

Agenda Item	4.
Report No	CLH 56/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing

Date: 6 December, 2018

Report Title: Tenant Participation and Engagement Update

Report By: Director of Community Services

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on a range of actions being undertaken to continually improve Tenant Participation in Highland.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are invited to **note** the recent tenant engagement activities in Highland and the recognition of these by the Scottish Housing Regulator and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).

3. Background

- 3.1 The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets out the current legal and regulatory Requirements for housing services. The revised Charter was approved by resolution of the Scottish Parliament on 8 February 2017 and compliance with the Charter is monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- 3.2 One of the fundamental Charter principles is that social landlords need to involve tenants and other customers in the design and delivery of housing services
- 3.3. The Council's Tenant and Customer Engagement Strategy 2015-2020 was approved at Committee on 4 June 2015 and can be viewed at https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/15379/getting_involved_strategy-tenant_and_customer_engagement

4. Scottish Housing Regulator and Recent Improvements

- 4.1 Following the publication of the Local Scrutiny Plan (LSP) in May 2017, the Scottish Housing Regulator advised that they would engage with the Council in relation to 4 performance indicators where the Council was in the bottom quartile of registered social landlords. One of these key indicators was Tenant Satisfaction based on the 2016 Comprehensive Tenant Satisfaction Survey.
- 4.2 In the rent consultation 2018/2019, Highland Council tenants said that they would like to see an increase in investment in order to:
- improve opportunities for tenants to participate in housing services; and
 - make improvements to the look of their estates.

This has been taken into account in the last 12 months and actions are detailed below.

4.3 Opportunities to participate

Taking into account the views of the tenants who responded to the 2018/2019 rent consultation, two additional Tenant Participation Officers have been employed on a fixed term contract. The main duties and responsibilities of these posts are as follows:

- deliver the Council's Tenant and Customer Engagement strategic framework;
- promote innovative tenant and customer engagement opportunities throughout the Highlands; and
- provide knowledge, information and training to staff and tenants to influence positive change.

- 4.4 This additional resource has enabled us to increase face-to-face contact with tenants resulting in far higher number of tenants engaging at a meaningful level. Participation opportunities provided this year are detailed below.

4.5 Tenant groups

The Tenant Participation Team are currently supporting 24 tenant / resident groups across Highland and are in the process of supporting an additional four through the start-up process. These groups are a mix of Registered Tenant Organisations, Sheltered Housing Tenant groups and less formal Interested Tenant groups. The team are also expanding the Register of Interested Tenants which comprises individual tenants who have indicated their willingness to engage in tenant participation activities and to provide feedback on service delivery.

4.6 **Senior Safe Highlander events**

4.6.1 These events are aimed at older tenants and residents and how they can stay safe, well and connected with their communities. The following events have been held in partnership with Highland Senior Citizens Network, Trading Standards, Police Scotland and Highland & islands Fire & Rescue Service:

- Dingwall – attended by around 60 delegates
- Fort William – attended by around 70 delegates
- Kingussie – attended by around 30 delegates

4.6.2 Further events are planned for other areas in Highland including Skye & Lochalsh in Spring 2019.

4.7 **Youth projects**

Youth development projects are underway in Caithness and these work in partnership with agencies such as High Life Highland and Criminal Justice. These projects include the Junior Wardens Scheme and the Youth Independence Project which works with older teenagers to engage with them and prepare them for a positive place in society. We are aiming to extend both of these projects to other parts of Highland in 2019.

4.8 **Rate your Estate walkabouts**

4.8.1 Tenants are invited to join Tenant Participation Officers, Council staff and elected Members to inspect their estate. This gives tenants the opportunity to put forward their priorities for improvements to the areas they live in.

4.8.2 In 2018, 27 Rate your Estate inspections were carried out across Highland and these provided valuable input from tenants as to what communities considered to be priority improvements. Further Rate your Estate events are planned in all areas in Spring 2019 and these will again inform the environmental improvements projects which form part of both the Housing Revenue and Housing Capital area budgets.

4.9 **Inverness Tenants Forum**

4.9.1 Following on from the successful Caithness, Sutherland and East Ross Tenants Forum, a new tenants forum has been established in Inverness. The aim of the Inverness Forum is to bring together tenants from the Inverness area to discuss local housing services and to collate their views on a variety of community issues. The intention is for the forum to be held every quarter and to date it has been attended by around 25 – 30 tenants. We are also running separate workshops on how we deliver services which are open to any interested tenants.

4.9.2 It is intended to develop forums in other parts of Highland in 2019, including the areas of Lochaber, Mid / West Ross, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, and Skye and Lochalsh.

