

To: Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board

On: 17 August 2021

Report by: Director of Communities and Housing

Heading: Review of Tenant Participation

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals to review and update the Council's arrangements for consulting and engaging with tenants and tenant representatives. It proposes that a new Tenant Participation Strategy is prepared for approval at a future meeting of the Policy Board, taking account of the points set out in section 3 and section 4 of the report.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Policy Board:
- (i) notes that a new Tenant Participation Strategy will be developed as outlined in this report and that the strategy will be presented to a future meeting of the Policy Board for approval;
 - (ii) notes that external consultancy advice will be commissioned from an organisation which specialises in providing best practice advice and support to tenants and social landlords on tenant participation issues; and
 - (iii) agrees that while consideration is given to the ongoing arrangements for Local Neighbourhood Forum, the project budget of £269,500 for the financial year 2021/22, will be utilised to deliver the existing lists of small scale projects which have previously been identified by Forum Members.
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3. Background

- 3.1 There are legal duties and regulatory standards which the Council must meet with respect to tenant participation and tenant engagement.
- 3.2 The 2001 Housing (Scotland) Act requires local authorities and registered social landlords to:
- prepare a strategy for promoting tenant participation which includes provision for obtaining and taking account of the views of tenants and tenant organisations and an assessment of the resources required to implement the strategy
 - maintain a register of tenant organisations
 - notify tenants and tenant organisations of proposals which would have a significant effect on tenants (eg policies on housing management, repairs and maintenance), standards of service and tenant participation strategy.
- 3.3 The section on 'customer/ landlord relationship' in the Scottish Social Housing Charter includes the following outcomes for all social landlords:
- *'Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.'*
 - *'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.'*
- 3.4 Current arrangements for tenant participation are based on the Customer Engagement Strategy approved in August 2010, with subsequent amendments approved in January 2011 and incremental additions over recent years (eg the development of Quality Circles, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and local implementation groups in regeneration area etc). An annual report on customer engagement activity is presented to the Policy Board which describes the full range of tenant and resident engagement undertaken during the year.
- 3.5 Budget provision for tenant participation is included within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), including allowances for grants to tenants' and residents' associations, tenant consultation, neighbourhood forum projects, and employee costs for officers who support tenant participation activity. All resources used to support tenant participation activity are from the HRA and so entirely funded from tenants' rent payments.
- 3.6 Tenant organisations which meet the Council's 'enhanced' registration criteria are eligible for grant funding (annual grants of up to £600 and one-off grants of up to £500 for equipment etc) and are able to participate in the Council's Tenant Participation structures, including Neighbourhood Forums and the Council Wide Forum.

- 3.7 The 2020 Tenant Satisfaction Survey reported a very high level of tenant satisfaction with opportunities to participate in the Council's decision-making processes – with 94% saying they were very or fairly satisfied with opportunities for participation (up from 88% in the 2018 survey and considerably higher than the Scottish average for all social landlords of 86% and local authority/ GHA average of 81% in 2019/20) .
- 3.8 Nevertheless, some aspects work better than others, and there is a need to review and refresh arrangements to ensure that the Council is engaging as fully and effectively as possible with tenants. The number of active tenant groups which meet the Council's registration criteria in full has reduced in recent years (now only 11 tenant organisations) and this has impacted on the level of tenant engagement at Neighbourhood Forums and attendance at Council Wide Forum meetings.
- 3.9 The HRA includes an annual budget of £269,500 for small-scale environmental works projects, with the budget disaggregated to local neighbourhood forums in proportion to the housing stock in each area. However, because of low levels of attendance at most forum meetings, decisions are now often taken on local project spend with very little or no input from tenants or tenant representatives.
- 3.10 A number of projects have previously been approved by the local neighbourhood forum but await implementation and confirmation of funding. Given the challenges that have been faced in holding meaningful forum meetings during Covid restrictions, it is considered that it would be appropriate to utilise the budget allocation within the Housing Revenue Account to deliver a range of small scale environmental and neighbourhood enhancement works allowing a new list of projects to be considered by the forum that emerges from the Tenant Participation Strategy Review.
- 3.11 Initial discussions have taken place with tenant representatives about what works well in terms of current arrangements and where there is room for improvements. The 2020 Tenant Satisfaction Survey also provides feedback on participation and communication. Some of the key points to note are:
- Council tenants most often say that, when the Council is consulting them on housing issues, their **preferred methods of communication** are letters, telephone calls and through the tenants' newsletter (People's News).
 - Tenant representatives would welcome more **shared events**, bringing together different tenant groups and facilitating networking between tenant representatives.
 - The Council should **continue to support existing and new tenant and resident groups**, with officers available to attend TRA meetings.
 - There is scope to expand the role of the **Tenant Scrutiny Panel**, to better promote the work of the group and encourage more tenants to get involved in tenant scrutiny.
 - The customer feedback surveys which are already in place (eg ongoing surveys on repairs, standard of accommodation for new tenants, housing options, temporary accommodation) provide important **customer insight** and better use could be made of customer complaints to inform ongoing service improvement.

- Better use could be made of **social media**, including helping the Council to communicate with groups who are less likely to take part in traditional tenant participation activities.
- The **Neighbourhood Forums** are not working effectively in most areas and other ways of agreeing spend on the neighbourhood forum budget should be considered.

