

circle | more than housing

Tenant Communication and Engagement Strategy

2021 - 2024





MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY PROVIDING QUALITY HOMES FOR PEOPLE IN HOUSING NEED

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CIRCLE | FOCUS GROUP FOREWORD

‘When empowerment meets honesty, excellence, accountability and respect we can accomplish anything.’



With support from Circle VHA and through them, Supporting Communities, we established a focus group made up of tenants, staff and board members. We are looking forward to making more changes in the future so we can all live happily in our homes.

“After a year of Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) meetings, we decided that it was time to review and update our Terms of Reference (TOR) and Code of Conduct (COC). These documents can be found on pages 30-33. This took place in October 2022 in person, so we now have version two of our TOR and COC.”

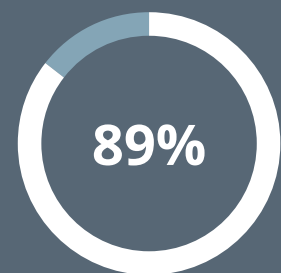
April Gregg, Circle VHA Tenant



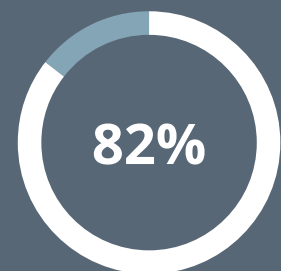
Since forming the focus group in December 2020, we have achieved a lot. A small group of tenants were involved in reintroducing the tenant newsletter and writing the new tenant handbook. The tenants also chose a tenant approved logo (located on the front cover) to use on publications and papers. The group has attended tenant engagement training and prepared documents for the tenant advisory group.

We wish to thank our fellow tenants, staff and board members for the commitment they have shown to date. We would encourage others to engage in any way they can to benefit all Circle VHA tenants.

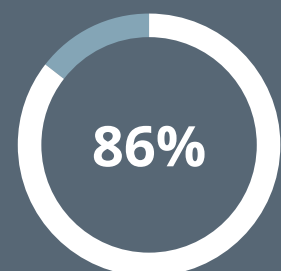
Gerry Fleming, Circle VHA Tenant



OF TENANTS ARE HAPPY WITH THE OVERALL QUALITY OF THEIR HOME



OF TENANTS ARE HAPPY LIVING IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD



OF TENANTS ARE HAPPY WITH THE LEVEL OF SERVICE PROVIDED BY CIRCLE

PROGRESSING TOWARDS A BETTER SOCIETY



“We champion the Tenant Engagement Strategy and the Board fully intend to be involved in its continued progression.”

CHRIS ELLISON
Chairperson, Circle VHA

CIRCLE CEO TENANT STATEMENT

“At Circle Voluntary Housing Association, we firmly believe that how we interact with our tenants, communities, colleagues and key stakeholders is of fundamental importance.”

HOUSING SCHEMES

72%

Of tenants questioned in our most recent survey were happy with the quality of their housing scheme.

MAINTENANCE

77%

Of tenants questioned in our most recent survey were happy with the quality of the maintenance service provided by Circle.

TENANT ENGAGEMENT

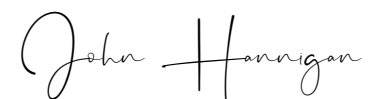
I am delighted that Circle VHA has undertaken this very important step in its evolution as an Approved Housing Body (AHB), welcoming the engagement of tenants in the fundamental decision-making about its future. I embrace and am grateful for the commitment from our tenants, especially during these difficult times. Many of our tenants have experienced hardship due to Covid-19, yet have come forward to be part of an exciting and challenging time for Circle VHA in its drive to provide quality homes for those in housing need.

COMMITMENT

Our tenants have stepped up to the plate and helped us deliver our first real tenant engagement strategy, which we will resource and deliver over the coming three years. We want to match our tenants' ambition and commitment by providing the best and most appropriate services and supports that our tenants deem important and that will enhance their communities.

MOVING FORWARD

We look forward to working with all of our tenants over the coming three years to deliver this strategy. My sincere thanks to the Focus Group and the Tenant Advisory Group for their significant input, influence and support in writing and publishing this strategy.



JOHN HANNIGAN
Chief Executive Officer
Circle VHA, 2021

TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY - FEEDBACK

86%

OF TENANTS ARE
HAPPY WITH THE
SERVICE PROVIDED
BY CIRCLE

78%

OF TENANTS WOULD
RECOMMEND CIRCLE
TO FAMILY AND
FRIENDS

89%

ARE HAPPY WITH
THE QUALITY
OF THEIR
HOME

82%

ARE HAPPY
WITH THEIR
NEIGHBOURHOOD

75%

ARE HAPPY
WITH ESTATE
MANAGEMENT
SERVICES

SCHOLARSTOWN

“I’m here just over a year and honestly couldn’t be happier. Circle have been absolutely great!”

KILMAINHAM BANK

“I love the privacy, greenery and the building itself. It’s a nice, spacious apartment that is well maintained. It is very secure and quiet with very little disturbance day or night. I have some nice neighbours too.”

RED ARCHES

“I just love everything about my home.”

THE RECTORY (STEPASIDE)

“I love the place, my children have grown up and left home so it’s just me here and I feel safe and secure. I have made some great friends since I moved here. It is a very quiet place with friendly people.”

OLD CHOCOLATE FACTORY

“I live in a high specification one bedroom apartment in a quiet complex. Our complex has an excellent and friendly caretaker. Our neighbourhood is a tourist area and kept very clean by DCC and there are 3 beautiful parks nearby. I am so happy with the place, there is never any trouble. I love living here. It is a beautiful central location in a very safe and friendly neighbourhood.”



**“IF YOU
REALLY LOOK
CLOSELY, MOST
OVERNIGHT
SUCCESSSES
TOOK A LONG
TIME”**

CIRCLE | MORE THAN HOUSING INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Circle VHA's first tenant communication and engagement strategy. It sets out what we hope to achieve, in partnership with our tenants, over the next three years.

STRATEGY

This tenant communication and engagement strategy focuses on effectively communicating with and working in partnership with our customers. For this strategy, customers are defined as:

- Circle VHA tenants; and
- Tenants to whom we provide landlord services on behalf of a local authority or a partner organisation.

To date, we have supported and encouraged the completion of tenant experience surveys in respect of our services, along with open meetings, face to face interviews, regular updates and tenant meetings. However, we recognise that we

need to do more. We hope that by setting out specific objectives in this strategy and committing the resources necessary to deliver it, we will achieve our ambition to have tenants at the heart of what we do as an organisation.

Our tenant focus group has written the strategy and, through consultation, received feedback and suggestions from other tenants and stakeholders. It details the structures we have put in place and the new and innovative approaches for more effective communication and engagement.

