

REPORT TO: HOUSING COMMITTEE 18 OCTOBER 2004

REPORT ON: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CURRENT TENANT PARTICIPATION POLICY

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

REPORT NO: 678-2004

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1. To recommend proposed changes to the current Tenant Participation Policy (TPP) in light of a review conducted by a Tenant/Officer Working Group.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. It is recommended that: Housing Committee approve the proposed changes to the current TPP as set out in the revised Draft Tenant Participation Strategy, a copy of which is available in the Members' Lounges.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1. There are no financial implications.

4. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1. The proposed changes to the TPP will strengthen tenant participation in decision taking.

5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1. The proposed changes to the TPP will strengthen the Council's commitment to take action to improve awareness of diversity and equality issues amongst tenants.

6. BACKGROUND

6.1. Housing Committee approved the current TPP in January 2003.

6.2. The Council was awarded the second phase of a grant from Communities Scotland to help it implement the tenant participation provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. One of the conditions of the grant was that a review should be undertaken of current tenant participation arrangements.

- 6.3. The Tenant/Officer Working Group which carried out the review of the current policy during the latter part of 2002, was reconvened, with the agreement of Dundee Federation of Tenant Associations (DFTA), to conduct this review. The members of the Group nominated by DFTA were all Council tenants drawn from its membership list, which is confined to Registered Tenants Organisations (as defined in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001) and individual Council tenants.
- 6.4. The Working Group met on 6 occasions since last autumn to see if any improvements are required in light of experience and recent guidance issued by Communities Scotland, during February 2004. (*Does your Strategy Document Measure Up*). The recommendations put forward by the Working Group have been used as the basis for the revised text. The Draft Strategy also provides an indication of the proposed design changes put forward by the Public Relations Department, with the aim of making the document more easy to read.
- 6.5. The Working Group's reasoning for the proposed changes is set out below.

7. **JUSTIFICATION FOR PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE TENANT PARTICIPATION POLICY**

- 7.1. The Working Group considered that the participation arrangements set out in the TPP were basically sound, but needed to be explained in a way which was more easy to understand from the tenant's point of view and to stress why it was in their interest to take part. This particularly applied to the '*calendar of participation*' which the Working Group suggests should show how each of the participation activities set out in the '*calendar*' fits into the overall decision taking process for all key services provided by the Department.
- 7.2. The Working Group considered that terms such as the '*services plan*', '*annual action plan*' needed a fuller explanation as to their purpose and more importantly how such plans had a bearing on the type and level of service provided to tenants. The group suggested that the '*calendar*' should be published, every year, in a suitably abbreviated form in the Housing News thus providing all tenants with the opportunity to take part in the activities set out in the '*calendar*', if they so wish. The '*calendar*' could be expanded, if necessary, to include '*one-off*' participation activities.
- 7.3. The Working Group recognised that the current arrangements were underpinned by the principles for good tenant participation as set out in the National Strategy for Participation. However, the group doubted whether the details of these principles were widely known. Accordingly it considered that it would help increase awareness all round if they were described in the policy and that it indicated how they were being put into practice.
- 7.4. The Working Group acknowledged that the current document did set out standards of service, particularly regarding commitments to give information to tenants, support to tenants but it considered that these should be more clearly stated.
- 7.5. The Working Group considered that, arrangements that are currently in place whereby tenants can put their housing concerns directly to elected members are an important feature of Local Authority managed housing, reflecting its democratic nature, and as such, should be referred to in the document.

- 7.6. The Working Group consider that, it should be made clear that the Housing Committee is the body within the Council which decides whether or not to include a tenant organisation on the register. This would help emphasise the importance the Council places on tenant organisations seeking '*registration*' status.
- 7.7. The Working Group proposed a number of mind '*editorial*' amendments to reflect the practical checklist on '*what a good strategy document should look like*' and the matters that it should include, as set out in Communities Scotland document referred to in 6.4. These amendments didn't change the content of the TPP.
- 7.8. The Working Group recognises that the proposed amendments, particularly the expansion of the 'Calendar of Participation', places a greater emphasis on how the Council intends to take forward its commitment to effective tenant participation, in strategic terms.
- 7.9. Accordingly, the Working Group proposes that the revised document is entitled:

*Working Together
Tenant Participation Strategy
Participation Arrangements in Dundee City Council.*

- 7.10. The document sets out:
- The background to the strategy and how it was developed and who was involved.
 - The definition, aims and principles of good participation.
 - How we work with, encourage and support Registered Tenant Organisations.
 - Arrangements for sharing information with tenants and their representatives.
 - Arrangements for consulting with tenants and their representatives on:
 - i. Major repairs.
 - ii. Day to day services.
 - iii. Major policy development.
 - How we resource tenants and their representatives to enable them to participate effectively.
 - The actions we intend to take each year to deal with the housing challenges facing the Council and tenants (*The Calendar of Participation*).
 - Arrangement and procedures that we have put in place to enable tenants to make a complaint.
 - Our commitment to equal opportunities, in the specific field of tenant participation.
 - Our arrangement for finding out what tenants think about our services.

- Sources of information to help tenants participate effectively.

8. **MEMBERSHIP OF THE WORKING GROUP**

8.10. Tenant members groups were as follows:

Frances Nelson, MBE (Chair DFTA)
Rena Smith, Balmoral Tenants Association (Sec DFTA)
Margaret Scott, Mill O'Mains Tenants Association (Vice Chair DFTA)
Shirley Galloway, Individual Member DFTA
Bill Johnston, Individual Member, DFTA
Lesley Docherty, Charleston Residents Association
Linda Linton, Charleston Residents Association

9. **CONSULTATION**

9.10. The Chief Executive, all Chief Officers of the Council and Dundee Federation of Tenants Association were consulted in the preparation of this report.

9.11. All tenant organisations registered with the Council under the terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 were consulted on the Working Group's proposed changes.

10. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Draft Tenant Participation Strategy.

ELAINE ZWIRLEIN
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

23 September 2004