

To: Communities, Housing & Planning Policy Board

On: 18 January 2022

Report by: Director of Communities and Housing Services

Heading: Housing Customer Engagement Annual Report 2020/21

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Housing Customer Engagement Annual Report for 2020/21 reviews progress made in relation to engagement and consultation over the last year and outlines the resources made available by the Council to promote tenant involvement.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Policy Board:
- (i) notes the Housing Customer Engagement Annual Report 2020/21 attached as Appendix 1;
 - (ii) note that due to the restrictions in place relating to Covid, the normal annual re-registration process for Tenants' and Residents' Associations will not take place and, where applicable, Enhanced Registration status and eligibility to apply for grant funding from the Housing Revenue Account will be carried forward from March 2020 for the 2022/23 registration year; and
 - (iii) notes that a revised Tenant Participation Strategy is being prepared and will be brought to a future meeting of the Communities Housing and Planning Policy board in 2022 for consideration.
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3. Background

- 3.1. This Housing Customer Engagement Annual Report outlines how the Council has engaged with tenants and other customer groups over the period April 2020 to March 2021. It also sets out an action plan for the current financial year 2021/22. Key drivers for this are:

- Regulatory and statutory duties to consult with tenants and to involve tenants in the scrutiny of performance
 - Consultation and engagement with tenants and other customer groups to inform ongoing service development and continuous improvement
 - The development of a new Tenant Participation Strategy which reflects current and future priorities and outcomes
- 3.2. The Customer Engagement Annual Report will be circulated to Tenants' and Residents' Groups and partner organisations. It will be available online from the Council's website and will be made available in Council offices when they reopen to the public.
- 3.3. Members are asked to note changes to the annual registration process for Tenants' and Residents' Groups in 2021/22 due to the Coronavirus pandemic as detailed in section 3 of the attached report. Enhanced Registration status, where applicable, was carried forward from March 2020 into this financial year and it is proposed that this will again be carried forward into the 2022/23 registration year.
- 3.4. In light of restrictions due to the pandemic, opportunities are being explored to enhance digital communication methods and make sure that the Council can continue to actively engage with tenants and tenant representatives.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – None
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None
3. **Community Planning** –
 - **Safer and Stronger** – Tenant and resident involvement in service development to create more stable communities and improve service delivery.
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** – None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** –
 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.

8. **Health & Safety** – None
 9. **Procurement** – None
 10. **Risk** – None
 11. **Privacy Impact** – None.
 12. **Cosla Policy Position** – Not applicable
 13. **Climate Risk** - None
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Background Papers

(a) Report to the Communities Housing and Planning Policy Board on 27 October 2020, '*Customer Engagement Annual Report 2019/20*'.

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Communities, Housing and Planning Services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting.

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Customer Engagement Annual Report 2020 – 2021

Planning and Housing Team
Communities and Housing Services

1. Renfrewshire Council'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 services, 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.

Renfrewshire Council's Customer Engagement Strategy for Housing was approved in August 2010. It recognises the importance of these issues, and sets out plans for widening the scope of engagement across a broad range of customer groups.

2. 2020/21 Annual Report

This Report outlines how the Council has engaged with tenants and customer groups over the period April 2020 to March 2021. Along with a continuing focus on tenant participation, the Council has also sought to engage with a broad group of customers on housing and housing related issues.

The action plan for the coming year which is usually included at the end of this report is not present because the Tenants Information Service (TIS) have been instructed as consultants and 'tenants' friend' to draft a new Tenant Participation Strategy to replace the current strategy which was approved by the Board in 2010. The new strategy will be brought to a future meeting of the Communities, Housing and Planning Board for consideration.

3. Tenant Participation Arrangements

The participation outcome for the Scottish Social Housing Charter requires landlords to *'manage their business so that: tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with'*.

The results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey (2020) indicated that 93.7% of tenants were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the opportunities provided to them to participate in the Council's (as their landlord's) decision making processes which was an improvement from the 2018 survey result of 87.8%.