TENANT ENGAGEMENT IS:

“Working with tenants to co-produce effective services that meet a

wide variety of needs; for example building in accountability through communication, monitoring and scrutiny. It's about empowering tenants, residents and communities to work with your organisation to achieve shared aims.”

(TPAS England)

TENANT PARTICIPATION IS:

“Providing all tenants with a range of opportunities to have a say about how their housing services are delivered. It is a two-way process where landlords value the engagement and recognise it as a valuable component to improving their business.”

(Supporting Communities, 2016)



47

WONDERFUL EMPLOYEES
WORKING TOGETHER
AS A TEAM



1275

NUMBER OF HOMES
PROVIDED WITH ESTATE
MANAGEMENT SERVICES



1357

THE NUMBER OF
HOMES PROVIDED
BY CIRCLE

CIRCLE | MORE THAN HOUSING ABOUT US

Circle VHA was set up in 2003 and has been a leading provider of social housing in Ireland since.



OUR VISION IS TO MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE BY PROVIDING QUALITY HOMES FOR PEOPLE IN HOUSING NEED.

CIRCLE VHA

Circle VHA manages and owns over 2,000 homes nationally. Currently employing 47 staff, we have an ambitious growth programme in response to the need for more housing for those who cannot afford to provide their own. Our vision is to make a difference by providing quality housing to those in housing need.

Circle VHA is a legally incorporated company limited by guarantee (registered in Ireland, no. 374693) and has a board of voluntary directors. The Circle VHA board consists of nine members, who each have considerable expertise and experience in areas such as housing policy and development, organisational management, financial management and legal expertise.

OUR PURPOSE IS TO DELIVER QUALITY HOMES AND INNOVATIVE INTEGRATED HOUSING SOLUTIONS TO INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN IRELAND

VALUES

Our passionate commitment to caring about our tenants and the services we deliver has led to the development of our core values - six behaviour-based principles that speak directly to the characteristics we hold high. Our values are: We Hear!

WILLINGNESS

All our values are underpinned by the willingness to fulfil them. Our staff are dedicated professionals with a desire to serve and create an environment that benefits all.

EMPOWERMENT

We will empower our staff to make decisions that benefit the quality of the service we provide at the earliest opportunity. We will provide the support they need to deliver an

excellent service in a safe, open and positive manner. We will empower tenants to influence how we provide for their housing needs.

HONESTY

We will provide an honest and fully transparent approach to all decisions and outcomes. We will create a safe space for all our stakeholders to express their views in a constructive way. We will allow for constructive criticism and the fostering of a view that allows the opportunity for growth in a positive manner.

EXCELLENCE

We will continuously strive to be better, to consistently reflect on how we perform in a safe and positive manner, accepting that excellence

is always attainable if there is a consistent strive for it. We will make excellence a daily occurrence.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We will embed accountability through robust and cohesive policy, which benefits all. Transparency will foster this and the creation of solid and reliable documentation will ensure that this accountability is enforced.

RESPECT

Everyone is worthy of respect for who they are and what they contribute both internally and externally. When the contributions of the many are accepted and understood then the delivery of our service will reflect the true Purpose, Vision and Values of Circle VHA.

CIRCLE VHA'S COMMITMENT TO TENANT COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

INNOVATION

This strategy aims to set out how we will communicate and develop meaningful engagement with our tenants. The strategy is designed to be inclusive and empowering, and we will, in partnership, shape the services of the future together. As the key stakeholders of our business, tenants have the right to drive the services provided by Circle VHA. We will provide a comprehensive and helpful range of channels for our tenants to engage with us.

Circle VHA is dedicating the necessary finance and other resources to fully implement, monitor, and evaluate this strategy. We will ensure that all staff understand this strategy and have the necessary guidance and tools to implement it. We will develop ways in which we can measure the impact of implementing this strategy. To enable engagement, we will empower our tenants and break down barriers to their involvement in Circle VHA.



REGULATIONS GUIDING TENANT COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

"The light is what guides you home, the warmth is what keeps you there."



HOUSING AGENCY

The Housing Agency is a government body working with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to deliver housing and housing services. At the time of writing this strategy, the Agency is the interim regulator of the AHB sector. On 22nd February 2021, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien TD, announced nine appointments to the board of the

newly established Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority, effective from April 2021.

The Regulation Office was established in 2014 following the introduction of the Voluntary Regulation Code for Approved Housing Bodies in Ireland. It has responsibility for the day to day management of the regulatory function, which will transfer to statutory regulation in 2022.

The Regulation Office expects AHBs to have:

- A tenant communication and engagement policy, setting out how the AHB will engage and communicate with tenants;
- A range of methods available by which tenants can easily communicate with the AHB, including out of office hours and in emergencies;
- All services and information accessible for tenants;

- Pre-tenancy training and support for new tenants identifying what is expected of the tenant and the landlord;
- A proactive approach to tenant welfare to identify where tenants are experiencing difficulty in maintaining tenancy agreements;
- Tenant feedback opportunities available to assess tenant satisfaction about the management and maintenance of homes;
- Evidence of how the AHB has consulted on all relevant matters;
- Annual communication with tenants outlining the AHB's performance in delivering key services;
- Timely communication about any significant events, such as rent increases, notice periods and any new legislative requirements which may affect tenants; and
- Opportunities available to tenants to provide input on key services.

As an organisation, as well as producing this strategy, we want to take it a step further. We want to have a tenant communication and engagement action plan with agreed targets to achieve our aims and objectives.

Further reading at ahbregulator.ie

The above is based on the existing voluntary standards. The powers and functions of the new Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority will be commenced on a phased basis. There will be a new set of statutory standards published and when appropriate, Circle VHA will engage with the Regulator and our tenants on the consultation around the new standards.

THE BENEFITS OF TENANT COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

Tenant communication and engagement are ways for tenants and Circle VHA to share information, ideas and to work together to improve services. There are many benefits to getting involved, such as:

- Services that reflect tenants' needs,
- Improved services,
- Increased tenant satisfaction,
- Enhanced community spirit,
- Sustaining communities,
- Better quality of life for tenants,
- Ensure tenants have a real say,
- Better relations between Circle VHA and tenants, each being more aware of the others position,
- Opportunities to develop new knowledge and skills,
- Meet new people,
- Share ideas,
- Build mutual respect and trust,
- Improved effectiveness and efficiency giving better value for money.

