

Renter Voice Policy

1. Purpose & Scope

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that renters have a say in how their housing is run, and that their views are heard and reflected on by Unison in considering how to deliver and improve housing services. This policy expresses Unison's commitment to ensuring that any feedback made by renters does not adversely affect their rental agreement.

This policy applies to:

- renters and prospective renters, their case workers and advocates.
- household members of all ages living in Unison properties.
- people whom Unison has assisted to make an application for social housing through the Victorian Housing Register (VHR).

This policy does not apply to:

- Neighbours outside the rental property (or properties in a multi-unit development).
- Friends of renters, household members or applicants (unless they are providing support).
- Family of renters or applicants (unless they are household members, support providers or advocates).

2. Policy Statement

2.1 Overview

Unison welcomes and values the views of renters and is committed to using this information, as far as possible, to improve service delivery.

Unison acknowledges that some renters may face barriers to speaking up and offering views, making a complaint about their housing or service provided by their Place Manager, or even requesting a repair or a maintenance job for fear of losing or otherwise adversely impacting their tenancy.

Unison is committed to ensuring that renters can speak openly without fear or reprisal from their rental provider. Having a say or making a complaint does not affect a renter's right to their housing or the provision of other related services. Addressing any misconceptions that Unison has the power to take away renter's housing if they speak up, and building confidence, trust, respect and transparency are key to empowering renters to have a voice.

For the purposes of this policy, Renter Voice can include, but is not limited to, formal and informal feedback, advice, suggestions, survey responses, participation in resident meetings and the Tenants Advisory Group (TAG). It also includes complaints made by renters, their advocates and support providers, including through Unison's complaints handling process. Please see Unison's *Complaints & Feedback Policy* for more information.

Unison also acknowledges that not all renters wish to engage on a range of issues and may choose not to respond to requests for input. We respect renters’ preferences regarding how, and when they wish to engage.

2.2 What is Renter Voice?

Renter Voice is the term given to the feedback between renters and household members and Unison about how things are going and what might make things run more smoothly and efficiently.

Having a say, or requesting repairs, or making a complaint are all useful sources of feedback for improving renter voice and does not impact on your right to have a home.

Renter Voice in Community Housing means that:

- All feedback is treated as an opportunity for improvement, not a nuisance or a problem to be managed.
- Renters feel confident and safe in providing their views, feedback and lived experiences on all aspects of their housing services, at any time, including – but not only – when these are asked for by Unison.
- Renters are advised up front why their views are sought, are valued, but also why they might not always be acted on.
- Their views are heard and reflected on by Unison in considering how to deliver and improve housing services.
- Their feedback is acted on as much as possible, and consistent with the legal and financial obligations of Unison in planning, designing, and delivering housing services.
- Unison is accountable to, and reports back to renters on how their views and feedback have been considered, acted on and have been used to influence changes to housing services; and where their views have not been acted on, with reasons provided in a timely way.

2.3 Guiding principles

The *Renter Voice Policy* is based on the following principles:

Principle	What this looks like in action for renters
Renters’ voices are always respected.	All renters feel safe in saying what they think. They are assured up front that speaking up, requesting repairs, giving feedback, and making complaints does not impact their tenancy. They are thanked for providing input.
Listening to, reflecting, and acting on what renters say is essential to the delivery of housing services that meet people’s needs.	Renters know how to provide their views, feedback and experiences, know how to make complaints, and know that they will be listened to with an open and attentive attitude. They will be taken seriously.
Renters’ lived experiences are respected and valued in planning, delivering, and improving housing services.	Renters are housing experts! Their views and lived experiences are valued and acknowledged. Where renters participate in, and provide their expertise on, advisory panels and committees, they are remunerated or otherwise appropriately rewarded.
Renters’ voice is part of everyone’s role: Board members, management, and frontline staff.	Renters’ views are actively sought, valued, and used in decision-making by everyone at Unison. Unison acknowledges and thanks renters for their expertise.