Renfrewshire Council's tenant participation arrangements seek to support engagement at both local and Renfrewshire-wide levels.

Registered Tenants' Organisations (RTOs)

The Council maintains a register of all Tenant 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.

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

Representatives of Registered Tenant Organisations are consulted by Council officers on a range of housing-related issues affecting their members and they are able to contribute to and influence the development of housing policy and service delivery.

As at the end of March 2021, there were 10 tenant organisations on the Enhanced Register of Tenant Organisations in Renfrewshire. There are 8 further groups on the Register of Tenant Organisations but they do not currently meet the enhanced registration criteria.

As a result of the restrictions that have been in place since March 2020, in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, it was not possible to carry out the normal annual registration process for 2020/21 as tenant groups had been unable to hold public meetings as detailed within the enhanced registration criteria. It is therefore proposed that all groups included on the Enhanced Register of Tenant Organisations at March 2020 will continue to retain this status for this financial year and the 2022/23 registration year.

Neighbourhood Housing Forums (NHF's)

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

Examples of the type of work approved by the Forums include: front hedge removal and replacement with fencing; slabbing & mono-blocking; hard landscaping of backcourts; handrails at common paths and exterior painting.

Customer Scrutiny

Because of restrictions (since March 2020), face to face meetings between Council officers and Tenant Representatives had to move online where possible. We have used other means of communication, including telephone, email and Microsoft Teams to continue to consult with the Tenants Scrutiny Panel, Tenants and Residents Associations and High Rise & Sheltered Quality Circles. While members of these groups have not been able to for example conduct in person inspections, they have instead taken part in various online meetings, including: the Annual Return on the Charter and input to the design and presentation of the Tenants Charter Report.

4. Customer Engagement in 2020/21

Over the past year, Communities, Housing and Planning Services have engaged with tenants and wider customer groups on a range of service matters as detailed further within this report.

4.1 Communicating with tenants and customers

- **Peoples News:** The Council's tenant newsletter, the People's News, was delivered to all Council tenants in Renfrewshire. In the last year it has included articles on housing investment, the Council's response to the pandemic and new build developments. The newsletter is available in a range of different formats in response to individual needs (such as large print and audio CD) and is available on request to other service users.
- **Scottish Social Housing Charter Report to Tenants:** following consultation with tenants, a special edition of the People's News was published on the Annual Housing Charter Tenant Report. This highlighted how the Service had performed over the previous twelve months with comparisons between other landlords and against previous years performance.
- **The Good Times:** The Council publishes a quarterly newsletter which is distributed to all Council tenants living within sheltered housing complexes. Articles include relevant health advice, forthcoming outings, events and activities organised by our Health and Wellbeing team and good news stories from tenants across all complexes. The newsletter has continued to be distributed throughout the COVID19 pandemic and has been a source of positive stories, information and support throughout a challenging time for tenants, many of whom were shielding during this time. Included in the newsletter is the most recent reports and feedback from the Quality Circle group. Tenants are invited to give feedback on the content and design of the "Good Times" to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose.

4.2 Customer insight

As part of the Council's commitment to meet the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter and to continually monitor services, regular 'point of service' surveys are carried out:

- **Repairs satisfaction:** Tenants are contacted by telephone following the completion of a repair, to find out what they think of the service they have received. Satisfaction with the repairs services in 2020/21 was 92.01%.
- **Standard of accommodation survey:** At the start of a new tenancy, new tenants are asked to participate in a satisfaction survey to ascertain satisfaction levels with the quality of the home when they move in. Due to pandemic restrictions this survey has had a very low response to verify a robust return. However, as restrictions are lifted it is expected that the completion of these surveys will resume.

