

Resident Influence Strategy 2022-2025



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1. Introduction

Our founder Octavia Hill recognised the importance of understanding residents' lived experience and applied this knowledge when planning and designing homes and neighbourhoods. This principle is as true today. Hearing residents' voices is important in everything we do, and it is only through understanding our residents that we can achieve our strategic purpose of 'Better Lives for All'.

Our commitment is clear:

"We will be focused on ensuring the resident voice is heard at all levels of Octavia to deepen our understanding of what people and communities need to thrive. Resident engagement will be integral to how we design and deliver our service to gain the best outcomes for the people we serve."

Octavia's Better Lives Strategy 2021-2024

In seeking to achieve this, we are building on Octavia's long-held commitment to resident engagement and on the strengths of our previous resident involvement strategy 'Connect'. 'Connect' put in place a single resident-majority panel combined with other engagement options to ensure residents could get involved in a variety of ways.

In this strategy, we are building on those foundations but extending our horizons to look beyond just the *activity* of resident involvement to the partnership that both residents and Octavia want to create and the outcomes we want to achieve from involvement. Our vision is to have an organisation that genuinely places residents at its core and builds trust and confidence by changing the way we approach engagement.

We are calling it a Resident *Influence* Strategy, since our aim is to foster resident influence to improve services, homes and outcomes. This broadens the scope in which we can enable that influence, through proactively 'noticing' residents experience using our data and insight, actively 'asking' for residents' views and responding promptly when residents seek to influence Octavia in ways of their own choosing, e.g. through complaints, social media or raising issues with politicians.

To make resident influence a reality we need to embed it in our culture and behaviours and in our mainstream roles and processes. The group of residents and staff who designed this strategy told us this is needed to create a culture of 'trust, respect, partnership, accountability and transparency' in how we engage with residents. This strategy sets out how we aim to achieve these ambitions.

2. Context

The Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, along with other high-profile events, resulted in focused attention on social landlords, questioning their commitment to really listening to customers and understanding what's important to them. While Octavia's last resident involvement strategy, Connect, was developed following the Grenfell tragedy, we have long been committed to seeking residents' views when making important decisions about the organisation's work and Octavia's future direction. This expectation is now increasingly becoming embedded in legislation and regulation, and these provide important context for this strategy.

National context

The Social Housing White Paper's Charter for Social Housing Residents, published in October 2020, places the resident voice at the heart of its vision for improvements in social housing. From building safety to better homes and neighbourhoods, and addressing complaints, it places a clear expectation on landlords:

“Stronger resident engagement by landlords will give residents a clearer voice so that they can hold landlords to account.”

Source: HMG. Charter for Social Housing Residents, 2020

Its key commitments include: 'to know how your landlord is performing', 'to be treated with respect', and 'to have your voice heard by your landlord'. To make this a reality, the consumer standards, which include the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, as well as the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures standard, are being put on a similar regulatory footing to the economic standards.

The Housing Regulator's approach to assuring these commitments continue to evolve, based on the 'co-regulatory' principle, namely that landlords should support tenants to '*shape and scrutinise service delivery, to hold them (landlords) to account and for understanding their performance, telling us as the Regulator if they are not meeting a standard.*' The Regulator cites these three outcomes as key:

- Tenants have access to information to hold their landlords to account
- Tenants have opportunities to influence the decisions and priorities of their landlords with respect to their housing
- Landlords take account of the views of tenants in the management of their homes

How far landlords meet these expectations will be assessed partly through the new suite of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). Three of these relate specifically to 'respectful and helpful engagement', including assessing whether landlords are listening and acting on

tenants’ views, keeping tenants informed and treating tenants fairly and with respect. These are key success measures for this strategy.

