
To: Housing and Community Safety Policy Board

On: 25 August 2015

Report by: Director of Development and Housing Services

Heading: Customer Engagement Annual Report 2014/15

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Customer Engagement Annual Report for 2014/15 is attached as an appendix to this Board Report. The Annual Report reviews progress made in relation to our Customer Engagement Strategy and highlights what we have achieved in the previous 12 months. It also outlines the financial and other resources being made available by the Council to promote tenant involvement.
- 1.2 It also sets out what we want to achieve for the year ahead taking into account various factors which will influence how we consult and engage with our tenants and other customers.
- 1.3 The report will be made available to tenants' and residents' groups, staff and partner organisations. Copies will also be made available at the Customer Contact Centre and at our Johnstone and Renfrew offices and we will place an advert in the next tenant's newsletter, 'The Peoples News', to indicate where tenants can obtain a copy.
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2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Policy Board:

- 2.1 Notes the contents of the Customer Engagement Annual Report 2014/15.

3. **Background**

- 3.1. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires all local authorities and registered social landlords to:
- Implement, monitor and review a Tenant Participation Strategy;
 - Establish and maintain a register of tenants' and residents' organisations; and
 - Notify individual tenants and tenants' organisations on proposals relating to housing management, service standards and the Tenant Participation Strategy, and take account of their views.
- 3.2. The August 2010 Housing and Community Safety Policy Board approved the Customer Engagement Strategy. This builds on the existing Tenant Participation Strategy, but extends it to include other customers who are not tenants. Since then, a Customer Engagement Annual Report has been prepared and reported to the Policy Board. This reviews progress made in the last year, and sets out what we are looking to achieve in the coming year in terms of tenant participation and customer engagement.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – The cost associated with providing support to recognised groups will be met from existing budgets.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None.
3. **Community Planning – Empowering our Communities** - The Customer Engagement Annual Report demonstrates our commitment to involving local people and supporting residents to communicate with the Council, its partners and other agencies

Safer and Stronger - Resident involvement in service development can help create more stable communities. This Report shows what is being done to promote tenant/ resident involvement.
4. **Legal** - The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires all local authorities and registered social landlords to implement, monitor and review a Tenant Participation strategy.
5. **Property/Assets** – None.
6. **Information Technology** – None.

7. **Equality & Human Rights – None.**

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

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8. **Health & Safety – None.**

9. **Procurement – None.**

10. **Risk – None.**

11. **Privacy Impact – None**

List of Background Papers

(a) **Background Papers – None.**

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Customer Engagement Annual Report 2014/15

Housing Strategy and Development

Development & Housing Services

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Introduction

This year's report outlines how we have engaged with our different customer groups over the period April 2014 to March 2015. For the past couple of years, we have moved away from reporting specifically on Tenant Participation (TP), which we have historically done, to a wider remit of reporting on how we have engaged with our broader customer base and we will continue to develop the methods we use for engaging with our broader customer base.

Nevertheless, the formal TP structure is important and underpins the relationship between the Council as a social landlord and Council tenants as demonstrated in sections 1, 2 and 3 of this report.

Along with other public sector organisations, the Council is in one of the most challenging periods of recent times as the financial context within which it is operating has become tighter. The need to make savings and efficiencies mean that the Council is facing a very difficult financial outlook. However in spite of this, the service must continue to make the best possible use of its resources to meet the challenges it will face. Customer engagement remains essential for ensuring we provide 'fit for purpose' services, which meet the needs and expectations of our stakeholders.

This report outlines our progress over the last year, and also details how we plan to expand and develop this over the year ahead. The actions we will undertake during 2015/16 reflect a number of major drivers which are influencing our approach to customer engagement, these include

- Our requirements under the Scottish Social Housing Charter to involve tenants and other customers in the scrutiny of our performance
- The continual development of consultation and engagement with all our customer groups
- The development of a revised Customer Engagement Strategy, to reflect the priorities and outcomes we wish to achieve in the coming years

1. Developing Renfrewshire's Customer Engagement Strategy

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires every social landlord to have a strategy on how they will involve tenants in shaping and monitoring the service they receive, including:

- housing management, repairs and maintenance policies;
- standards of service to be provided in relation to housing management, repairs and
- maintenance policies; and
- any proposal to change landlord.