- **Housing Options:** The Council carries out satisfaction surveys with clients after their first housing options interview at Homeless Services to gauge the standard of the service they received and the quality of the advice they were given. In 2020/21, of 76 service users who were consulted, 96% stated that they were pleased with the quality of advice and information they were given.
- **Temporary accommodation:** Service users leaving temporary accommodation are asked to complete a satisfaction survey which asks if the service they received met their needs, as well as what they liked and did not like about the temporary accommodation. Of the 76 service users who completed 'exit surveys' during 2020/21, 94.7% said they were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the overall quality of the temporary accommodation provided.
- **Owners survey:** In 2020/21, over 221 owners took part in a survey about factoring services and 62.4% stated they were satisfied with the service provided.
- **Homes for Keeps:** Due to changes during the pandemic period, Homes for Keeps is now part of the wider Resettlement process to assist people (regardless of age) transition into their permanent tenancies.

4.3 Customer consultation and engagement

During 2020/21 tenants were consulted on a number of matters:

- **Annual report on the Charter:** Tenant representatives were consulted on the performance indicators and the style and format of the Annual Tenant Report on the Charter in October 2021.
- **Rent Increase Consultation:** Renfrewshire Council has a statutory duty to consult tenants before increasing rents. To help inform the decision on rents for 2020/21, consultation was undertaken in December 2020 and January 2021 involving discussion with tenant representatives at the annual Council Wide Forum, an on-line survey of Council tenants and a telephone survey of Council tenants. Only a very small number of tenants responded to the online survey (5 respondents), but over 600 telephone interviews with tenants were conducted by external consultants during January 21 (this represents 5% of Council tenants). The majority of tenants who took part in the consultation agreed with a 1.5% increase.

4.4 Regeneration and Renewal Areas

A joint report was approved by the Council on 17 December 2020 setting out a major £100m programme of housing-led regeneration and renewal, over the next 10 years. A further report to the Communities Housing and Planning Policy Board on 18th May 2021 authorised the Director of Communities and Housing Services to consult on regeneration and investment proposals with Council tenants, residents and private owners in the first 8 areas in phase 1 of the Regeneration and Renewal programme.

An extensive consultation exercise was undertaken with tenants, residents and private owners to gather their views on the regeneration proposals for each area. The feedback received provides an insight into how people feel about their local area in general, including the external environment, quality of the local neighbourhood and wider issues which they feel affects quality of life and the wellbeing of local residents.

The findings of the Consultation exercise are being reported to this meeting of the Communities Housing and Planning Policy Board and if approved, it is proposed that a Neighbourhood Renewal Group will be established for each area, co-ordinated by officers from Communities and Housing but with participation from other council services, partner organisations and local tenants and residents in each of the 8 regeneration and renewal areas.

- **Johnstone Castle Regeneration:**

The final handovers of the new Council homes were completed in April 2021. This development was successful in achieving awards at both the Scottish Homes Awards 2021 for affordable development of the year and achieved Regeneration project of the year at the Herald property Awards.

- **Paisley West End:**

Officers continue to work with the Council's RSL partner Sanctuary Scotland and the Scottish Government on the delivery of the regeneration of Paisley West End. The approved Masterplan is being refreshed by Sanctuary and their appointed architects Anderson Bell Christie to ensure deliverability. The revised Masterplan will see high levels of vacant properties being replaced with around 150 high quality newbuild homes for social rent and affordable sale in the West End.

All Council tenants from within the masterplan area have been successfully rehoused. As the revised Masterplan progresses residents and owners in the wider West End area will continue to be kept informed.

- **Tannahill Area Regeneration:**

The Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board approved a housing investment strategy for the Tannahill area of Ferguslie Park on 30 October 2018. This strategy included a newbuild housing development of 101 newbuild homes to replace existing Council housing in the area. The first handovers are likely to take place in Summer 2022.