Renters from all backgrounds, cultures, language groups, ages (including children), and abilities are supported to have a say, and they are listened to with respect.	It is easy for all renters to have a say. Barriers to participation are removed. Renters feel culturally safe. There are interpreters, translation services, and accessible ways to communicate. Wherever possible, staff go to renters to seek their input, rather than using phone or office visits or requiring things “in writing.”
What renters say is acted on, and they are told about how they have influenced change, leading to improved services.	Renters are kept informed about issues they have raised, and how complaints are being handled (<i>refer to Complaints & Feedback Policy</i>). They are given information and regular updates about how their input is being used.
Renter voice input is reflected in decisions made by the organisation.	Renters are told up front how their contributions are considered and used by Unison. They are also informed about why it is not always possible to act on what they have said.

2.4 Who can have a say?

Any renter, prospective renter, household member of a Unison home (or their supporters and advocates) is encouraged to share their views, feedback, and lived experiences on all aspects of their housing services, at any time, including when these are asked for by Unison. Household members include people of all ages, children, and people of all abilities, cultural backgrounds and genders.

2.5 How to have a say

There are many ways renters can have a say about their housing, including:

- Responding to surveys.
- Attending social events organised by Unison to share information.
- Raising issues with housing staff or just by being actively listened to.
- Making complaints when things are not working (*refer to the [Complaints & Feedback Policy](#)*).
- Making suggestions about how things can be improved.
- Giving feedback on how things are going, or when changes are planned.
- Participating in resident meetings.
- Becoming a member of Unison’s Tenant Advisory Group.

Renters can have a say by:

- Telephone: 03 9349 0250
- Online: [Feedback + Complaints | Unison Community Housing](#)
- Post: PO Box 12145 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne VIC 8006
- In person: 117 Berkeley Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

2.6 How Unison uses Renter Voice

This policy recognises that renters and household members know the most about living in Unison properties. They have valuable ideas and experiences to contribute to improving the way our housing services are provided.

Unison needs renters' experience and ideas, and uses the information provided by renters to:

- Improve all aspects of their housing provision.
- Fix problems while they are small, before they become much bigger problems.
- Keep costs as low as possible by hearing about maintenance and other issues quickly, so they can be responded to as soon as possible.
- Be aware of any interpersonal issues between renters/household members and appreciate how this can impact on their views.
- Act on ideas about how to make things run more smoothly, such as improving communication with renters.
- Consult with renters to understand their preferences where Unison are planning to make changes to the property (e.g. ideas regarding fittings, use of common space or what to plant in communal gardens etc.)
- Help renters enjoy living in their homes, so they can get on with their lives in secure and stable housing.

2.7 Accessibility – if renters need help in having a say

Unison is committed to ensuring that the opportunity to have a say about housing is accessible to everyone. If a renter has specific communication needs or barriers, they can communicate this to Unison so assistance can be provided by:

- using an assistance service, such an interpreter.
- assistance with reading or writing.
- communicating with another person acting on the renter's behalf.

This policy is available on the Unison's website [Home | Unison Community Housing](#).

2.8 Confidentiality

All individual feedback, views, and input are confidential, and no identifying information is shared without permission.

Unison uses this information to respond to issues raised by renters, and to improve the services. All personal and sensitive information provided by renters is kept secure and managed in accordance with the [Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014](#).

Unison may share information to promote the wellbeing or safety of a child or group of children, or to prevent family violence, with other approved information sharing entities as legislated by the Victorian Government.

For more information relating to privacy and confidentiality, please refer to the [Unison Privacy Policy](#).

3. Definitions

Household Member: Other people residing in the rented home, including children.

Prospective Renter: A person who Unison assists to apply for social housing.

Renter: The person renting the home, whose name(s) is on the rental agreement. Includes recently exited renter.

TAG: Tenants Advisory Group

4. Document owner

The Director Housing and Homelessness is responsible for the review of this document. Refer to them to suggest any revision.

5. Related Information

5.1 Internal documents and links

- [Unison Tenants Advisory Group \(TAG\) Webpage](#)
- [Unison Privacy Policy](#)
- [Our Customer Commitment Webpage](#)

5.2 External documents and links

- [Client Voice Framework for Community Services](#)
- [Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014](#)
- [CHIA Renter Voice Toolkit](#)

This policy meets the regulatory requirements of the Performance Standards established under sections 93 and 94 of the Housing Act 1983. (Performance Standard 1, Tenant and Housing Services – supporting tenant and resident engagement).