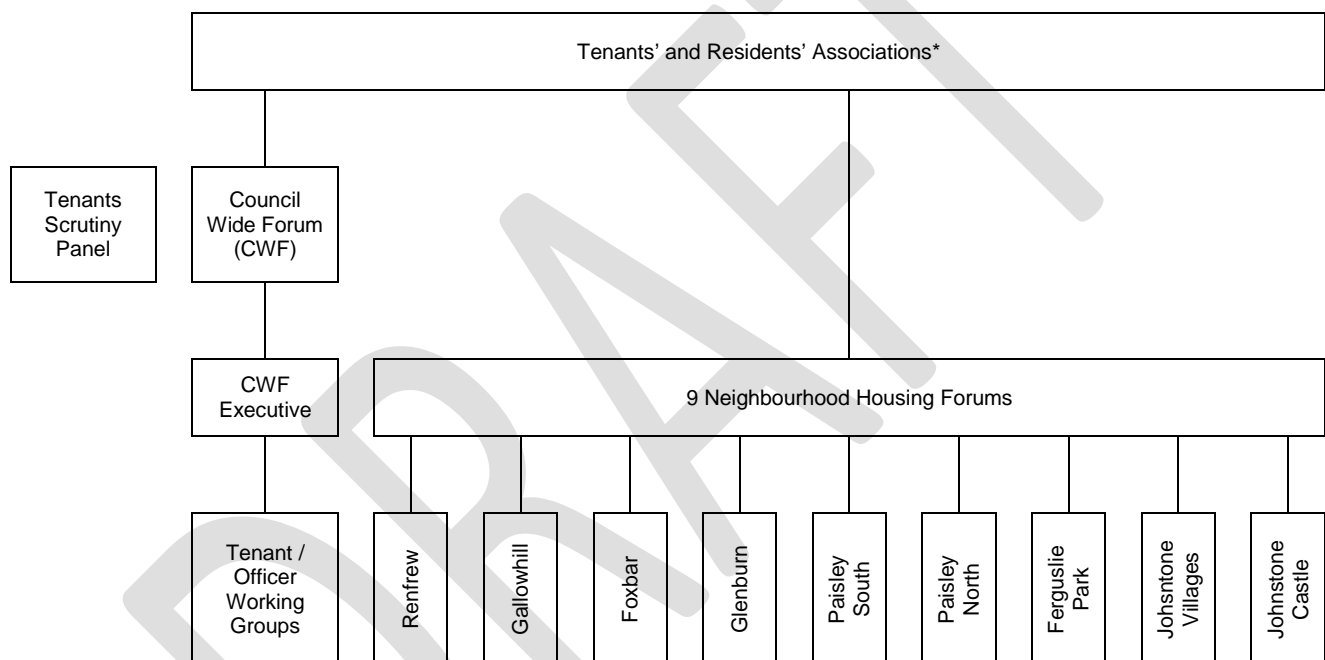
Our current Customer Engagement Strategy recognises these areas, but also sets out our plans for widening the scope of engagement across the range of Development and Housing services to reach a broader range of customers.

This complements and strengthens the formal arrangements for tenant participation and reaffirms our commitment to involving tenants in the decision making process.

During 2014/15, we developed opportunities for engaging with tenants who are not active in tenants' organisations and not part of the formal TP structure (see section 4, below).

2. Our Tenant Involvement Structure

Our current structure was introduced in April 2011 with the addition of the Tenants Scrutiny Panel during 2013. The structure maximises the use of available resources and provides a focus on local housing and housing related issues. It allows tenant groups to raise issues or concerns with local operational staff who can either deal with matters directly or liaise with the appropriate staff in other Council services or partner agencies.



*Tenant and Resident Associations on Renfrewshire Council's Enhanced Register

The key elements of this structure are:

- a. **Registered Tenants' Organisations (RTOs)** – The Council keeps a register of all Tenants Organisations in Renfrewshire. Tenant organisations which meet the Council's registration criteria (as agreed by the Housing and Community Safety Policy Board in August 2010) are included in Renfrewshire's Enhanced Register of Tenant Organisations.

These groups have full access to the Council's Tenant Participation Structures (including participation in the Neighbourhood Housing Forum, Council Wide Forum and Council Wide Forum Executive) and are eligible for grant funding from the Housing Revenue Account.