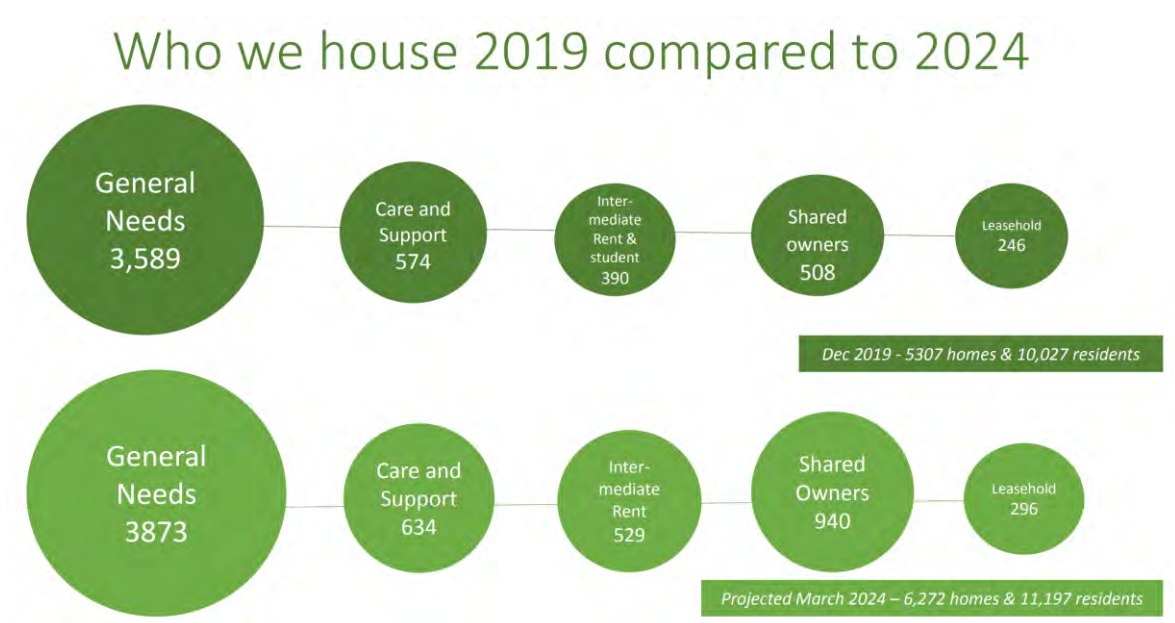
The TSMs also focus on complaints, underpinned by new directives from the Housing Ombudsman, and aligning with the Building Safety and Fire Safety Acts and their commitments to ensuring that tenants are consulted and listened to with respect to the safety of their homes. Octavia’s overall strategy strongly aligns to the aspirations of the White Paper, and this strategy aligns with and supports engagement across these areas.

Who we house

Octavia’s resident population is changing, which affects how we need to engage over the coming years. The ‘Who We House’ report from January 2020 highlights:

- A change in tenure mix with homeowners and Intermediate Market Rent tenants making up an estimated 28% of all Octavia residents by 2024, up from 21% in 2019 and 13% in 2014
- A population significantly older than the London average and with continued projected increases. By 2029, of our residents aged 18 and over, 58% are projected to be aged 51+ and 17% aged 71+
- Low tenancy turnover in General Needs, especially for family-sized units, resulting in a continued picture of demand outstripping housing supply and particular pressure on younger people unable to meet their housing needs.

Fig1. How ‘Who we House’ has changed



Source: Octavia, ‘Who We House’, January 2020.

We need to make sure that involvement in our engagement mechanisms reflect Octavia's wider population and recognises the commonalities and differences in how people want to get involved with us, and the areas that matter to them.

3. Background

Given these important shifts both locally and in the wider sector, Octavia sought external expertise in developing this strategy in line with White Paper recommendations. With input from members of our resident-majority panel Your Voice, we engaged the tenant involvement experts TPAS. TPAS have partnered with Octavia through a discovery and design process with involved and uninvolved residents, staff, leadership and Board members, to produce a final report. This has four key recommendations aimed at improving resident influence by strengthening accountability, transparency, partnership and ultimately mutual trust and respect.

This document recognises the strong work done by the co-design group and TPAS, and takes on board its findings and recommendations, adapting them to create this strategy. In benefiting from the valuable insight our partnership with TPAS has provided, we would like particularly to thank the residents and our colleagues who committed their time to this work and trust that they see it clearly reflected here.

