

REPORT TO: HOUSING, DUNDEE CONTRACT SERVICES AND
ENVIRONMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE -
23 MARCH, 2009

REPORT ON: REVIEW OF THE TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

REPORT NO.: 103-2009

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1. To seek Committee approval to a revised Tenant Participation Strategy.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. It is recommended that Committee adopts the proposed Tenant Participation Strategy.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1. None.

4. **MAIN TEXT**

- 4.1. The current Tenant Participation Strategy was approved by Committee in October 2004. In September 2007 a consultation strategy designed to 'dovetail' with the Tenant Participation Strategy was included.

The Housing Department is committed to continuous improvement of its services and implementing best practice. To ensure that tenant participation in Dundee reflects best practice the Council's tenant participation arrangements were examined through a Peer Review which was facilitated by the Scottish Housing Best Value Network (SHBVN).

A focus group of tenants and officers have examined the findings of the Peer Review and produced revisions to the Tenant Participation Strategy. A consultation on these revisions was carried out between May and October 2008. The Housing Department has used the draft revisions along with the comments received to draft a new Tenant Participation Strategy.

- 4.2. The main improvements made to the strategy are:

- 4.2.1. A commitment to hold a minimum of two tenants' forums each year, in addition to existing commitments regarding meetings between elected members, tenants and Housing staff.
- 4.2.2. Publishing twice yearly tenants' new bulletins to inform all tenants of the issues discussed at Housing Forum Meetings and to give information on how to be involved in forthcoming consultations.

4.2.3. Inclusion of an action plan detailing commitments which are specific, measurable and describes how we will report performance against our commitments. The action plan includes for example:

- The publication of a programme of future participation activities (the Tenant Participation Action Plan).
- A commitment to regularly survey satisfaction with the Tenant Participation service and set targets for improvement.
- Commitments to provide training to tenants to allow them to make an informed contribution to consultations.

5. **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1. This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti Poverty, Equality Impact and Risk Assessment. There are no major issues.

6. **CONSULTATIONS**

6.1. The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance), Head of Finance, Assistant Chief Executive and all other Chief Officers have been consulted on this report.

6.2. The views of all tenant organisations registered with the Council and a range of 'equalities organisations' across the City were sought on the proposed changes to the Tenant Participation Strategy. All Council tenants were also invited through a Housing Bulletin issued during July 2008 and the Housing News issued during October 2008 to give their views on the proposed changes.

6.3. Tenant members of the focus group were:

Liz Brown	Rockwell Tenants' Association
Jessie Gault	Blackness Tenants' Association
Morag Hutcheson	Mill O' Mains Tenants and Residents Association
Margaret Scott	Dundee Federation of Tenants Associations
Rita Smart	Individual Member - Dundee Federation of Tenants Associations
Rena Smith	Balmoral Tenants' Association

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1. None.

ELAINE ZWIRLEIN
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

FEBRUARY 2009

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

Tenant Participation Strategy

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Foreword

Dundee City Council has been a leader among social landlords in tenant participation for many years. We are, however, not complacent and have conducted a number of in-depth reviews of our participation arrangements to ensure they are kept to the highest possible standard.

Over the last couple of years we have been aware that in some aspects of tenant participation we have improvements to make. We have reviewed our service with assistance of our colleagues in other local authorities through the Scottish Housing Best Value Network. Through this strategy we have put in place actions to make sure that we continue to give good value for money to our tenants by allowing good participation in our decisions.

This strategy has clear commitments to participation so that any tenant can see and judge our success. Similarly the roles of council officers and Councillors in delivering this strategy are made clear to all.

We are committed to continuous improvement in tenant participation and we are sure that the arrangements we have set in this strategy will help tenants to inform us where improvements are needed.

Recently we have introduced a Tenants handbook to give tenants a readily to hand reference to their rights, responsibilities and where to go for help and information about housing issues. We have also set out our commitments to Customer Care and Standards of Service, so that tenants can be clear about what to expect of the Housing Service.

We want good tenant participation in our services for no other reason than that it is good business sense. Unless we offer people the housing and housing services they want, they will not want the council to be their landlord - that is why we take tenant participation seriously.

Finally we would like to thank all tenants who contributed to the production of this strategy.

**Director of Housing
Convenor**

What is tenant participation?

Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about:

- Housing policies which have an impact on tenants.
- Housing conditions and how housing (and related) services are delivered to tenants.
- It is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power.

Background

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires local authorities to have a Tenant Participation Strategy for promoting the participation of their tenants in the development of proposals relating to housing management and services.

The principles for good participation are set out in the National Strategy - 'Partners in Participation'. These principles are summarised below:

- Tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, councillors and housing officers working towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.
- Tenant participation practice should be seen as a continuous process where information, ideas and power are shared, common understandings of problems are strived for and a consensus on solutions is worked out.
- Good tenant participation allows all parties to contribute to the agenda.
- All participants require to have all the information needed to consider the issues properly; that information requires to be clear, timely and accessible and to take account of equal opportunities concerns.
- Processes of decision making should be open, clear and accountable.
- Adequate time should be given to tenant representatives to consider the issues properly. Tenants should have the opportunity to work out a common view in advance of meeting landlords' representatives.
- Good tenant participation requires the landlord to recognise the independence of tenant organisations.
- Good working relationships evolve gradually and are flexible to adapt to local circumstances.
- Tenant organisations require adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
- Tenant participation must meet the requirements of the legislation surrounding equal opportunities. Good practice in participation removes barriers to effective participation arising from ethnicity, geographic location, and special needs language differences, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability.

Our commitment to equal opportunities

The Council has an equal opportunities policy. The policy recognises the need to attain equality for all citizens. When working with tenants we will:

- Promote and encourage the full and active involvement of all tenants in tenant participation.
- Not support or recognise any tenants' organisation, which operates discriminatory practices.
- Support and advise any tenant who encounters barriers arising from ethnicity, special needs, language difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability.
- Provide on request, through the Council's Translation Service, translations of all publicly available documents produced by the Housing Department or in another format which meets tenants' needs.
- Promote good practice amongst Housing Department staff by ensuring there are training arrangements in place covering a range of equal opportunity issues.
- Ensure that all participation activities are conducted in accordance with the department's codes of practice for good tenant participation.

How We Developed the Strategy

We have had formal tenant participation arrangements in place for eighteen years and we currently work with 20 Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs). These arrangements have been developed jointly with tenant's representatives and are designed to ensure that tenants have sufficient opportunity to make an effective contribution to the development of the housing service.

During 2007 we asked a team of tenants and Housing staff from other local authorities and housing associations to appraise our approach to tenant participation (a Peer Review by the Scottish Housing Best Value Network). This team came forward with number recommendations on how we could improve the strategy and our approach to tenant participation.

At the end of 2007 and into 2008 a tenants working group considered the outcome of the Peer Review and brought forward proposals for a revised Tenant Participation Strategy. The Housing Department consulted on these suggestions from May until November 2008 and this strategy is the outcome of this work.

The Aims of the Tenant Participation Strategy

The aims of the tenant participation strategy are to ensure:

- All tenants have the opportunity to participate effectively in the development of the housing service.
- All tenants are aware of the commitments the Housing Department has made to gain tenant involvement.
- All tenants are aware of the standards of service for participation they can expect from the Housing Department.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Refer Action Plan: Monitoring and Evaluation

To demonstrate how we will fulfil these commitments we have summarised our actions in a clear and measurable plan. This action plan details all foreseeable participation activities, such as conferences, focus groups and tenant meetings, considered necessary to ensure effective tenant involvement in the development of all key housing services. We have also set targets and measurements against standards of service for participation.

The main actions which we have committed to take will be reflected in our Local Housing Strategy and the Housing Department's Service Plan and we will demonstrate our progress through the Housing News, regular bulletins and tenant's forum meetings.

The action plan for the tenant participation strategy is appended and will be reviewed annually.

Joint Housing Staff and Tenant Representative Monitoring Group

The implementation of the strategy will be monitored by a group of senior Housing staff and tenant representatives.

Working with Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs)

Refer to Action Plan: Working with Registered Tenant Organisations Regular Activities

The Register of Tenants Organisations

It is the Council's duty under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to maintain a register of tenant organisations. Tenant organisations included on the register:

- Must be able to show that they are run democratically and can represent the views of Council tenants on housing and housing related issues.
- Are entitled to have a say in how the housing service is run and developed.
- Are also entitled to receive information about all key aspects of the service.