The annual registration process for 2014/15 was carried out during July and August 2014 and as of September 2014, there were 11 tenant organisations on the Enhanced Register of Tenant Organisations in Renfrewshire. See table 1 below,

Bridge of Weir	Gallowhill	Quarrelton
Caledonia Glen	Johnstone Castle	Whitehaugh
Charleston	Maxwellton Court	Williamsburgh
Ferguslie Park North	Provost Close	

Table1: List of Enhanced Tenant and Resident Associations.

There are 7 other groups which are on the Register of Tenant Organisations but which do not currently meet the enhanced registration criteria.

The re-registration process for 2015/16 is taking place during July and August 2015 and our Tenant Consultation Officer is working with the Tenant and Resident Associations to offer assistance to help them meet the enhanced criteria.

Representatives of Registered Tenants Organisations are consulted by Council officers on a wide range of housing-related issues affecting their members through the various forums and groups in our tenant participation structure. They are also able to influence the development of housing policy and services.

- b. **Neighbourhood Housing Forums** – The Neighbourhood Forums concentrate on the day to day issues which affect tenant representatives – for example, particular problems with empty properties or antisocial behaviour. Officers from Development and Housing Services liaise with other Council services and partner organisations about issues raised by tenant representatives at the Forums.

The Forums monitor performance in their area, and progress in relation to any local housing initiatives. They also agree and prioritise small-scale environmental works.

Although nine Neighbourhood Forums are in the formal structure Johnstone Villages and Johnstone Castle have agreed to meet together, and Renfrew and Gallowhill have also agreed to meet together, giving a total of seven Neighbourhood Housing Forums.

The Forums are chaired by the Neighbourhood Services Coordinator for that area, and agenda items at Forum meetings have included:

- Local performance statistics (rent arrears, voids, anti-social activity)
- Estate Management issues
- Repairs
- Scottish Housing Quality Standard

A large part of the Forums remit is to agree on small scale local environmental works to help enhance the neighbourhoods in which they operate. During 2014/15, the total amount made available to the Forums for these works was £330,000. Examples of the type of work approved by the Forums include;

- hedge removal
- fencing, slabbing, monoblocking
- handrails at common paths
- close, door, fence painting
- security lights
- high spec door entry systems
- cleaning of communal launderette floor and wall tiles

- hard landscaping of backcourts
- power washing of slabbed areas

- c. **Tenant Scrutiny Panel** – The Tenants Scrutiny Panel (TSP) was set-up in 2013 as another vehicle for tenant involvement and to provide a mechanism for tenants to examine and evaluate our performance in specific service areas. Renfrewshire Council was selected as one of only 4 organisations within Scotland to participate in the Scottish Government funded pilot scrutiny training programme 'Stepping Up to Scrutiny'.

In March 2015 the members of the TSP were presented with a certificate in recognition of them completing the 'Stepping Up to Scrutiny' programme at the Chartered Institute of Housing Conference in Glasgow.

The first scrutiny exercise carried out by the TSP looked at the standard of our empty properties and this exercise resulted in an action plan to help improve the service we provide and the actions within this action plan have now been completed.

During 2014/15 new members were recruited to the TSP and refresher training delivered by outside consultants was provided. The TSP are currently undertaking their second scrutiny exercise, reviewing the experience of our customers at the Customer Service Centres in Renfrew, Johnstone and Paisley.

- d. **Council Wide Forum** - All Enhanced Registered Tenants' Organisations are invited to send delegates to the annual Council-wide Forum (CWF) which is where we consult on issues which affect all of our tenants, Renfrewshire wide. The Council Wide Forum met during December 2014 when the agenda items at this CWF meetings included:

- Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) – progress on achieving target by April 2015.
- Tenant Scrutiny Panel – update on activities
- Grass Cutting / Hedge Cutting – Q & A Session
- Rent Consultation - discussion with Head of Housing Services
- Welfare Reform / Universal Credit – Update
- Scottish Social Housing Charter / Tenants Report – Update

- e. **Council-wide Forum Executive (CWFE)** - The Executive comprises of up to 18 tenant representatives, 2 owner occupier representatives and Council officers as required (with 2 tenants to be appointed from each Neighbourhood Housing Forum and 2 owner-occupiers appointed at the Council-wide Forum). The Executive meets every 8 weeks and will regularly feedback to the Neighbourhood Housing Forums and the Council Wide Forum on issues discussed.