TENANT ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

1. CONSULTATION

The results and recommendations from the 2019 Tenant Experience Survey provided grounding for the strategy. In writing our strategy, we involved and consulted with many groups and individuals, including:



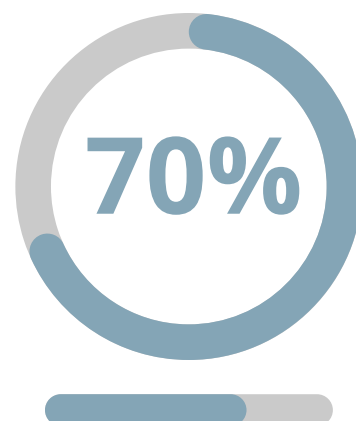
TENANT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

2. FEEDBACK

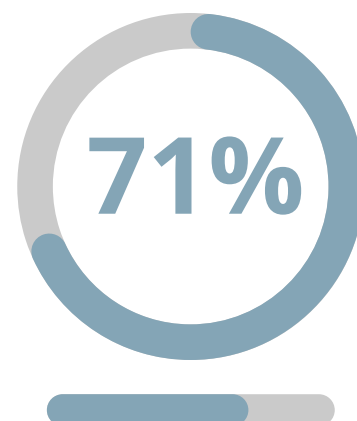
The results and recommendations from the 2019 Tenant Experience Survey provided significant grounding for the strategy. Relevant abstracts are quoted below:

TENANCY SERVICES OFFICERS

Whilst 70% of the respondents were aware of the role of Tenancy Services Officers, only 56% knew who their own Tenancy Services Officer was. Just under 73% wanted information on their home from the Tenancy Services Officers, while half were also interested in information on community services.



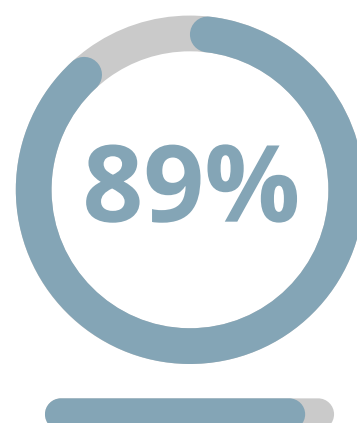
70% of the respondents were aware of the role of Tenancy Services Officer.



71% of the respondents would use an online app to communicate with Circle.



56% of the respondents knew who their Tenancy Services Officer was.



89% of the respondents believed that the Tenant Advisory Group was a good idea.

COMMUNICATION

Respondents favoured personal orientated communication, by letter and phone. 71% stated that they would use an online app to deal with a range of communication issues.

NEW ROLES

The majority of respondents were not aware of either the Property Service Officer or Income Management Officer roles, with 43% and 44% respectively, of respondents stating that they were aware of the roles. Over 90% of respondents stated that these new roles did not affect them.

TENANT ADVISORY GROUP

89% stated that they felt that a Tenant Advisory Group was a good idea, and 52% stated that they would be prepared to get involved in a Tenant Advisory Group.

**“CIRCLE
WILL SEEK
TO FIND NEW
AND INNOVATIVE
SOLUTIONS TO
COMMUNICATE
WITH OUR
TENANTS.”**

TENANT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The results and recommendations from the 2019 Tenant Experience Survey provided significant grounding for the strategy. Relevant abstracts are quoted below:

1. TENANT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

- In many private estates the Residents' Associations are only open to property owners. In this instance Circle VHA could collaborate with the Residents Association to have an 'elected tenant representative' on the Association.
- Circle VHA should develop a Tenant Engagement Strategy. Tenant participation provides tenants with a range of opportunities to have a say about how their housing services are delivered. It is a two-way process where landlords value the engagement and recognise it as a vital component to improving their business. A Tenant Engagement Strategy requires commitment from all levels of the organisation. It can be implemented in a variety of ways, from formal engagement groups, such as the Tenant Advisory Group, to low threshold events like family fun days in the community.
- As part of the above, Circle VHA could explore how to facilitate

the establishment of Tenants Associations, which play a valuable role in housing estates. They provide the opportunity for tenants to engage and contribute to making positive developments within their homes and environments. They provide the means by which Circle VHA could engage on a more regular basis with their tenants; strengthening integration and defining on the ground needs.

- Tenancy Services Officers can play a key role in engaging with tenants. They could organise 'family fun days' in communities or events to coincide with Halloween or Christmas. These events would act as the first step in encouraging people to get involved. Ultimately, they could provide a more wide-reaching role. Responsibilities could include, but are not limited to: supporting tenants in accessing relevant services; providing relevant social supports; fostering community spirit; ensuring the needs of older tenants are being met, not just in terms of their physical well-being but in ensuring that there are activities they can take part in that will avoid isolation.

- There is a large community infrastructure in Ireland and working with local community groups could provide a useful resource for building community engagement. Circle VHA should contact existing community organisations to develop relationships and examine ways of including Circle VHA tenants in their activities.

2. ACCESSIBILITY OF TENANT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

Maintain and monitor the use of Plain English as good practice in any future surveys. The National Adult Learning Association (NALA) has produced guidelines to assist in this.

Additional methodologies should be used beyond the postal and/or online questionnaires to illicit a response. One to one interviews could be used or focus groups. Survey Monkey is a cost-effective method of carrying out surveys but frequently yields a low return rate. A combination of approaches could be used to further maximise tenants' ability to engage in the research.

3. COMMUNICATION WITH TENANTS

- The results of this survey should be disseminated within Circle VHA with an emphasis placed on the areas where tenants are most unhappy and experiencing difficulties. In order for this survey to be an effective tool within Circle VHA, all levels of the organisation, from Board level to front line staff, need to be familiar with the issues raised.
- While analysing feedback and patterns from this research, Circle VHA can determine which issues are within their remit to address, how urgent they are, and the timeframe and resources needed to implement changes.

Circle VHA could divide the issues into 3 broad categories:

1. Direct Responsibility: Issues which fall under the direct remit of Circle VHA such as maintenance and repairs, dealing with Circle VHA tenants antisocial behaviour and security.
 2. Shared Responsibility: Issues that affect Circle VHA tenants but cannot be solved by Circle VHA alone. For example external antisocial behaviour has to be addressed in partnership with An Garda Síochána, Local Authorities and community infrastructure.
 3. External Responsibility: Issues that are completely outside of the control of Circle VHA such as noise from a motorway or lack of public transport.
- The Tenancy Services Officer for each scheme should familiarise themselves with the specific issues in the schemes that are their responsibility.
 - Circle VHA should review rent statements to ensure that they are straightforward and that literacy issues are considered. The current system should be updated to allow for online access.

"All in all, I found the strategy very easy to read, it is clear and concise with an excellent action plan. It is clear the tenants' fingerprints are all over it."

**SHEENAGH MCNALLY - CONSULTEE
SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES**

"I would very much like to acknowledge the terrific work in developing this strategy. It shows real leadership from Circle and is pioneering in the Irish situation. It also shows that you are not starting from scratch but have already in place numerous channels for engagement which can be pulled together for a strategic purpose. You also have terrific committed staff who are committed to engaging with tenants."

**PETER DORMAN - CONSULTEE
COMMUNITY ACTION NETWORK**

"Look forward to hearing and seeing some of your great engagement work. Working together will bring positive changes."