We will ensure that the Register of Tenants Associations is kept up to date and is displayed in District Housing Office reception areas, is published on the council's web-site at [HTTP/www](http://www) etc and is made available to anyone on request.

There may be circumstances where an RTO must be removed from the Register. If a RTO operates out with its constitution over a period of time, we would issue it with a 3 month notice, in writing, of our intention to remove it from the register. This notice would specify the reason for the decision, the course of action the RTO would have to take to avoid removal and the appeals procedure if the RTO wished to contest the decision.

We recognise that some tenant organisations may not wish to register. Where appropriate, we will consult with non registered groups, but these consultation arrangements will not be bound by the commitments set out in our strategy and the statutory provisions of the Act. Members of such groups who are Council tenants will maintain their rights to be consulted as individuals.

Resources for Tenant Participation

We recognise that RTOs need resources to help them participate effectively. The resources we provide come in four forms:

- Support and advice from Tenant Participation staff and other Housing staff
- Training and information
- Financial support
- Advice from Independent Housing Advisers

How these resources should be deployed and the amount of funding to be made available to RTOs from rental income is assessed annually by the Director of Housing and Dundee Federation of Tenants' Associations.

The outcome of this assessment will be published in the Housing Department's Annual Performance Report – The Housing News.

Support and Advice from Tenant Participation Staff and Other Housing Staff

The Housing Department have a team of Tenant Participation Officers who are responsible for liaising with tenants groups and to help tenants and staff get the most from the Tenant Participation Strategy. Support and advice from our tenant participation staff may include:

- Helping RTOs to prepare and adopt a constitution which complies with statutory criteria forming part of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
- Helping RTOs to draw up and submit an application to be included on the Council's register.
- Helping RTOs communicate with/obtain the views of their individual members.

It is not just Tenant Participation Officers who are responsible for making sure that tenants have their say and get good information. All staff in the Housing Department will consider tenants' needs in their working arrangements and this will include:

- Provision of information and advice about services they are responsible for delivering.
- Ensuring RTOs receive enough information and in a form which is easily read and understood about proposed service changes.
- Ensuring RTOs can take part in participation arrangements for proposed service changes in a way that minimises administrative burdens of their management committees and office bearers.

Training for Tenants

To ensure that tenants have the knowledge and skills to have an informed input into consultations the Housing Department will develop a training plan for tenants. The aim of this training will be to:

- Give information about departmental policies, departmental decision taking processes and policy and legislative constraints.
- Show how to make an effective and informed input into the department's decision taking processes.
- Show RTOs how to run their affairs in a business like and democratic fashion.
- Provide RTOs with a sense of direction to ensure they achieve the aims and objectives of their organisation.

Financial Support

We are committed to ensure that RTOs are able to participate in the housing service without their members having to bear any personal cost. All RTOs engaged in activities related to Council housing are eligible to apply for a grant every financial year is to help RTOs meet the costs of:

- Seeking the views of their members and informing members of their activities.
- Administrative expenses, including where appropriate, the cost of maintaining office premises.
- Affiliation fees to tenant support organisations.
- Attendance at training activities, conferences and seminars.
- Crèche facilities.

We will meet all reasonable requests from RTOs for assistance with typing, photocopying and other clerical assistance.

Support and Advice from Independent Housing Advisers

We recognise that where tenants are involved in taking forward a policy review, they may require advice from housing experts who are independent of the Council. We would consider request from tenants for this type of advice sympathetically, in light of resources available to the Council.

Where a policy is being developed which may involve stock transfer, we would always ensure that tenants have free access to housing experts who are independent of the Council.

Working with the Dundee Federation of Tenants Associations

The Council recognises that the Dundee Federation of Tenants Associations is the largest representative body for tenants groups in the City. The Council will provide funding and support to the DFTA to help it to be an effective voice for tenants in the City. Regular meetings will take place to ensure that officials, tenant's representatives and Councillors work together in partnership to deliver the Tenant Participation Strategy.

The department's Management Team and Convener of Housing will meet with Dundee Federation of Tenants' Associations on a quarterly basis. These meetings provide opportunities for tenants, to bring forward concerns or proposals on issues which they feel are not, or cannot be met through established decision making processes. The agendas for these meetings are determined by tenant's representatives.