Despite coronavirus restrictions, the Tannahill Liaison group have continued to engage with officers, including an outdoor face to face meeting where tenants chose various elements of the new build homes and tenants were also involved in suggesting new street names for the development. Officers continue to engage with the tenants and residents through newsletters, regular telephone calls and emails. A dedicated Tannahill mailbox for any electronic enquiries has also been established. Communication arrangements will continue to be reviewed as restrictions are eased and where possible, digital methods of communication will also be used where possible.

4.5 Engaging with our wider customer groups during 2020/21

A key outcome for the Customer Engagement Strategy is to ensure there is active engagement with various customer groups across the range of housing services and that opportunities exist for customers to be involved in monitoring performance and helping shape service delivery. This has been challenging due to the restrictions which were in place for much of 2020/21.

Turning Point Scotland and Blue Triangle Housing Association continued to be commissioned to provide wraparound support and use a 'Housing First' approach to support and engage with an increased number of service users from the previous year. Housing First provides the tailored support which meets each individual's needs and will increase the likelihood of the individual sustaining their settled tenancy.

As part of this approach during 2020/21, mobile phones were provided free of charge to service users so that they could keep in touch with their support provider during 'lockdowns'.

When moving from temporary to settled accommodation, many service users worked with their Housing Options Adviser to carry out 'virtual viewings' via their mobile phones of the properties being offered. This helped to reduce footfall at a time when there were restrictions on non-essential travel, as well as maximising the use of a digital approach to participation and service delivery

- **Sheltered Housing and Amenity Housing**

A new web-based recording tool, 'Better Futures' is being implemented to support continual improvement and maximise outcomes for service users and tenants in sheltered housing, to enable housing support service users' needs to be recorded over a period of time. Better Futures provides a picture of an individual's progress against objectives or targets they have set/agreed with their Sheltered Housing Officer. The system can produce valuable information about how an individual's situation has changed from when they started using the service.

46 tablets were distributed to tenants who are supported to use their devices by our Digital Participation Officer, with assistance to develop their digital skills; including internet safety; online shopping; safe systems and online communication with family and friends. We have now completed the installation of WiFi in all of our sheltered lounges for tenants to access. This will help tenants with our activities, social groups and face to face training, and means tenants can go online in the lounge without a mobile data connection.

Over 300 enhanced weekly welfare checks have been carried out to provide support to tenants and gain up to date information on health and wellbeing needs during the COVID19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions. This coupled with over 280 daily welfare checks ensured tenants remained fully supported during a significantly challenging time.

During the unprecedented challenges throughout 2020/21, the Sheltered Housing team developed a broad range of innovative art, poetry, music, video and digital projects to support our older tenants, many of whom were particularly vulnerable, using their own words, thoughts and choices to reach out to family, friends and the community. Projects included:

A 'sharing our world to remind you we're still in yours' initiative used funding from Creative Scotland for a community arts venture aimed at enabling those shielding in Renfrewshire to reach out to the wider community through creative writing. Tenants produced pictures, poems and stories which told the wider community of their experience of lockdown. The touching words and personal memories provided an outlet for feelings of fear, grief, hope, humour and support for one another. The work was displayed on billboards and advertisements across Renfrewshire's main towns.

Partnering with local radio station Paisley FM to broadcast a weekly "Community Request Show". Tenants send in requests for songs and 'shout outs' for birthdays and anniversaries for family and friends. Staff posted the link to our tenant email and Facebook groups, so the show could also be heard on catch up. We purchased small digital radios for those who did not have one to ensure every tenant would be able to enjoy their weekly music tribute.

Online video sessions, supported by our Digital Participation Officer, who ensured that everyone could access the sessions with weekly Zoom coffee mornings and online quizzes proved particularly popular, as well as on-going support to keep in touch with family and friends.

An annual update of 'You Said, We Did' was published in a poster format and displayed in all Council complexes, providing information on where tenant suggestions have been used to help improve the service.

4.6 Housing Support Team

A new Senior Housing Support Officer has been recruited to further develop and improve the liaison with external providers and partners supporting those who receive enhanced wraparound support via initiatives such as Housing First and produce regular analysis and checks that service users outcomes are being met. The number of service users being provided with enhanced support increased again this year, in recognition of the benefits this can have for those with a range of support needs to have settled housing.