4. Where we are now

In 2019, at the outset of the Connect strategy, we became early adopters of the sector initiative, Together with Tenants charter, putting in place our new resident-majority panel and setting up a menu of engagement options to complement its work. The Covid 19 pandemic, however, started just a year into the strategy and fundamentally affected both what could be achieved and how.

In response to this unprecedented challenge, we accelerated our use of digital engagement methods, enabling our resident-majority panel, Your Voice, to remain active throughout to engage with and support our recovery planning.

We worked to keep a range of involvement methods operating such as surveys and focus groups. We also initiated new ones, including consulting vulnerable residents by telephone on their needs during the first lockdown and using resident feedback to shape our support response to the ongoing energy crisis.

However, given the impact of the pandemic on face-to-face engagement, some of the strategic intentions we set were not fulfilled. For example, we engaged fewer residents

overall than intended and had to use a more restricted set of engagement tools, which in turn impacted fewer areas of the business than we had hoped.

Through this experience we have learned the importance of maintaining a flexible menu of options and a hybrid (digital/telephone/in-person) approach to delivery, to maximise access and the breadth of resident voices we hear.

We have learnt from the engagement structures that were well-tested during the pandemic, such as Your Voice, but wish to continue others and iterate our menu based on what works in the context of the next three years.

Through the discovery process for this strategy, we worked with both involved and residents who have not previously given their views, as well as staff, to understand what was working and what was not in our current approach. These groups then came together in a series of three co-design workshops, the recommendations from which have fed into this strategy.

Five key factors were identified as being necessary for resident influence to be effective. They are partnership, accountability, trust and respect, with transparency underpinning all of them. Octavia recognises these themes, which strongly relate to our values of reliable, responsive, respectful and resourceful, as key to the relationship we want to have with residents.

Fig 2. The five themes identified as key to driving resident influence



5. Aim

The vision of this strategy is to achieve ‘Better lives for all’ by delivering our purpose ‘equality through homes, support and opportunity’ as set out in Octavia’s Corporate Strategy. Empowering the resident voice to help shape what we do is vital to achieving that, but this needs to go beyond the mechanics of engagement, which were established through the Connect strategy, to focusing on the outcomes we want to attain.

The aim of this strategy is therefore:

To drive resident influence to help design and deliver better services, homes and outcomes

We are focusing on resident *influence*, rather than just *involvement*, because it is the influence that will drive change and help us meet our strategic purpose, and there are several ways of achieving this, not all of which will require active involvement.

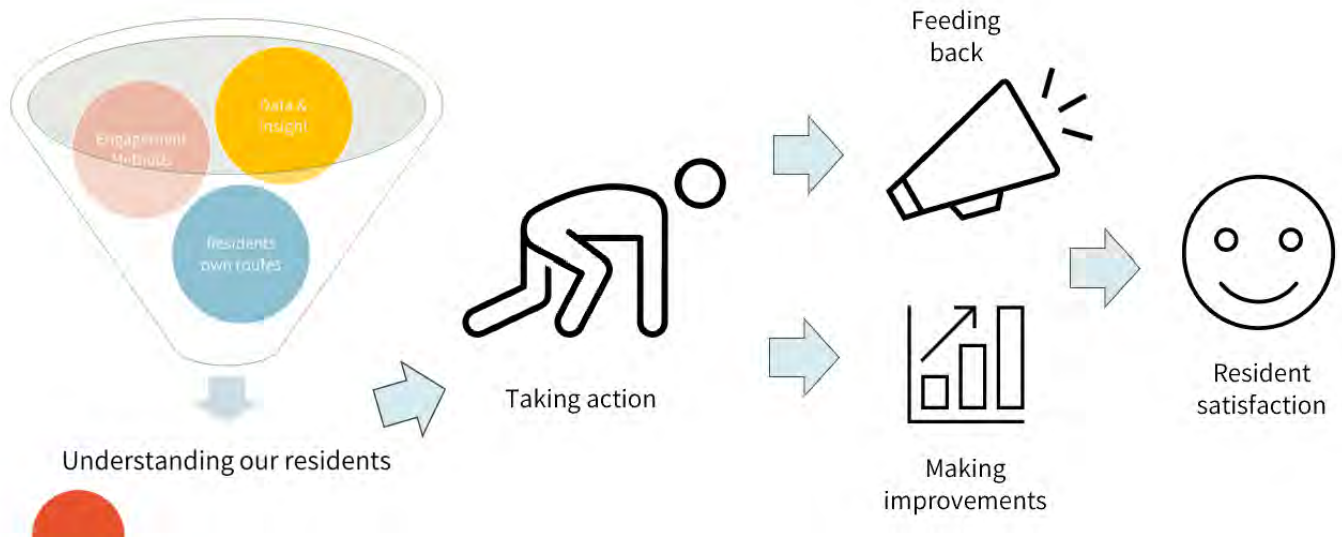
It includes:

- proactively *noticing* residents’ expectations, experiences or needs through the use of data and insight, and using that to drive change
- actively *asking* residents about their preferences or experiences to help shape service design and delivery
- *responding* effectively to issues raised through routes of residents’ own choosing, including channels such as social media and third-party advocacy

However, enabling resident influence cannot be an end in itself - it must bring benefits.

The ***impact*** that influence has, and the positive outcomes it generates, are reliant on the action we take because of the insight we receive. Our priorities therefore must be to improve residents’ ability to influence by strengthening the flow of insight into action and tangible results.

Fig 3. Our resident influencing model, from TPAS’ recommendations



Our communities work

While this strategy speaks specifically to **resident** influence, which includes all tenure types, Octavia also works directly with members of the wider communities in which we operate. How we seek influence from these wider groups in relation to our community work is addressed through the Communities Strategy and is not directly within scope of this strategy. However, a growing proportion of residents benefit from our community offer and strong neighbourhoods are key to resident satisfaction, so the Communities Team have been closely involved in the development of this strategy, ensuring strong alignment and a coherent experience for our residents.

6. How we will get there

We will drive resident influence to improve our services and outcomes by embedding opportunities to hear and act on the resident voice across Octavia. We will do this by focusing on three priorities:

- 1) **Improving engagement methods and oversight structures:** We will innovate and learn to improve how we engage, reaching for the widest possible range of voices, and a richer partnership with residents
- 2) **Strengthening communication and insight:** We will be transparent in our communications to empower residents and improve our use of data, to generate insight and proactively improve services with residents at the centre
- 3) **Embedding a resident-first culture and behaviours:** We will embed responsibility for driving resident influence in roles and performance objectives across Octavia, build opportunities for influence into our core processes and introduce new Service Style behaviours

For each priority we state the key ways in which we will act, as well as the strategic pillar the actions align to and the measures of success that we will use. In Chapter 7 each of the proposed measures of success are aligned to these priorities, as are the actions within the annual action plan underpinning this strategy.

1) Improving engagement methods and oversight structures

Our Connect resident involvement strategy created a single resident-majority panel and a menu of complimentary engagement options, which established sound foundations for enabling resident influence we wish to retain. This is because:

- A single standing panel enables residents to develop a strong, aligned voice on issues of common interest and provides a clear point of accountability for us.
- A choice of engagement options across different channels (online, face-to-face, telephone) maximises involvement through providing a range of ways to influence Octavia to suit different preferences and lifestyles. It also ensures we have the right insight tools to meet the challenges we are working on.

Building on these foundations we want to go further to achieve our strategic pillars to ‘tackle inequality’ and be ‘people-centred’. We will do this in four key ways, by:

a) Continually improving our menu of engagement tools including the use of technology. Our starting point for this strategy is the menu of options embedded through Connect which provided a robust spread of tools. We have adapted these to reflect how they have been used and the three categories of strategic, local and focused. We will flex this menu over the lifetime of the strategy because:

- The pandemic limited our ability to test some of these, and we have more learning to do to understand their reach, impact and value for money
- There are other methods we want to pilot and develop, for example, engagement around building safety, recruitment and procurement
- We need to review and understand the suitability of our online platforms and investigate how we can use technology to better consult on policies and changes.
- We want to innovate to maximise the breadth of voices we hear, including better understanding residents’ lived experience in their locality, as well as to develop partnerships in working through complex issues such as net-zero targets through trialling deliberative methods.