**CLAIRE DABBY - CONSULTEE
CLANMIL HOUSING (NI)**

4. THE TENANT COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Tenant communication and engagement are about how our tenants can voice what we as an organisation do. We want to empower our tenants to be involved in running their homes and communities while having a say in the shaping of the areas where they live. We want to give tenants a choice in how they take part at different levels of engagement.



CIRCLE | MORE THAN HOUSING TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRUCTURE



5. MENU OF ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

We continue to put our tenants at the heart of everything we do. Working with the TAG, we continue to develop new opportunities for all tenants to engage. We will take a blended approach to engagement – face to face and online.

OPPORTUNITIES

We must provide tenants with a choice of how they can become involved and see the value of their involvement through feedback and communication. We recognise the importance of offering options for people who want to get involved from the comfort of their own homes.



TENANT ADVISORY GROUP

TENANT ADVISORY GROUP (TAG)

This group of tenants will work in partnership with Circle VHA to improve service delivery by providing feedback, keeping tenants informed, and overseeing tenant-related policies/procedures/publications. The group will also review the effectiveness of the strategy and monitor its progress against targets set.

Proposed time commitment – one 2 hour meeting every quarter. Meetings will be face to face and virtual.



REGIONAL TENANT ADVISORY SUB GROUPS

REGIONAL TENANT ADVISORY SUBGROUPS

Regional subgroups will be introduced when interest grows across the country. It is envisaged that each region will have a subgroup that will feed into the overall TAG.

Proposed time commitment – one 2 hour meeting every quarter. Meetings will be face to face and virtual.



TENANT SURVEYS

SURVEYS

Tenants complete surveys to give their feedback. They can reply by telephone, by post, text, or online.

Proposed time commitment – up to one hour as and when requested. Involvement can be from home.



IT FOCUS GROUP

IT FOCUS GROUP

A group of tenants working with members of the staff team. Together, they will work on the website, tenant app and give valued feedback to Circle VHA.

Proposed time commitment – as and when deemed necessary. Meetings will be face to face and virtual.



TENANT ASSOCIATION

TENANT ASSOCIATION

A group of tenants who will promote and facilitate community spirit in their area. For example by helping with organising open days and community events.

Proposed time commitment – as and when required. Involvement will be from home/scheme/estate.



EDITORIAL PANEL

EDITORIAL PANEL

Tenants and staff working together to produce tenant newsletters and other publications.

Proposed time commitment – focused work on an ad hoc basis. Involvement can be from home.



THE SHADOW GROUP

THE SHADOW GROUP

The group will assist with the development and review of policies and procedures on an ad hoc basis. It may take the form of being part of a focus group to discuss and develop specific housing policies. Also, tenants may be asked to consider revised documents online.

Proposed time commitment – as and when requested/dependent on the nature of the documents. Involvement can be from home.



SCHEME WALKABOUT

SCHEME WALKABOUT

An opportunity for staff, tenant representatives and relevant agencies (e.g. Owner Management Company (OMC) and local authority) to walk around a scheme or neighbourhood to identify any issues and consider possible solutions.

Proposed time commitment – two hours per year. Involvement will be from home/scheme/estate.

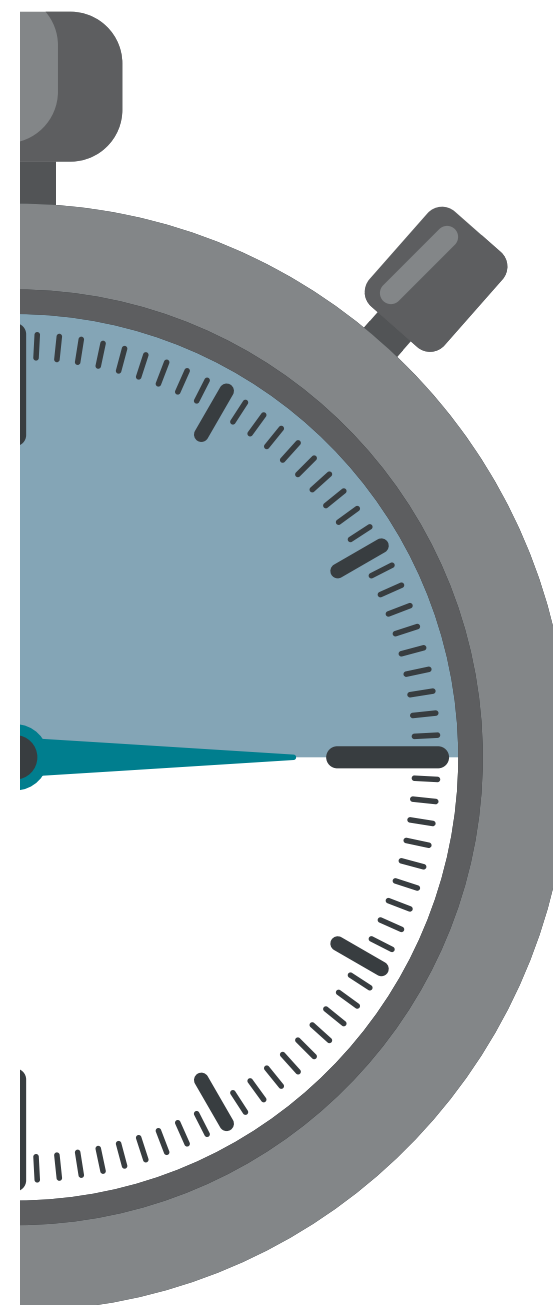


INTERAGENCY MEETINGS

INTERAGENCY MEETINGS

The meetings follow up on the issues highlighted at the scheme walkabout. Agencies, including management companies, meet regularly with community representation to deal with ongoing concerns.

Proposed time commitment – three meetings a year. Meetings will be face to face and virtual.





BIANNUAL UPDATES

BIANNUAL UPDATES

Staff will organise face to face updates at individual schemes, providing feedback from the scheme walkabout and interagency meetings. A living document will demonstrate progress on the various issues.

*Proposed time commitment – two meetings a year.
Involvement will be from home/scheme/estate.*



MYSTERY SHOPPING

MYSTERY SHOPPING

Tenants will be the mystery shoppers and training will be provided. This will allow tenants to examine the quality of the services provided by Circle VHA and provide customer feedback, which will help improve services. Examples would be testing the response from the office to a request for customer service, or a complaint.

Proposed time commitment - dependent on the area of service being tested – up to two phone calls per week. Involvement can be from home and/or visits to offices and schemes.



CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING

CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING

To get the tenant's experience of a particular service provided by Circle VHA, the tenant is talked to, taken through Circle VHA's policies and procedures, and asked about their experience at each stage. The feedback is recorded, and recommendations made for improvement.

Proposed time commitment – 2 hours. Involvement can be from home.