4.10 **Looking ahead**

In 2019 the Tenant Participation Team intend to expand on the work and projects already in place. This includes:

- establishing a Homelessness Forum to obtain better feedback from service users to help us deliver our homeless services;
- working with colleagues in Care and Learning to build on existing youth forum arrangements to engage with young people and support them to consider their housing choices;

- assisting with any consultation required with tenants, homeless clients, and applicants on our waiting list as part of the Housing Allocations Policy review which follows legislative changes brought in by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014; and
- Working with the Local Community Partnerships to ensure that housing and the voices of our tenants are heard.

4.11 The Highland Council has also been selected to work with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) on the Scottish Government's 'Next Steps' programme. This programme sets out new guidance on how to review, improve, and develop current tenant participation and scrutiny arrangements.

5. Strategic tenant working groups

5.1 To increase tenant empowerment, officers have supported tenant representatives to set up three strategic tenant groups:

- the Tenant Finance and Participation Group;
- the Communications Working Group; and
- the Highland Tenants Scrutiny Panel.

These groups have the specific objective of helping drive organisational accountability and excellence, thus promoting a system of tenant-focused regulation.

5.2 The purpose of the Tenant Finance and Participation Group is to review information relating to the role of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) within the Council including scrutiny of:

- how it operates;
- if the resources contained within benefit tenants; and
- what value for money outcomes can be expected from those resources.

5.3 In 2014, the Scottish Government issued guidance on how Housing Revenue Accounts should operate. This guidance identifies five key principles under which an HRA should operate. The key principle 3 requires that:

“there is a robust, written methodology for calculating and allocating HRA costs (including internal costs charged by the Council to the HRA) in sufficient financial detail for tenants to understand why costs are being charged and who is benefiting from the services these costs relate to. This must include the allocation to the HRA of the appropriate proportion of council Trading Operation surpluses attributable to council housing activities. Furthermore, the HRA cost allocation methodology must also be updated regularly to reflect changes in legislation, statutory guidance, codes of practice, the market for HRA goods and services and any other relevant changes”

The Finance and Participation Group are currently reviewing the Methodology Statement.

5.4 The Communications Working Group is presently working with the Housing Service to provide up-to-date and tenant-friendly information through various communication channels. This includes reviewing the tenant newsletter and encouraging involvement in the new Highland Tenants Together Facebook page.

5.5 The purpose of the Highland Tenants Scrutiny Panel is to scrutinise the delivery of services from a tenant perspective and ensure that processes and outcomes are fit for purpose. The group have recently completed their first Scrutiny exercise reviewing the Council's complaints process and they produced a report which made a number of recommendations for improvements.

5.6 A copy of the report was sent to the Scottish Housing Regulator and received a very positive response

“the panel’s report was very good. It was well structured, easy to read and made a number of recommendations that would lead to good practice. It made a number of key observations which they followed up with recommendations for improvement. I would wish the group well for their next area of interest as the complaints report has shown the valuable contribution a tenants/service user perspective can be in improving a service area. “
(Regulation Analyst :Scottish Housing Regulator).

5.7 These strategic groups are supported by officers who have taken part in ‘Stepping Up to Scrutiny’, a training programme initially delivered on behalf of the Scottish Government by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Housemark and now delivered in-house.

6. Tenant Representation at Committee

6.1 At Committee on 19 October 2017, it was agreed that tenant representatives should attend Committee as advisors. Three tenant representatives have been nominated by their fellow tenants and this will hopefully bring tenants closer to the decision-making processes in the Council.

6.2 Tenant representatives are also invited to future Policy Development Groups where they can help bring a wider perspective to the discussion and closer working to deliver good housing services.

7. TPAS Awards

7.1 The TPAS Scotland national conference was held in Aviemore over the weekend commencing 16 November 2018 and this included the following awards:

- Lorna Simpson (Tenant Participation Officer for Caithness, Sutherland and East Ross) won the Tenant Participation Champion of the Year Award. Lorna was also shortlisted for the Employee of the Year award at the Highland Council Quality Awards;
- Lynn Dey from the South Kessock Tenant and Residents Association won the Best Practice in Involving Youth award;
- South Kessock Tenant and Residents Association achieved runner-up placing in the Best Practice in Digital Improvement award; and
- four other tenant groups from Highland were nominated for awards.

8. Implications

8.1 Resource : There are no resource implications arising from this report

8.2 Legal : The efforts to improve tenant participation assist the Council with legal and

regulatory compliance as set out in section 3.1 above.

- 8.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) : The proposals set out in this report aim to strengthen community involvement in housing services and ensure that the tenant voice is heard in regard to decisions which affect them
- 8.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever : There are no climate change implications arising from this report.
- 8.5 Risk : There are no risk implications arising from this report.
- 8.6 Gaelic : There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 26 November 2018

Author: Mandy Macleman, Principal Tenant and Customer Engagement Officer

Background Papers: Highland Council Tenant and Customer Engagement Strategy 2015-2020;
Highland Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review of Complaints Process