The CWFE which met 6 times in 2014-15 (May, July, September & November 2014 and January & March 2015), has a more strategic role including approving the agenda for the Council Wide Forum, being used as a sounding board and consultation body for new policies and other issues which arise.

- f. **Tenant / officer working groups** – Working groups are established from time-to-time to look at certain aspects of our services in more detail, and bring forward proposals

for change. Currently we have one group which is looking at the housing repairs service (Repairs Development Group).

The Repairs Development Group (RDG) met 6 times in 2014/15 (May, July, September & November 2014 & January, March 2015).

This structure works well as a means of involving Registered Tenant Organisations and tenant representatives and has been developed to be more effective when engaging with tenants who are not active in the tenants' movement and we are actively looking to develop more ways to involve as many of our customers as possible (as outlined in section 4).

3. Supporting Tenant Involvement

A range of measures to encourage tenant involvement are currently funded from rental income:

- Assistance to Registered Tenant Organisations with running costs (up to £600 per organisation per annum)
- One-off grants to groups requiring equipment such as printers or computers
- Production of a tenants' newsletter – The People's News – to keep tenants informed
- The costs of venue hire, catering and publicity for consultation events.
- Cost of sending delegates to seminars, training events and national tenant conferences
- Cost of transport for delegates to and from consultation meetings, conferences and seminars

During 2014/15, expenditure on Tenant Participation was:

Grants to Registered Tenant Organisations	£5,310
'Peoples News' - tenant magazine and Annual tenants report on the Scottish Social Housing Charter	£27,800
Subscriptions to the Tenant Information Service (TIS) and Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)	£2,810
Transport	£3,610
Conferences / training	£7,430
Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) and facilitating other tenant meetings	£7,160
Total	£54,120

In addition, we:

- a. Make funds directly available to carry out a range of small scale local environmental works through the Neighbourhood Forum budget. These works are determined by Registered Tenants' Organisations, within certain agreed guidelines. The resources made available for these works during 2014/15 were £330,000.
- b. Ensure our Registered Tenants' Organisations have access to appropriate Council officers to enable them to operate as effectively as possible. This includes a dedicated Tenant Consultation Officer, whose duties include helping to support and sustain tenant organisations. Within the department, the Service Review and Development

team, the Finance Services Manager and the staff within the local Neighbourhood Services office are also involved in offering support to the RTO's.

4. Tenant Engagement – what else was achieved during 2014/15

During 2014/15 we carried out various actions in order to help us achieve the objectives of our Customer Engagement strategy. These include:

- Developed and delivered our first #OpenHouse drop in events for tenants, and we are currently looking at how we can deliver these over the next year.
- Put together a tenant panel to help us to agree on the design and the content of our first ever tenant report on our performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter. This was delivered to every tenant in October 2014.
- Recruited new members to the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and delivered training to help them in their activities.

Our Customer Engagement Strategy outlines how we seek to engage with all our customers – not just Council house tenants. In relation to tenant involvement, the strategy goes beyond our legal obligations in respect of 'tenant participation' – allowing all tenants (not just those who take an active interest in their local tenants' and residents' association) opportunities to influence those policies, procedures and service standards which are relevant to them.

As well as the established and robust structure which enables Tenants and Residents Associations to engage with us, we also recognise the need to communicate with our wider customer groups, who may not be represented through the formal framework.

We understand that the majority of our tenants are not actively involved in the formal Tenant Participation structure, and that we need to ensure we engage with them in ways that suit them.

During the last year, we have continued to expand and develop the methods we use to ensure we communicate and engage with tenants and our wider customer groups who have an interest in specific areas of work we are involved in.

Below is a list of those activities we have been involved in with our tenants during 2014/15:

- a. **Magazines and newsletters** – Three editions of our tenant magazine *The Peoples News*, was produced in a newspaper format from a renewable resource during 2014/15. The newspaper is delivered to all our tenants, and in the last year has included articles on Welfare Reform and available financial help, Right to Repair, updates on progress to meeting the Scottish Quality Housing Standard along with updates on Regeneration Initiatives and Energy Advice. The Peoples News has also featured articles on the Tenant Scrutiny Panel as well as other articles outlining how tenants can become involved in consultation and participation activities.

In October 2014, we published a special edition of the Peoples News on the Housing Charter Tenant Report. This outlined how well we had done as a landlord over a number of areas, such as repairs, rent collection and tenant involvement.