ENHANCING SERVICES

ENHANCING SERVICES

A group of trained tenants assess a service area and seek a wide range of opinions regarding how the service is delivered. The group will review policies and procedures and speak to staff responsible for the service area.

Proposed time commitment – approximately six meetings over two/three months (to be agreed by the group). Meetings will be face to face and virtual.

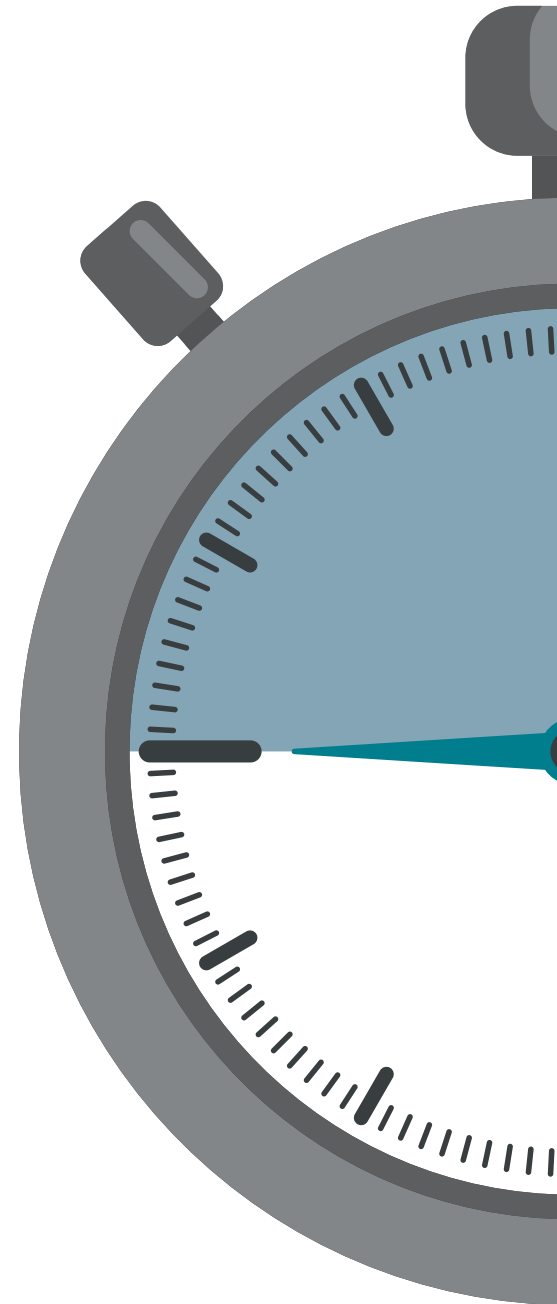


BOARD MEMBER

BOARD MEMBER

Carry out a process that will enable tenant representation on the Circle VHA board.

Proposed time commitment – six meetings per year and planning days. Meetings will be face to face and virtual.



6. COMMUNICATION METHODS

Circle VHA will ensure that information given to tenants is easily understood. It will also be available in a variety of formats and languages.

We will keep tenants informed by providing:

- A clear and concise tenancy agreement and handbook,
- Quarterly newsletters,
- Summarised versions of key documents,
- An up to date website,
- Social media updates via LinkedIn and Twitter,
- Drop-ins and coffee mornings,
- Tenants meetings,
- Individual letters,
- Emails,
- Text messages,
- Individual home visits,
- Tenant experience surveys and feedback,
- Public meetings,
- Tenant app.

The 2019 Tenant Experience Survey captured some interesting statistics around communication. Firstly, respondents favoured personal orientated contact - by letter and phone. The organisation is growing at speed, and it is crucial to make clear to tenants that this may not always be feasible.

7. TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Circle VHA is committed to supporting all tenants interested in taking part in promoting communication and engagement in our communities. We will do this by offering training to ensure they have the skills to contribute confidently and effectively.

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us that we can continue effectively engaging with our tenants by using different platforms like Zoom. Circle VHA will ensure that tenants will be able to engage digitally through the provision of training and hardware, where required.

Tenants will be reimbursed for out-of-pocket volunteer expenses. Where travel is required for face-to-face meetings, engaged tenants will receive travel expenses. This will be per mile for car users or the fare cost for buses, taxis and trains. Circle VHA encourages car sharing and using public transport for longer journeys, where appropriate. Each engagement option will have different circumstances and be held in different localities, and therefore, volunteer expenses will be proposed, agreed and clearly defined in an expenses and mileage policy.

Staff and administrative/office facilities will be available to support and encourage tenant engagement.

8. EQUALITY FOR ALL

Circle VHA is committed to equality and diversity. It works hard to provide homes and services that meet the needs of its diverse communities. Circle VHA provides training for staff on equality and diversity to ensure that tenants are not discriminated against in the way that we deliver services for reasons of:


- Gender,
- Civil status,
- Family status,
- Sexual orientation,
- Religion,
- Age (does not apply to a person under 16),
- Disability,
- Race,
- Membership of the Traveller community.

"The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 ('the Acts') prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education. They cover the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community. In addition, the Acts prohibit discrimination in the provision of accommodation services against people who are in receipt of rent supplement, housing assistance, or social welfare payments."

(Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission)

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGY

Our approach to delivering this strategy is detailed in the following action plan. Monitoring and reviewing the strategy is as crucial as setting our objectives and targets. The services follow the direction established during the planning process. Our efforts don't stop with the publishing of this strategy.




€351

THE AVERAGE COST OF A REPAIR CARRIED OUT



86%

CIRCLE TENANT SATISFACTION RATE



99%

CIRCLE TENANT RENT COLLECTED

THE STRATEGY

We see this strategy as a living document, informing the work we plan to do over the next three years. It is flexible to adapt to any changes in policy, legislation or external factors, such as technology changes. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it reinforces the need to recognise the environment we live and work in.

The staff team will implement the action plan in partnership with the TAG. Responsibility for the monitoring and review of this strategy lies with the TAG with support from the Tenant Engagement Officer (TEO).

Throughout the term of this strategy we will continue to record information about our activities on our internal systems. This will allow us to produce a variety of different reports, which will identify initiatives that produce high levels of engagement, areas of good practice and measurable outcomes.

- We have developed a three year action plan to record, monitor and evaluate the strategy. We intend to regularly report progress against the action plan targets through the below means:
- Links to the website,
 - Newsletters,
 - Tenant Advisory Group meetings,
 - Board meetings,
 - Housing Agency Regulation,
 - Office reports,
 - Annual reports,
 - Mail drops,
 - Tenant app,
 - Emails,
 - Text messages.

