

The Highland Council

Finance, Housing and Resources Committee – 26 February 2014

Agenda Item	16
Report No	FHR/38/14

Update on the Tenant Participation Strategy

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report provides information about the impact of The Scottish Social Housing Charter on the scope and content of the next Tenant Participation Strategy. The report notes the process and timescale for developing a revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 sets out the duties for social landlords to develop a Tenant Participation Strategy in collaboration with tenants.
- 1.2 The previous Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan 2009 – 2012 was developed with the former *Tenant Consultative Group*. This group evolved to monitor progress.
- 1.3 Since this time the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 has placed additional duties on social landlords to involve tenants (and other customers) in housing and housing related services.
- 1.4 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 clearly defines housing and housing related services in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (the Charter). The Charter also sets out the 16 outcomes and standards for delivery of these services.
- 1.5 These Charter outcomes are supported by a performance framework of 37 Charter indicators, including satisfaction measures and a range of contextual data to collectively form the regulatory Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).
- 1.6 The specific Charter outcomes for communication and participation are:
 - “*Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides*”.
 - “*Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord’s decisions at a level they feel comfortable with*”.

2. Recent Tenant Participation Activities

- 2.1 A wide range of participative activities have featured in Highland. In particular, there has been a growth in the number of tenants taking part as an individual, rather than the more traditional method of joining an organised tenants group.

2.2 Involvement in communication, information and consultation is currently the most common area of tenant involvement, for example:

- **Highland Tenant Update** - Quarterly tenant newsletter. This aims for 40% tenant contribution with tenant editorial involvement.
- **Highland Tenant Voice** - Independent tenant web-site launched 2009, redesigned 2013. This involves tenant ownership of content and administration, delivered by a 'group' of individual tenants from across Highland.
- **Facebook** - Highland Tenants Together. This was launched in September 2013 as an off-spring of the tenant web-site and is administered by the same group.
- **Annual Tenant Conference** - since 2009. There is a tenant led conference planning group to design, plan, coordinate and deliver the conference.
- **Forums for Interested Tenants** – There are area forums for individual interested tenants to meet, share and network. Forums have tenant led agendas with a primary focus on housing issues but including wider community issues.
- **Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs)** - Registered groups form a national network through which Scottish Government and other agencies formally consult on housing and tenancy issues. The Highland register of 18 groups provides a formal consultation source for the Council, though RTOs are equally valuable for identifying and action planning any area based housing, community or environmental issues.
- Tenants have also been involved in activities such as taking part in the development of the Volunteer Expenses Policy and the Grants for Groups Policy.
- A small group of tenants was involved in planning and delivering staff awareness training about the Charter outcomes and standards. This included taking part in the design specification, evaluation of quotes, and selection of a trainer.

2.3 More recently, we have been testing models of involvement that align with Charter outcomes on tenant involvement in performance assessment or service review. For example:-

- **Voids** – a tenant inspection team was supported to review the void process from a customer perspective. They made 10 recommendations for service improvement.
- **Capital Programme** - A survey tracking the tenant experience of having new heating systems fitted will be used to support a more detailed process review which will also involve tenants.
- **Repairs** - A tenant focus group involving tenants as a sounding board in the development of the repairs appointments system was a useful way to test

customer expectations.

- **Rents** - A focus group involving tenants as a sounding board in the rent restructure proposals helped widen scrutiny of rent setting.
- **Housing Investment** - A focus group involving tenants as a sounding board for the housing investment programme helped shape and influence the direction of the funding package for new Council supply.

2.4 In addition, there are a number of tenants involved in performance management or service review type projects in progress:

- **Welfare Reform** – we are currently scoping a tenant inspection to review tenant access to advice and information services, as well as a project involving tenants testing a budgeting skills ‘game’ for wider community roll-out.
- **Capital Programme** - tenant volunteers will review and agree new Charter compliant satisfaction measurement questions, then test the new survey.
- **Allocations** - tenant volunteers are involved in an area based customer survey to better understand the reasons for high refusal rates on offers of housing, to help shape possible area based solutions to low demand/high turnover housing stock.

3. Future Objectives

3.1 The revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan should aim to align tenant involvement activities with performance management arrangements. Specifically it should develop tenant volunteering opportunities at the levels of:

- 1) satisfaction measurement
- 2) monitoring and reviewing of services
- 3) decision-making and governance.

3.2 This will involve agreeing actions to increase the number of tenant volunteers. It will also involve actions to promote, support or develop any skills or training or qualifications that tenants might need to support engagement in a chosen volunteer role. Each tenant volunteer role will have a volunteer role description.

3.3 Equally, there is a need for actions to develop methods to ensure tenant involvement in Service Planning and the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).

3.4 Tenant involvement in satisfaction measurement, monitoring and reviewing services will provide the qualitative data to ensure a robust Annual Return on the Charter (ARC). The first ARC is due for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator in May 2014 while the new statutory annual report to tenants on the Charter is due November 2014.

3.5 There is an opportunity for the revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan to promote greater tenant involvement in decision-making and governance.

4. Tenant Participation Strategy – Process and Timescale

4.1 It is proposed to recruit active tenants to form a Tenant Participation Strategy

Review Group. This follows promotion of this volunteering opportunity at the Tenant Conference in September 2013, and in the winter edition of the tenant newsletter.