3.12 There has been significant disruption to housing services since March 2020 because of the Covid pandemic and tenant participation arrangements continue to be affected by the restrictions which mean it is not possible to hold face-to-face meetings with tenant organisations. During the last 18 months, increasing use has been made of digital methods of participation and there is scope to extend this further. This will be addressed in the development of the new strategy.

4. Developing a new Tenant Participation Strategy for Renfrewshire

4.1 Taking account of initial feedback from tenant representatives, it is proposed that further consultation takes place and a new Tenant Participation Strategy is developed which addresses the key areas for consideration set out in Table 1 below. External consultancy advice will be commissioned from an organisation which specialises in providing best practice advice and support to tenants and social landlords on tenant participation issues.

4.2 The preparation of the new strategy will be subject to consultation and engagement and it is anticipated that the Document will be presented to the first meeting of the Policy Board in 2022 for approval.

Table 1

	Comments*	Key Areas for Consideration
Tenants and Residents Associations	<p>11 TRAs currently meet the Council's criteria for the Enhanced Register of Tenant Organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridge of Weir, Charleston, Cochrane Castle, Corseford, Ferguslie Park North, Glenburn, Howwood Rd Area, Maxwellton Court, Provost Close, Quarrelton, Spateston <p>There are 8 other TRAs on the register of tenant organisations in Renfrewshire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arkleston & Newmains, Caledonia Glen, Hunterhill, Johnstone Castle, Kirklandneuk, Moorpark, Paisley West End, Williamsburgh 	<p>Continue to provide support for new and existing groups; review opportunities to better promote TRAs and encourage more tenant involvement.</p> <p>Review the criteria for 'enhanced' registration status with a view to simplifying the process.</p> <p>Consider ways of better engaging with tenants, increasing membership and involving younger tenants.</p>

<p>Grants to Tenants' and Residents' Associations</p>	<p>TRAs which meet the enhanced registration criteria are eligible for grant funding (annual and one-off grants) from the HRA.</p>	<p>Review the level of grant available to local groups.</p>
<p>Council Wide Forum</p>	<p>The Forum currently meets once each year. The number of tenant representatives has reduced in recent years but there is scope to review the format and encourage higher levels of participation by Council tenants and tenant representatives.</p>	<p>Change the number, format and agenda for meetings and widen attendance, with one of the meetings each year open to all Council tenants (and promoted through social media).</p> <p>Meetings could include geographically based workshop discussions chaired by the Local Housing Managers and focusing primarily on local estate management issues.</p>
<p>Neighbourhood Forum & Budget</p>	<p>There is a Housing Revenue Account budget of £269,500 for neighbourhood forum projects, disaggregated to 7 areas based on housing stock (Paisley North, Paisley South, Foxbar, Glenburn, Ferguslie Park, Renfrew & Gallowhill, Johnstone & villages) for small-scale projects relating to environmental works and security.</p> <p>Because of the lack of tenant attendance at the neighbourhood forum meetings, projects tend to be identified by officers and local elected members.</p>	<p>Review the neighbourhood forum budget, project criteria and decision-making processes.</p> <p>Assess the format of meetings and the process to identify projects.</p> <p>Consider link to the budgets and projects supported via Local Area Partnership's</p>
<p>Tenant Scrutiny Panel</p>	<p>Tenant scrutiny is an important part of continuously reviewing and improving the Council's landlord performance and ensuring active tenant participation. There is scope to increase the number of Council tenants involved in the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, increase the scope of the Panel's work and better support Panel's scrutiny activities.</p>	<p>Continue to support the work of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, recruit more tenants and provide training for tenant volunteers.</p> <p>Increase the Tenant Scrutiny Panel's involvement in the preparation of Council's Annual Assurance Statement which is</p>

		<p>submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.</p> <p>Involve the Tenant Scrutiny Panel in the preparation of agendas etc for new Council Wide Forum meetings.</p>
Quality Circles	<p>Quarterly inspections are undertaken by two groups – multi-storey flats and sheltered housing. This works reasonably well, but the groups would benefit from more tenant participants.</p>	<p>Continue to support the work of the Quality Circles, recruit more tenants, and provide training for tenant volunteers.</p> <p>Create new a new Quality Circle to address estate management issues.</p>
Regeneration areas – local liaison groups	<p>Local liaison groups were established at Johnstone Castle and Tannahill to ensure tenants and residents are fully involved in regeneration plans for the local areas.</p>	<p>Note that new groups will be established in each of the eight areas in phase 1 of the Council's Housing-led Regeneration and Renewal programme, with extensive consultation currently taking place with tenants, residents, and owners in these areas.</p>

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – None arising directly from this report. The cost of consultancy support as referred to in section 4 will be met from within existing HRA budget provision.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - none
3. **Community/Council Planning** –
 - **Our Renfrewshire is thriving** – effective tenant participation gives tenants the opportunity to influence decisions about housing services and gives the Council stronger links with local communities.
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** – external consultants will be commissioned in line with the Council's requirements on the procurement of services.
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – N/A
13. **Climate Risk** –N/A

List of Background Papers

- (a) Report to the Housing and Community Safety Policy Board, 10 August 2010, 'Outcome of Consultation on draft Customer Engagement Strategy'
- (b) Report to the Housing and Community Safety Policy Board, 18 January 2011, 'Consultation with Tenant Groups'
- (c) Report to the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board, 27 October 2020, 'Housing Customer Engagement Annual Report 2012/20'

Author: Lesley Muirhead, Planning and Housing Manager,
email: lesely.muirhead@renfrewshire.gov.uk