- b. **Quality Circles** – We have continued to support and develop the role of the Quality Circles (in multi-storey blocks and sheltered housing complexes) to expand ways in which they can become involved in shaping services – during 2014 members of the Quality Circle groups were also involved in helping design the layout of our Tenants Report.
- c. **Welfare Reform** – We contributed to the work of the Tackling Poverty Commission, and continued to support the work streams of the corporate Welfare Reform Programme to further explore options available to the Council as a landlord, our tenant base and internal/ external partners. Whilst taking opportunities that arise to access external funding in partnership for the benefit of Renfrewshire tenants and residents. As of June 2015, there were 1646 tenancies affected by Under Occupancy. Since April 2014, 1597 Discretionary Housing Payments have been applied to assist those affected by Under Occupancy.
- d. **Attendance at National Tenant Events** - We sent 8 delegates to the Tenant Participation Advisory Service conference in St Andrews in November 2014. Delegates contributed to group discussions, attended workshops and shared their experiences with other tenant activists.
- e. **#openhouse (tenants open days)** - As part of our revised customer consultation framework we held a series of tenants open days during early June which were branded as '#openhouse'. Planning for these events began in early 2014 in consultation with tenant representatives.

The events were a drop-in format with representation from many sections of Development and Housing Services, other Council Services, Partners and Volunteers. They were organised at a more decentralised local level with one in Renfrew, one in Johnstone, one in Paisley North and one in Paisley South. These events were intended as a way to expand our consultation arrangements with tenants and we will look to learn and build on the experience of these moving forward.

- f. **Delivering Housing Improvements – Communications Plan** - The Communications Plan outlines how we communicate with, and inform our customers of progress of the five year Scottish Housing Quality Standard investment programme to ensure tenants, owners and the local community in general understands the benefits and progress of the programme. As the Standard was achieved in March 2015 the focus of our communications is now publicising the work which has been carried out and the community benefits delivered by the investment programme, as well as our plans to maintain houses at the required Standard. Future investment programmes will also reflect the energy efficiency standards we are now required to meet and the Communications Plan will be developed to include this important element of the standard.
- g. **Choice Based Lettings Pilot - HomeChoice@Renfrewshire** – The pilot commenced on 28 January 2013 solely for the multi storey flats at Gallowhill in Paisley. Following on from this, the pilot was expanded to the Foxbar area of Paisley in November 2013.

In advance of the pilot operating in both areas, significant publicity and promotion was undertaken and ongoing activities continue take place to further promote

choice based lettings in the pilot areas. To ensure we monitor customer experience of the pilot, we continue to undertake a choice based lettings survey with successful applicants and make any changes to process that are highlighted through this where required.

- h. **Johnstone Castle Regeneration** – Following the approval of the Johnstone Castle Housing Regeneration Report presented to the Housing and Community Safety Policy Board on 26th August 2014, officers have been working closely with tenants, residents and owners of properties identified for demolition in Johnstone Castle. Our Regeneration Initiatives Coordinator and Development Officer base themselves within the local community centre two days a week to allow tenants and other interested parties to drop in and discuss matters with the team. Officers also attend home visits where requested.

We set up a Facebook group for persons at the affected addresses which allow them to receive information updates on progress of the regeneration of their area as well as allow them to ask questions and discuss issues with officers as they arise.

A project group has been set up with Council Officers, tenants and a representative of the local Tenants and Residents Association who meet 6-weekly to discuss rehousing, demolition and new build progress as well as other matters that arise throughout the regeneration project.

We have been working in partnership with other local registered social landlords to offer a greater choice of house type, size and area choice to our tenants who live at the identified addresses and who require rehousing.

- i. **Housing Consultation Register** – As part of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey, we asked those who participated if they would like to be placed on our Housing Consultation Register. As a member of the register, they could be contacted when we are looking to consult with our tenants on housing issues.
- j. **Customer Surveys** – We have a number of ongoing feedback surveys with customers across a variety of service areas, including;
- Repairs Satisfaction Survey
 - Satisfaction with standard of home when tenants move in
 - Housing Options survey

5. Engaging with our wider customer groups during 2014/15

We also engage with residents who are not tenants of Renfrewshire Council (including home owners, homeless people and people threatened with homelessness, people in private rented accommodation and tenants of other Registered Social Landlords).

Furthermore, we have internal clients for whom we carried out work through our Property Services division during 2014/15.

