platforms, including WhatsApp, can become the target for scammers. While invite and closed groups help reduce this risk, the potential should be considered when deciding what type of information can be shared on the different types of channels.
- Not everyone feels comfortable using social media or has a social media account.

Better communications that cross the bridge between housing associations and tenants are essential to modern housing. However, planning and understanding how best to communicate with tenants, and which channel is most suitable to perform that communication, are essential. Once established, robust communication strategies allow a housing association to build better relationships with tenants and avoid mismanaging the increasingly stringent regulations.

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