Consulting and giving Information

Refer to Action Plan: Consulting and Giving Information

We will ensure that tenants have the opportunity to have a say in how the housing service should be delivered. We will also ensure tenants are kept updated on service changes and on how their views have been taken on board.

We have also made a number of commitments to ensure that tenants are kept fully informed about proposals or projects which may directly affect their home or local environment. We provide tenants with the opportunity to indicate whether or not we have adhered to these commitments through customer satisfaction surveys. The results of these surveys will be published annually in the department's performance report – The Housing News.

Tenants Forums

Tenants Forums will be held in the Spring and Autumn of each year. These forums will be open to all tenants. The purposes of these forums are to:

- Understand the challenges facing the department.
- Influence how the department intends to face up to them.
- Keep up to date with progress and performance of previously agreed actions.
- Agree, a programme of future consultation activities required to take forward proposed service changes and rent levels.
- Provide feedback on tenant consultations which have taken place.

We will also support conferences on specific issues if more detailed discussions between staff and tenants is required to take forward Council policy.

Housing Bulletins

Following each forum a bulletin will be issued to all tenants summarising information given at the tenants' forum meetings and any feedback received. This information will also be published on the Council's web site and displayed in all the District Housing Office reception areas.

Provision of Information to all Tenants About Day to Day Services

We will keep tenants informed about day to day services. This information will be provided using leaflets, posters, newsletters, the Council's web page, information packs and tenants' handbooks issued to new tenants at tenancy agreement signings.

Each District Housing Office will display information on the service it provides. Display space/boards in the offices will also be made available to DFTA/RTOs.

Standards of Service for Tenant Participation

We have set ourselves standards of service delivery for the provision of information to tenants groups. Our performance against these standards will be measured through our customer satisfaction surveys.

Our standards are:

- When a tenant or RTO writes to the Housing Department, a full reply will be given within ten working days.
- If the information requested is not readily available, an explanation will be given within five working days. A full reply will then follow within a further ten working days.
- If we cannot give a date by which the information requested will be provided, an explanation will be given within five working days.
- All written replies will name the person who is dealing with the enquiry.
- All written information to tenants and RTOs will be in clear, everyday language.
- When invited to a meeting the Housing Department will confirm who will attend. Those attending will be expected to know any details of the subjects to be discussed and be able to explain what influence tenants' views will have on Council decisions.
- When inviting tenants to meetings the department will provide written details of the time, place and purpose of the meeting 10 working days in advance (or less, if agreed by the appropriate tenant representative and the department).

When inviting Councillors and Council officials to meetings, RTOs will provide them with written details of the meeting ten working days in advance where possible.

Details should include the time, place and purpose of the meeting.

RTOs representing an area affected by a major repair and improvement project will always be provided with the following:

- Details of any project planned for their area over the course of the coming year.
- Details of any changes to the start date of any project planned for their area.
- A briefing from the appropriate Housing Officer on how the work will be carried out before it starts on site.
- A briefing from the appropriate Housing Officer prior to any public meeting.
- Regular updates on the progress of projects.
- Reasons for any withdrawal of a project originally planned for their area.

Tenants directly affected by a major repair or improvement project will always receive information about:

- The amount of work that will take place and the level of disruption that it will cause.
- The expected start and completion dates.
- The contact person in the Housing Department.
- An emergency contact number where necessary.

We will, where possible, offer design choices to tenants and RTOs on projects. We will ensure that any meetings required to reach an agreement will provide tenants/RTOs adequate time to consider the issues properly.

Involving Tenants in Evaluating the Housing Service

There are many ways that we want to gather the opinions of tenants and other people who use housing services. For many years we have collected tenants' views on our services through postal surveys. We have set targets for satisfaction with services which are measured through these surveys to help us to improve. We have always reported satisfaction levels with our services through the Housing News. We will continue to do these surveys in the future and we will review these surveys annually.

We also want to expand the opportunities for tenants to let us know how well we are doing our jobs. We have recently started collecting tenant's views through telephone surveys. We are also making more use of focus groups (where we hold a meeting with tenants to discuss an issue in detail) and tenants' conferences for example.