CIRCLE | MORE THAN HOUSING ACTION PLAN

WHAT?	HOW?	WHO?	WHEN?
Establish the Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) and make concrete foundations for the engagement structure	Provide training on i) Circle VHA and ii) Good Governance and Effective Meetings	Supporting Communities Meetings	June 2021
	Schedule the TAG's quarterly meetings in line with Circle's board and committee meetings	TAG, Director of Services & Supporting Communities	June 2021
Offer and promote wide-ranging and innovative engagement opportunities, tools and activities so that tenants can engage in ways that suit them best	Create a programme of engagement opportunities to be offered to all tenants	Focus Group	June 2021
	Review the programme of engagement opportunities annually to ensure it is fit for purpose	TAG & Tenant Engagement Officer (TEO)	Quarter 2 2022 and yearly thereafter
	Increase communication and awareness by advertising the engagement programme through various avenues - online, leaflet, telephone, face to face, and newsletter	All staff led by the TEO	As and when required or requested Years 1, 2 & 3
	Promote tenant engagement during tenancy sign ups and any other tenant meetings	TSOs & all staff	Years 1, 2 & 3 at all sign ups and during customer care calls
	Produce an annual calendar of events	All staff & co-ordinated by TEO	Yearly in Sept. for the following year
	Invite expressions of interest from all tenants to hold and continually update a tenant engagement register with information on areas individual tenants would like to be involved with	TEO supported by all staff	Years 1, 2 & 3 at all sign ups and during customer care calls
	Co-ordinate and deliver open days and community events	TEO led, with all staff/tenants/tenant association	As per the calendar (previous September) Years 1, 2 & 3
	Create an information leaflet to promote tenant engagement, summarise the strategy and how to get involved	TEO	Quarter 3 2021

WHAT?	HOW?	WHO?	WHEN?
Consider good governance for the engagement structure	Review operational guidelines e.g. Terms of Reference (Appendix 1) and Code of Conduct (Appendix 2) Repeated every 2 years	TAG with support from the TEO	Quarter 1 2022
	Devise election guidelines applicable for all engagement opportunities	TAG with support from the TEO	Quarter 1 2022
Put into place ways and means to improve communication with all tenants	Communicate with tenants in timely, effective and accessible ways, and utilise the wide range of communication channels e.g. website, newsletter, phone call, tenant app	TEO led with all staff	As and when necessary Years 1, 2 & 3
	Provide good quality and accessible information about our properties, services, how we work and clarify the responsibilities and obligations of the landlord and tenants and those using our Owners Management Company (OMC) services	TEO led with all staff	Ongoing (at sign ups & as required)
	Continue to develop the use of technology to maximise communication opportunities and channels by introducing a tenant app	TEO & IT & Info. Governance Officer led with all staff	Quarter 4 2021
	Continue to produce a Circle tenant newsletter Review the tenant handbook	Editorial Panel with support from the TEO (contributions from all teams)	Quarters 1, 2, 3 & 4, Years 1, 2 & 3 Quarter 2 2024
	Carry out a mapping exercise of local areas to identify available support services, e.g. mental health, addiction, to raise awareness amongst all tenants	TEO led with TSOs	Q3 2022
	Add a section to the organisation's annual report on tenant engagement and communication successes	TAG with support from the TEO	Quarter 1 Years 1, 2 & 3
	Ensure that tenants receive feedback on how their views have been taken into account by publishing outcomes of consultations/participation on decisions made about services in the newsletter and website	TAG with support from the TEO	Quarterly when required Years 1, 2 and 3
	Ensure publications, promotional materials etc. are reviewed by the involved tenants	Tenants with support from the TEO	As and when requested

WHAT?	HOW?	WHO?	WHEN?
Make use of the 'Tenant Approved' logo	Tenants with support from the TEO	TAG with support from the TEO	As and when required Years 1, 2 & 3
	Review and improve the tenant engagement content on the website and social media channels	TAG / support from the TEO & IT & Info. Governance Officer	Quarters 1 & 3 Years 1, 2 & 3
	Produce summarised versions of key documents	TEO & TAG	As and when developed or reviewed
Increase tenant engagement for the betterment of all tenants	Carry out an exercise to ascertain if the TAG is representative of the tenant body. If gaps are identified, actively recruit new members	TAG, TEO & Supporting Communities	December 2021
	Hold elections for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair	TAG, TEO & Supporting Communities	September 2022
	When numbers determine, establish regional tenant advisory subgroups	TAG, TEO & Supporting Communities	To be reviewed quarterly Year 1, 2 & 3
	Surveys - undertake tenant experience surveys to establish tenant satisfaction and experience Publish the findings in the newsletter, website and annual report	Customer Service Team TAG & TEO	Quarter 2 2024 Quarterly Year 1, 2 & 3
	Grasp opportunities to engage young people through surveys	TAG & TEO	Quarterly Year 1, 2 & 3
	IT Focus Group - Create a tenant app for all tenants to access key data such as rent accounts, maintenance programmes, tenancy records and to promote non paper communication, interest in getting involved, news/ announcements	IT & Information Governance Officer with the IT Focus Group	Quarter 4 2021
	Tenant Association - Encourage groups of tenants to become tenant associations with the aim to promote and facilitate community spirit in their area	TEO, all staff, TAG, fellow engagement groups	Years 1, 2 & 3 at tenant visits and meetings, during customer care calls
	Editorial Panel - Tenants and staff to work together to produce tenant newsletters and other publications	Editorial Panel with TEO support	Quarters 1, 2, 3 & 4 Year 1, 2 & 3

WHAT?	HOW?	WHO?	WHEN?
Increase tenant engagement for the betterment of all tenants	The Shadow Group - Assist with the development and review of policies and procedures on an ad hoc basis	The Shadow Group & relevant staff members	As per the P&P review schedule Years 2 & 3
	Scheme Walkabouts - Walk around a scheme or neighbourhood to identify any issues and consider potential solutions	Staff, tenant reps and relevant agencies (e.g. OMC/Mgt company and local authority)	Annually as per the timetable Years 2 & 3
	Interagency Meetings - Follow up meetings to discuss issues highlighted at the scheme walkabout	Staff, tenant reps and relevant agencies (e.g. OMC/Mgt company and local authority)	Quarterly following the scheme walkabout Years 2 & 3
	Biannual Updates - Face to face updates at individual schemes, providing feedback from the scheme walkabout and interagency meetings	TEO, board member & key staff members from Housing, Finance, Income and Property. All tenants in the area/scheme will be invited	Quarters 1 & 3 Years 2 & 3
	Mystery Shopping - Tenants to examine the quality of the services provided by Circle VHA, and provide customer feedback	TEO led and trained mystery shoppers	Quarter 2 Years 2 & 3
	Customer Journey Mapping - Mapping the tenant's experience of a particular service area	Co-ordinated by the TEO	Quarterly in Year 3
	Enhancing Services – Trained tenants assess a service area and seek a wide range of opinions in terms of how the service is delivered	TEO, staff members relevant to the service area & Enhancing Services tenant members	Quarter 3 Year 3
	Board Member – Implement a process that will enable tenant representation on the Circle VHA board	TAG, TEO, Leadership Team, Board	Years 1, 2 & 3