One of the key outcomes of the Customer Engagement Strategy is to ensure we are engaging with the various different customer groups we have, not just Council house tenants. We aim to increase opportunities for customers who are not tenant activists to be involved in monitoring performance and help shape service delivery.

a. **Homeless and potentially homeless People** – We understand that although these client groups may not be as easy to consult with as some of our other tenant and customer groups, that due to the nature of the services we provide, it is critical that we engage in order to provide the services which meet their needs.

- We carry out a satisfaction survey with every client after their first housing options interview, to gauge the standard of the service they received and the quality of the advice they were given. In 2014/15 of the 328 service users we consulted with, 97.6% stated that they were pleased with the quality of guidance and information they were given
- When clients are leaving temporary accommodation, they are asked to complete a satisfaction survey which asks them if the service met their needs, as well as what they liked and what they did not like about the service. Of the 181 service users who completed 'exit surveys' during 2014/15, 92% said they were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the overall quality of the temporary accommodation provided.
- All service users who attend the George Street Service are asked to complete a satisfaction survey, the responses from these have helped to develop improvements within the service.
- Anyone who attends the Home For Keeps workshops at the George Street service complete a survey on their knowledge on all the workshops before and after, satisfaction surveys are also completed.
- We also conduct a satisfaction survey in relation to the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme. The results already show 100% satisfaction with the scheme from landlords who are participating and who would recommend the scheme to other landlords.
- In order to improve engagement levels for those who have been traditionally difficult to engage with before, such as those with a record of repeat homelessness, offending or addictions, we have commissioned Turning Point Scotland to intensively support and engage with these service users including the deployment of 'peer workers' to assist with effective engagement.

b. **Property Services Technical Unit** - Listed below are some of the varied projects that Property Services have worked on over the last year

- Early Years Programme - Pre 5 Provision - across Renfrewshire
- Johnstone Town Hall
- Linwood School
- Mossvale/St James Shared Campus, Paisley
- St Fergus Primary School, Paisley
- St John Bosco/Bargarran Shared Campus, Erskine
- St Paul's Primary School/Foxlea Nursery, Paisley
- Tweedie Hall, Linwood

Projects commence with a series of Focus Group meetings, where technical staff work collaboratively with colleagues from other Council departments, staff, parent groups, local users, local traders, stakeholders, Community Councils etc. The object is to enable the Groups to influence the design and deliver a highly efficient,

sustainable facility with flexible and effective spaces for working, teaching and learning.

In some projects there have been a series of public consultation meetings, in others, formal public Pre Planning Consultations. Furthermore, as construction work proceeds, local residents and elected officials are informed on progress by a series of newsletters and also by web updates.

c. **Energy Management Unit** – We engaged with our customers through a variety of different methods, including:

- Providing home visits from an Energy Advocate Service
- Providing visits to schools and other public building by an Energy Officer
- Identify and implement energy saving measures in all public buildings
- We were involved in the annual Renfrewshire Money Week – giving energy advice to those who attend
- We have established the Energy Advocacy Renfrewshire (EAR), which is an enhanced energy advice service which engages with the most vulnerable in our communities working with them to resolve complex energy issues. The advocacy service will resolve, as far as possible, billing issues and fuel debt.
- Chairs the Fuel Poverty Forum – which brings together many local groups to ensure that we are focusing on the correct customers and that the best services are offered

d. **Private Sector** - Owner Services continue to provide support to private landlords, private owners and tenants in the private rented sector.

The Council also engaged with over 4,090 owners during the year to consult with them to organise common repairs in blocks. The Council also provides a range of specific management services to 973 owners and 1,563 Council properties under the Property Factors Act (Scotland) 2011.

6. 2015/16 – Developing a new Customer Engagement Strategy

Over the next year, we will develop a revised Customer Engagement Strategy, to replace the existing strategy which has been in place since 2010. Some of the factors we will take into account when developing our new strategy will include;

- The views of our tenants and other customers and stakeholders
- Changes to customers preferred methods for consultation (e.g. growth in use of social media channels) since the last strategy was adopted
- Evaluation of who makes up our customer groups – changes since 2010
- Statutory requirements and identified areas of good practice for consulting with customers
- Revised structures and priorities of Development and Housing Services

We will involve our tenants and other customers in this exercise and the revised strategy will include improvement actions to enable us to achieve the desired outcomes of the new strategy.

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