Fig 4. Involvement menu



*Resident associations are set up by residents but supported by Octavia, where they meet core governance standards

b) Renewing and empowering our standing residents' panel. Your Voice has made a significant contribution on behalf of residents over a challenging period, but all agree on the need for changes. We will:

- Make the panel resident-only rather than resident-majority, including chaired by a resident, with training to ensure members feel empowered in their role
- Enable it to have a dual role as a consultative and oversight body, monitoring progress against this strategy and the residents' charter, scrutinising evidence of resident influence and feeding into decisions
- Strengthen the relationship between the panel and the Group Services Committee, with joint sessions and a standing agenda item for each meeting of Corporate Committee
- Hold a recruitment campaign for seats on the panel and ensure a representative mix of tenure and characteristics
- report on progress to the co-design group while the new panel is being established, to ensure action stays on track

c) Amplifying the resident voice in Octavia's governance. We will further embed the resident voice at Executive and Board level, ensuring it is feeding into decision-making, by:

- Establishing a resident engagement programme for leadership, Executive and Board members
- Introducing new ways to bring the resident voice into decision-making including, where appropriate, strengthening our reporting on customer voice and evidencing of how it has influenced decision making, and being clear how it has influenced the proposals and trialling a resident voice slot (live or recorded) at board meetings

d) Improving involved residents' experience of engaging with Octavia. We know that the experience of having had a positive impact on behalf of residents is a key motivation for those that engage with Octavia, so we want to make sure that those who give up their time are finding it a rewarding experience. We will therefore:

- Understand the reasons why people get involved and factor that into the approaches we use
- Look at how the additional benefits of engagement e.g. Gaining new skills, forming relationships, can be maximised
- Track involved residents experience of engagement and act on the results

- **Strategic pillars:** People-centred and Tackle inequality
- **Measures of success:** include reach, representativeness of involved residents, first-time engagement, involved residents' experience and perceptions of impact

2) Strengthening communication and insight

The co-design group told us they want much greater transparency from Octavia, and for us to make better use of our data to anticipate their needs, in the way they are used to in the retail sector. These actions build on communication commitments made under the Connect strategy but go beyond that in scope with our focus on ensuring resident influence through a variety of routes. We will do this in four ways, by:

a) Co-creating a Residents' Charter and reporting against it. We will consult on key performance indicators (KPIs), service standards and commitments to co-design a charter that sets out what residents should expect from their relationship with Octavia. Regular reporting against it to the residents panel and beyond, will enable them to hold us to account.

b) Improving the transparency and reach of our resident communications including social media. We will improve our use of our website to report on progress against the charter, promote involvement options and share stories of 'you said, we did' and 'we

noticed, we did'. In line with our communications strategy, we will understand residents' communication preferences and seek to communicate through those.

c) *Strengthening our data quality to share and use actionable insight.* We will:

- Continue to improve the quality of the data in our current systems, and over time ensure new systems meet our needs for more robust data and insight
- Listen to our customer-facing staff and suppliers, and also residents who are colleagues, to draw on the intelligence they gather. We will also promote roles at Octavia more actively to residents to bring the two bodies closer together
- Pull together the different sources of data, from feedback, data systems and colleague and supplier intelligence, to create shareable insight to inform decision-making

d) *Responding effectively when residents choose their own routes to influence us.* Our aim will always be to address issues at the first point of contact, where we can, through exemplary customer service. But when that fails, we need to be prepared for residents choosing their own routes to take their concerns further, for example through social media or by seeking third party advocacy from activists or elected representatives. In those cases we need to identify, investigate and respond appropriately to their concerns in a timely way.

Strategic pillar: Modern and engaging

Measures of success: include satisfaction with how the landlord informs residents and listens and acts on feedback.