The Housing Support Service publishes a newsletter which is distributed to all Council tenants and other service users who receive Housing Support. Articles have included updated and relevant housing and money advice, good news stories from across the service and commissioned services, staff updates and relevant health information to promote healthy lifestyles and wellbeing.

Senior managers undertake monthly quality assurance audits to ensure consistency across service provision.

Housing Support Plan Review questionnaires are used to give individuals the chance to tell the Council what they think about services, the feedback from which helps improve services to clients.

A joint tenancy sustainment project “Make it Your Own”, continues to be delivered in partnership with Impact Arts. This involves supporting people to learn new DIY, interior design, textiles and visual art skills. Every project is tailored to every individual's needs and tastes to ensure they get the most from their time on the programme. The project runs from a workshop in Hunterhill, Paisley where those who join attend a weekly one-to-one session for 12 weeks and receive a budget for their own home.

Support was provided to clients to help furnish their tenancy with donated or recycled furniture items through our “Buddies Recycled” programme, with the team continuing to help homeless applicants to resettlement into their tenancy, given the success of the Move On project established during last years ‘lock-downs’ to help people move safely from temporary accommodation to their new home.

Private Sector

Officers from the Owners Services team provide support to private owners, landlords and tenants in the private rented sector. The Council engaged with over 973 owners during the year to consult on and organise repairs in common blocks.

4.7 Supporting Engagement

- **Attendance at National Tenant Events** – due to government guidance on the pandemic, conferences which delegates have attended in previous years were cancelled. However, if these events are arranged in future, we will support tenant representatives to attend where possible.
- **Resources** - To support and develop tenant participation activities, funding is provided from the Housing Revenue Account.
- **Staffing** – Four development officers within the Planning and Housing Team are available to support Customer Engagement. One of these development officers is a key contact dedicated to Tenant Participation. Two Service Improvement Officers and a Regeneration Officer are also available to assist where required.
- **Financial support** to assist Registered Tenant Organisations with running costs, annual grants of up to £600 can be applied for, along with one-off grants for equipment such as printers or computers (up to £500).
- **Training events and conferences** - Opportunities are made available for tenant representatives to attend seminars, training events and national tenant conferences. Representatives are asked to provide feedback from these events to allow the Development Officer to cascade any relevant information onto other tenant groups to ensure they also benefit from this training/information.

- **Access to independent advice** – The Council is a member of both the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and Tenant Information Service (TIS). Advice and assistance can be accessed from these organisations as required.
- **Other forms of support** including venue hire, catering and publicity for consultation events; the cost of transport for delegates to and from consultation meetings, conferences and seminars.

During 2020/21, expenditure on Tenant Participation was:

Grants to Registered Tenant Organisations	£835
'Peoples News' – tenant newsletter and Annual Tenants' Report on the Scottish Social Housing Charter	£9,362
Subscription to the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)	£1,875
Facilitating remote tenant consultation and meetings, including the Tenants Scrutiny Panel	£4,904
Total*	£16,976

**expenditure on staff resources and administration costs are not included in the above figures.*

5.0 Tenant Participation Strategy

The Communities Housing and Planning Board on 17 August 2021 agreed that a new Tenant Participation Strategy should be developed and that an external consultancy service should be commissioned to support tenants and help deliver the new strategy, this will be presented to a future Board in 2022.

In September, the Tenants Information Service (TIS) were appointed after a short tender exercise involving the Tenants Scrutiny Panel.

TIS have worked closely with tenants and Officers across the Housing Service to understand the current arrangements for tenant involvement, this has included: desktop analysis of tenant participation, facilitating tenant focus groups and a joint tenant and staff liaison group. Due to current restrictions, these meetings have been held online. These discussions will assist in the formation of the new Tenant Participation Strategy.