WHAT?	HOW?	WHO?	WHEN?
Provide sufficient resources to support, train and develop tenants who want to engage at all levels of the structure, along with staff to make engagement effective and worthwhile	Make provision for an annual tenant engagement and communication budget to include volunteer out-of-pocket expenses	Director of Services and TEO	Quarter 3 2021 for the following year, and each year thereafter
	Recruit a TEO	Director of Services	Quarter 3 Year 1
	Carry out a training/development needs analysis to identify areas for support and training	TAG with support from the TEO	Quarter 4 2021 Quarter 3 2022 & 2023
	Develop and deliver a programme of training	TAG with support from the TEO	Quarter 1 Year 2 & 3
	Identify opportunities for tenants and staff to train together	TEO	Quarter 4 2021 Quarter 3 2022 & 2023
	Provide staff with tenant engagement refresher training and ensure it is a key element of new staff training	HR, TAG, TEO & Management Team	Quarter 4 Years 1, 2 & 3 When new staff commence employment
Monitor and review the tenant communication and engagement strategy and action plan	Break down barriers to engagement by contributing to costs associated with travel, providing hardware to bridge the digital divide, and to source and provide training where possible	TEO	Quarter 3 Annually
	Map progress of the action plan and amend where necessary	TAG & TEO	Quarter 1, 2, 3 & 4, Years 1, 2 & 3
	Make sure the strategy remains aligned to Circle's vision and business plans	TAG & TEO	Quarter 1, 2, 3 & 4, Years 1, 2 & 3

APPENDICES - APPENDIX 1

TENANT ADVISORY GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

VERSION 2: REVISED AND APPROVED BY THE TAG IN OCTOBER 2022

Circle Voluntary Housing Association is committed to ensuring tenants' needs are at the heart of everything it does. Board and staff members are committed to taking on board the tenants' views to improve service delivery continually.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) will be to work in partnership with Circle Voluntary Housing Association to:

- Improve service delivery by providing feedback to Circle Voluntary Housing Association;
- Keep tenants informed; and
- Oversee the implementation of the action plan.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To ensure that Circle Voluntary Housing Association provides high-quality services that retain tenants at the heart of the organisation; and
- To work on behalf of tenants to ensure that services are of the highest standard and meet tenants' needs.

MEMBERSHIP

- Membership is open to all tenants; however, there will be a maximum of 15 members on the TAG;
- If more than 15 tenants are interested, establishing regional/local forums that will feed into the TAG may be considered;

- For tenants to be elected to the TAG, the tenant will provide the TAG with some details (name, where they live, why they want to get involved etc.). At the next TAG meeting, members will propose, second and approve the membership, and record it in the minutes;
- Members will, as far as reasonably possible, reflect the broad cross-section of Circle Voluntary Housing Association tenants in terms of age, gender, disability, economic and social status, race, and religious affiliations;
- Members must be a current tenant and are not employees, board members, or business partners of Circle Voluntary Housing Association;
- Maximum of two persons per household can be a member of the TAG;
- Be willing to undergo training;
- All members are expected to attend 75% of meetings and not miss more than two meetings in a row, without an explanation;
- The TAG may agree to long term absence based on TAG members' individual circumstances;
- Members will receive travel expenses, i.e. casual user car allowance, bus fare/taxi fare – when receipts are provided;

- All members will be expected to comply with Circle Voluntary Housing Association's Code of Conduct. Members who do not comply will be asked to resign by the TAG;
- TAG members will be realistic in their requests and not expect to receive any better or worse treatment/service from Circle Voluntary Housing Association or members of staff due to their membership of the TAG; and
- Group members must not disclose confidential information to anyone outside of the TAG.

MEETINGS

- The group will meet approximately six times a year. On occasions, it may be necessary to meet more frequently. It is the intention of Circle Voluntary Housing Association to maintain regular communication with the TAG and provide feedback;
- Meetings will be held in an agreed venue or online, and should not last longer than two hours. The location may vary;
- The TAG will set its work programme in conjunction with Circle Voluntary Housing Association staff; and

- Members will receive an update on all engagement opportunities at each meeting from the TEO; however, if there is a pressing issue, members will receive email correspondence at the time;
- Circle Voluntary Housing Association will provide the TAG with all information and staff expertise relevant to its project;
- Group members will be allowed to declare any interest in any of the activities the TAG will be undertaking. This will be recorded at the meeting. If there is an apparent conflict of interest, the member will be expected to withdraw from those discussions; and
- The two-minute rule will be used to discuss your point at another time if it is taking too long.

CHAIRING OF MEETINGS

- The TAG will appoint its own tenant chairperson and vice-chairperson when TAG members feel comfortable and confident to do so;
- No one person can hold the position of chair for more than two consecutive years, apart from exceptional circumstances;
- In the chair's absence, the vice-chairperson will chair the meeting;
- If the TAG membership wishes to invite another person, e.g. a member of Circle Voluntary Housing Association staff, as a non-voting member to act as chairperson, it is free to do so;
- The chairperson will ensure that an agenda is drawn up for each meeting in liaison with Circle Voluntary Housing Association's appointed staff member. It will have regard to matters arising from the previous meeting; and

The quorum for a formal meeting shall be 50% of the current membership of the TAG. A quorum must include either the chairperson or vice-chairperson. At least one Circle Voluntary Housing Association representative must be present.

VOTING

- Decisions should be by consensus. In the absence of a consensus, decisions shall be reached by a simple majority vote of those members present (50% + 1); and
- Only TAG members are entitled to vote.

SECRETARIAT

- Circle Voluntary Housing Association will keep documents clear, concise, and keep housing terminology easy to understand;
- Papers will be circulated via email with day-to-day communication via WhatsApp;
- If you would like an item discussed, inform the chair before the agenda is circulated;
- The agenda and any appropriate accompanying papers aim to be distributed to members at least ten working days before each meeting;
- Minutes must be taken of all meetings and aim to be distributed to members within ten working days of the meeting; and
- Minutes of meetings shall be prepared by a member of Circle Voluntary Housing Association staff.

TAG RESOURCES

- The TAG will give due consideration to value for money, available resources and the corporate priorities of Circle Voluntary Housing Association; and

- Circle Voluntary Housing Association and the TAG will agree on the support required as part of the process.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE TAG

- The TAG will give tenants and staff feedback on its work through Circle Voluntary Housing Association's annual report, newsletter, website, et al. TAG members will attend other tenant involvement events, as appropriate, to discuss their work.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

- An annual health check will be carried out on the effectiveness of the TAG to ensure it is performing effectively; and
- The terms of reference will be reviewed in October 2023 and annually thereafter.