To have a greater depth of involvement in how services are delivered we will encourage tenants to take part in "Tenant Led Inspections". A tenant led inspection is where a group of tenants are assisted in doing a detailed audit of how a part of the housing service is delivered. We intend to have at least one inspection every year. This may include:

- Checking whether service standards are being upheld.
- Observing Housing staff doing their jobs.
- Checking whether procedures are being followed.

Codes of Practice:

We have set out more detailed arrangements for tenant participation regarding particular areas of work to help Housing staff deliver services to tenants in a way that complies with the aims and principles of the strategy. The following codes of practice have been drawn up together with tenant representatives and copies are available from any member of the Tenant Participation Team:

- Tenant Participation in the Capital Programme.
- Tenant Participation in Community Regeneration.
- Tenant Participation in Policy Development.
- Tenant Participation in Best Value.
- Tenant Participation involving Equalities Groups.
- Guidance to Registered Tenant Organisations on representing the views of their members and support they can receive from the Housing Department.
- Communicating with Registered Tenant Organisations (new).
- Tenant participation through working groups/focus groups (new).

Making a Complaint

We do our best to get things right first time. We have a complaints procedure which is designed to quickly and efficiently solve the problem when we don't. If tenants are not satisfied with the service they receive, the quickest way to sort things out is to contact the staff responsible for the service who will make tenants aware of how to proceed.

Alternatively, tenants may contact the Council's Helpline who can also advise on the complaints procedure. Ultimately, this may lead to an appeal being made to the Director of Housing to consider the case.

If tenants are not happy with the Director of Housing's findings they can take their case to the Council's Chief Executive.

If tenants are still unhappy after hearing from the Chief Executive they can take their complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, who may decide to carry out an independent external review of the situation.

Tenants should also bear in mind that the Scottish Housing Regulator regulates and inspects all social landlords including the Council, on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Councillors Surgeries

All Councillors have regular surgeries which any tenant or tenant representative can go along to. These surgeries provide opportunities for tenants or their representatives to put their concerns on Council housing issues directly to their local Councillors, particularly where they feel all other avenues open to them have not provided them with satisfaction.

Who to Contact

Addresses and telephone numbers of all Housing Offices

Names and contact addresses of all Registered Tenant Organisations

Tenant Participation Action Plan			
Action Items	What Action We Propose...	When we will do our proposed action...	Who is responsible for taking this forward...
<i>Monitoring & Evaluation</i>			
1	Provision of training to housing staff and councillors on the Tenant Participation Strategy/Action Plan/Codes of Practice	April-June 2009	Quality & Performance Manager
2	Establish senior housing staff/tenant representatives monitoring group	April 2009	Quality & Performance Manager
3	Measure and improve satisfaction with delivery of the Tenant Participation Service. (Our current target is to achieve an 87% satisfaction level)	Annual survey of Tenants Organisations	Quality & Performance Manager
4	Review the Tenant Participation Strategy	By March 2011	Quality & Performance Manager
<i>Working with Registered Tenant Organisation: Regular Activities</i>			
5	Maintain and update the Register of Tenants Organisations	Quarterly check with updates as required	Tenant Participation Team
6	Joint Assessment of resources required by RTO's to participate effectively in the housing service.	Every November (As part of the rent setting process)	Finance & Corporate Services Manager
7	Develop and agree a training plan for tenants and RTO's - to allow effective contribution to consultation - to develop effective tenants organisations	March 2009 and annually thereafter	Tenant Participation Team
8	Meeting between the Convener of Housing and DFTA	Four times per year	Director of Housing
9	Meeting between the department's Management Team and DFTA	Four times per year	Director of Housing
<i>Consulting & Giving Information</i>			
10	Rent and Service Charge Consultation	September to January every year	Finance & Corporate Services Manager
11	Hold open Tenants' Forums	Every Spring and Autumn	Quality & Performance Manager
12	Publish Tenants Bulletin	Following each Tenant Forum	Quality & Performance Unit - Strategy Team Leader
13	Review the Tenants Handbook	By March 2011	Quality & Performance Manager
14	Complete at least one tenant led inspection of housing service every year	Every Year	Quality & Performance Manager
15	Produce code of practice for good tenant participation involving communication between umbrella tenant organisations, local tenant organisations and individual tenants	March 2009	Quality & Performance Unit - Strategy Team Leader