3) Embed a resident-first culture and behaviours

The Connect strategy talked of a culture of openness to resident involvement, without recognising the extent to which our actions and behaviours determine the opportunities that residents have to influence our services and improve outcomes. We want to bring colleagues and residents closer together by addressing the variability in approach and service that residents have highlighted. We will do this in five ways, by:

a) *Building responsibility for driving resident influence into all roles.* We will build responsibilities into both role profiles and objectives for all staff whether customer-facing, back-office or leadership. We will identify specific additional responsibilities within customer-facing roles and services that are key drivers of customer satisfaction, such as repairs, strengthening our accountability and processes in relation to issues involving third parties such as managing agents and suppliers.

b) Delivering refreshed customer service and resident influence training, with input from residents, to embed a culture of resident-first across the organisation. This should empower colleagues to deliver against their objectives and roles within a clear framework and embed the themes of trust, respect, accountability, transparency and partnership identified as key by the co-design group.

c) Embedding opportunities for resident influence within mainstream business processes, for example in our procurement, recruitment, policy review and strategy development processes, and when we implement service or wider organisational change.

d) Establishing a culture of continuous improvement. We will support colleagues with tools and guidance so that they feel confident in re-designing and piloting new ways of working to respond to the insight they have and improve services, homes and outcomes.

e) Changing how we use our resident involvement expertise to empower staff, using it to enable colleagues to drive engagement and influence through providing tools, guidance and facilitating specialist engagement activity.

Strategic pillars: Optimise our impact

Measures of success: satisfaction with neighbourhood and treatment, net promoter score.

7. How we will know we have succeeded

Below is an indicative set of measures that we will use as a starting point to monitor the success of the strategy, in addition to tracking progress on the delivery of the specific commitments. These are subject to consultation with residents and are therefore subject to change. We also aim to supplement them over the course of the strategy with other performance information that will drive improvement in specific areas. This indicative KPI set is drawn from a number of areas:

- Octavia’s organisational strategy and KPI scorecards. Some of these are immediately relevant to resident influence, others assess the wider impact that should result
- The Tenant Satisfaction Measures include three targets relevant to resident engagement, two of which will be new for Octavia
- We will also introduce measures to track the experience of those involved in both ad hoc and ongoing engagement mechanisms

Indicative success measures

Priority Ref	Strategic Pillar	Measure	Target
1.1	People-centred	# residents engaged in involvement activities	2021/22: 1,789 Target: 5% year-on-year increase (16% cumulative over strategy)
1.2	Tackle inequality	Involved residents are representative of our overall resident profile	% match to resident profile
1.3	Tackle Inequality	# residents engaged who have not previously been involved with Octavia	*New* Baseline & improvement
1.4	People-centred	% involved residents satisfied with resident involvement opportunities and support	*New* Baseline & improvement
1.5	Optimise our Impact	% involved residents satisfied with the influence and impact they have been able to have	*New* Baseline & improvement
2.1	Modern & Engaging	% Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them	2020 Baseline: 70% Target: 75% and within Upper Quartile of Housemark comparators (TSM)
2.2	Modern & Engaging	% Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them.	*New* Baseline & improvement (TSM)
2.3	Modern & Engaging	% Involved residents satisfied with the information and feedback they receive	*New* Baseline & improvement
3.1	People-centred	% Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect	*New* Baseline & improvement (TSM)
3.2	Optimise our impact	Net promoter score	2020 Baseline: +20 Target: TBC
3.3	<i>Optimise our Impact</i>	<i>Case-by-case tracking of performance measures</i>	<i>Baseline & Improvement</i>

		<i>subject to resident influence</i>	
3.4	Tackle Inequality	% Residents satisfied with the neighbourhood where they live	2020 Baseline: 87% Improvement
3.5	<i>Optimise our Impact</i>	<i>Value for Money (VfM) Metric to be co-designed with residents</i>	<i>Baseline & improvement</i>
3.6	People-centred	Employee customer metric (pulse survey)	To be defined and baselined