APPENDICES - APPENDIX 2

TENANT ADVISORY GROUP CODE OF CONDUCT

VERSION 2: REVISED AND APPROVED BY THE TAG IN OCTOBER 2022

This code of conduct is a list of agreed rules on how members of Circle’s Tenant Advisory Group (TAG) are expected to behave and how they should conduct themselves. It also helps set standards for how members should behave towards each other at meetings.

PERSONAL CONDUCT

Members are expected to:

- Be friendly, polite and courteous;
- Be positive, picking up on good points as well as highlighting areas for improvement;
- Appreciate and respect differences in knowledge, background, ability to speak in public etc.;
- Never discriminate on any ground against any other member of the TAG;
- Respect the role that staff play in providing support and administrative resources to meet the needs of members;
- Support a democratic decision taken by the TAG;
- Not speak or write on behalf of the TAG without the prior agreement of the TAG;
- Use the normal reporting channels for raising personal housing-related issues that affect members;
- Observe any rules and health and safety guidelines given by Circle and take reasonable steps to ensure health, safety and welfare; and
- Ask for support if there are any aspects of the activity which you are unsure of.

CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

Members and visitors are expected to observe the following when taking part in the TAG meetings or any working groups established by the TAG:

- Arrive punctually to enable meetings to start promptly;
- Come prepared by reading all the relevant papers beforehand and bring them with you to the meeting;
- Be courteous to each other at all times and not use offensive, provocative, discriminatory or racist language;
- Follow the agenda and keep to time;
- Work with other members constructively to arrive at the best possible solution to the matter under discussion;
- Keep contributions brief and to the point;
- Listen to each other, and allow each other the opportunity to speak and comment; and
- Remember that the meeting’s purpose is to benefit tenants generally, not specific individuals or personal issues.

DISCLOSING INTERESTS AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Members must:

- Disclose any interest, whether personal or on behalf of any other group they belong to, which might possibly affect or influence their approach to the matter under discussion;
- Offer to withdraw from the meeting where a conflict of interest is clear and substantial; and
- Stand down if any personal circumstances may bring their membership into disrepute; this includes rent arrears, complaints of antisocial behaviour, or any dispute with Circle. This will be on a case by case basis.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Members should respect the confidentiality of personal information about individuals, whether present or not, and refrain from mentioning specific individual cases which may cause embarrassment or identification of an individual; and
- Members must not disclose any information or items of a confidential nature to anyone else apart from the TAG members to allow the meeting’s business to take place.

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

If a member misses two consecutive meetings without apologies, the chair of the TAG will make contact. Upon missing a third meeting without apologies, the member will be deemed to have resigned.

BREACHES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

In the event of tense or heated discussion at the meeting, a five minute time out can be called at the chair’s discretion.

Should a member of the TAG or a visitor fail to abide by the code, the chair may warn that if they breach the code again during that meeting, they will not participate in the discussions and may remain in an observer capacity only.

If a member of the TAG or a visitor, despite a warning, continues to breach this code, or the breach is more serious, they may be asked to leave the meeting.

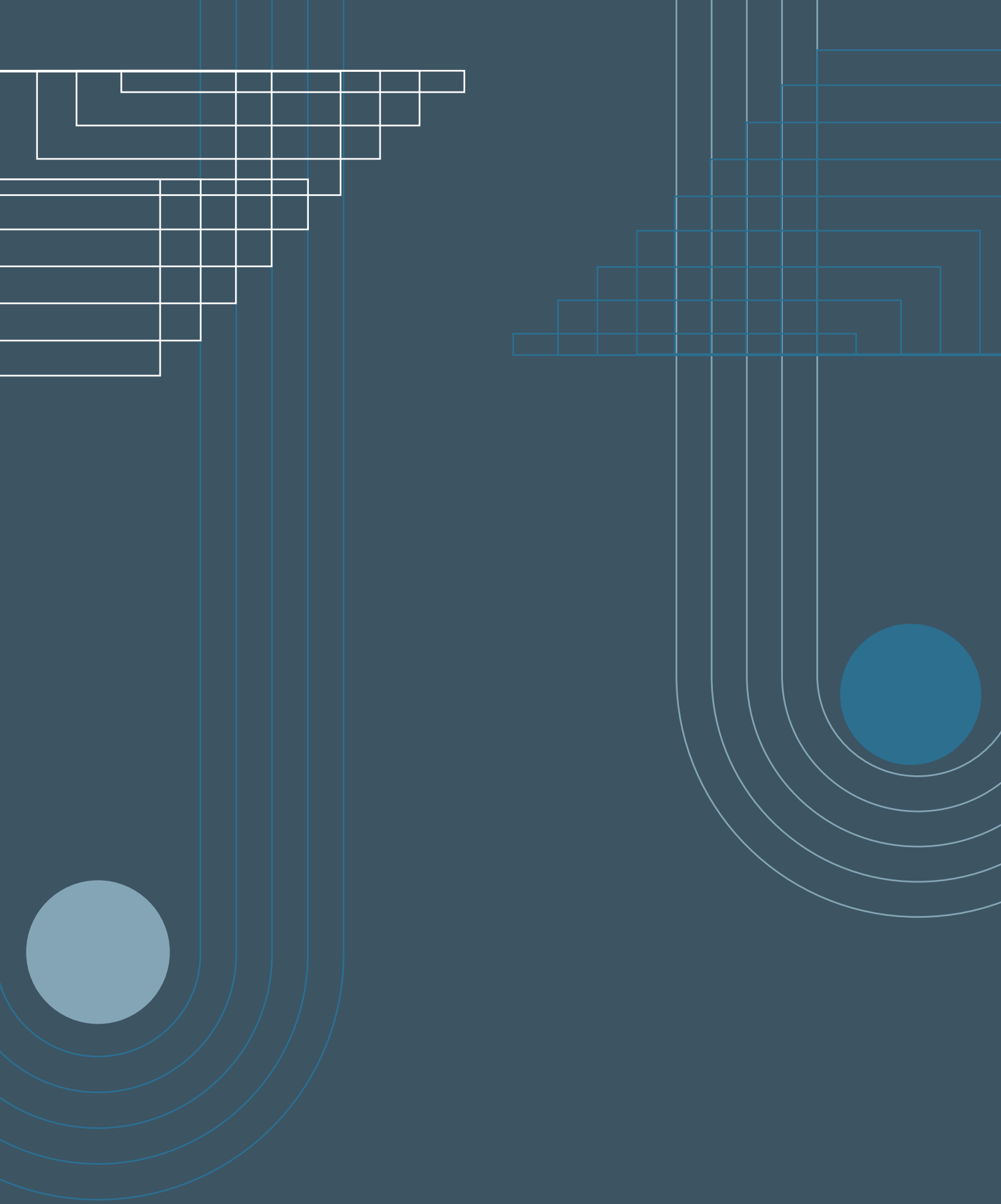
I agree to abide by the standards set out above:

Name:

Signed:

Date:





circle | more than housing

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