- 4.2 A volunteer role description for the group (**Appendix 1**) sets out the responsibility to produce a Scottish Social Housing Charter compliant Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan.
- 4.3 The group will be time limited and facilitated and supported by a Housing Policy Officer for the purpose of developing and consulting on a draft revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan.
- 4.4 It is expected that the group will be formed by March 2014 and that a draft revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan will be submitted to Committee in September 2014.
- 4.5 The review group will ensure that content of the revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan:-
 - reflects legal and regulatory expectations to support and promote tenant involvement in housing and housing related services
 - offers a range of positive and rewarding volunteering opportunities for tenants across all areas of housing service delivery
 - connects tenant volunteering opportunities clearly with tasks and activities related to performance management, self-assessment and scrutiny arrangements
 - provides the opportunities and sets out clear arrangements for tenant participation within the Council's housing service's decision making and governance arrangements.

5. Implications arising from this report

- 5.1 **Resource:** There are resource implications in relation to the cost of policy review. It is anticipated that any resource implications can be met from within existing HRA resources.
- 5.2 **Legal:** The proposals in this report seek to meet the legal and regulatory expectations of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 5.3 **Equalities:** There not specific implications arising from this report.
- 5.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever:** There are no climate change/carbon clever implications arising from this report.
- 5.5 **Risk:** Tenants and other customers have new rights under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 to report significant performance failures to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

6. Recommendation

6.1 Committee is asked to:

- note recent and current tenant participation activity
- agree the approach to developing a new Tenant Participation Strategy
- note that a consultative draft strategy will be presented to a future meeting

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 13 February 2014

Author: Lyn Kilpatrick, Housing Policy Officer

Background Papers:

- [The Scottish Social Housing Charter](#)
(Scottish Government 2012)
- Measuring the Scottish Social Housing Charter <http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Scotland%20Policy%20Pdfs/Charter/Measuring%20the%20Scottish%20Social%20Housing%20Charter%20Outcomes%20-%20Updated%20July%202013.pdf>
(ALACHO, SHBVN, CIH, Housemark, July 2013)
- The Scottish Social Housing Charter – Technical Guidance for landlords <http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Technical%20Guidance.pdf>
(Scottish Housing Regulator, November 2013)
- [Monitoring the Scottish Social Housing Charter](#)
(Scottish Housing Regulator, 2012)

Highland Council - Tenant Volunteer Role Description

Role Title:	Tenant Participation Strategy Review Group representative
Lead Council Officer:	Housing Policy Officer
Where :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings at various locations in Highland, mainly in Inverness, mainly at Highland Council office sites • Reading, research and assignments at home • Possibly out of Highland on occasion as delegate at relevant external events.
Time commitment:	<p>This is a time limited volunteering role concluding with Council approval of a revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan 2014/2015. It is anticipated the review process shall last for 6 months and consist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum one day a month for participation in Strategy Review meetings or workshops • potential for 3 -4 hours per week for reading, research and assignments • potential for 1 – 2 hours per week for correspondence and communications, mainly by email, but also by telephone. • Potential for occasional attendance as a delegate at any relevant Tenant Participation training, consultations, events, conferences or workshops, for example – Tenant Scrutiny training events.
Role purpose:	The purpose of this volunteer role is to collaborate in the process of developing The Highland Council's revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan 2014/2015.
Role description:	<p>A Tenant Participation Strategy is a statutory responsibility for social landlords in Scotland through the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001</p> <p>The introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 places new duties on social landlords in relation to tenant involvement and scrutiny of housing services.</p> <p>The review group will make sure that the Council's revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflects legal and regulatory requirements to promote and support tenant involvement and participation • offers a range of positive volunteering opportunities for tenants at all levels of housing service, including decision making and governance • clearly sets out the Council's intentions for Charter compliance in terms of tenant involvement in the self- assessment of housing services, ie tenant scrutiny. • contributes effectively to the delivery and monitoring of housing service performance and standards

Main tasks:	<p>The group will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify innovative / good practice in participation, involvement and scrutiny • assess and consider how good practice models may translate to the Highland context • think through and make smart recommendations for including in the draft strategy and action plan • agree the content of the draft strategy and action plan • take an active part in the consultation on the draft strategy and action plan • take feedback and contribute to revisions
Required skills, qualities and experience	<p>This is a role for a Highland Council tenant volunteer with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an ability to travel to various locations using own or public transport • knowledge of the current social housing policy context in Scotland • understanding of equalities and diversity in housing services • an ability to connect with people and work as part of a team • good listening skills and ability to communicate effectively • experience of using Microsoft Word and Excel • good organisational, research, planning and report skills • an ability to reliably work to task and take instructions • commitment to participation
Training and support available:	<p>You will be supported in this role and associated tasks by the designated Housing Policy Officer.</p> <p>Any training relevant to this short term volunteering role will be discussed, agreed and coordinated by the Housing Policy Officer.</p> <p>Out of pocket expenses for this unpaid role will be paid as set out in the Volunteer Expenses Policy</p>
Any other requirements:	<p>Willingness and capacity to maintain a reviewing/scrutiny volunteering role in relation to implementation of the revised Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan 2014/2015</p>
Date role created	<p>8 January 2014</p>
Created by	<p>Lyn Kilpatrick, Housing Policy Officer Lyn.Kilpatrick@highland.gov.uk</p>