

The Highland Council

**Tenant Participation
Strategy**

2009 - 2012

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1. Welcome to The Highland Tenant Participation Strategy 2009 - 2012

- 1.1** 'As a review group we welcome you to the launch of Highland's second Tenant Participation Strategy which puts involvement and communication with tenants very much at the centre of housing service delivery and development. We have learned much as a group, and as individuals, from actively taking part and making our views known in developing this strategy. We look forward to working more closely with more tenants over the next three years, and with staff of Highland Council, as we work through the actions we have agreed are necessary to make tenant participation in Highland ever more effective. We hope more of you will join us!'

Tenants representatives from The Tenant Participation Strategy Review Group

- 1.2** 'Working with tenants and staff to develop this Tenant Participation Strategy for Highland has been a process full of energy and commitment. This strategy reflects what we want to achieve and how we hope to deliver change over the next 3 years as we implement the revised Strategy and Action Plan. We recognise the value that different contributions can bring to improving the quality and direction of services, and we consider that The Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan puts in place a variety of practical measures to make sure that we can share ideas and views at a range of levels, and that whether from the armchair or at more formal organised decision making settings, tenants are being provided with improved opportunity and information to effectively contribute if they so wish. I would like to congratulate and thank everyone involved in developing the strategy and look forward to continuing to work with them to put it into practice.'

Councillor Margaret Davidson, Chair Highland Council, Housing & Social Work Committee

2. Introduction

2.1 *'Tenant Participation is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and service.'*

(National Strategy for Tenant Participation)

2.2 The Scottish Government introduced legislation about Tenant Participation in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. This placed a range of obligations on social landlords to consult tenants on the **standard** of service in relation to housing management and repairs and maintenance, and on **policies** relating to housing management, repairs and maintenance, rent setting and collecting, tenant participation, and any service or policy development which is likely to affect tenants.

2.3 It required that landlords consult both individually with tenants through a variety of methods. Social Landlords were also required to develop a Tenant Participation Strategy in consultation with tenants to provide a framework that allows everyone involved in delivering and receiving housing and associated services to work together towards continuously improving these services.

2.4 This Tenant Participation Strategy is Highland Council's second strategy. It has been developed collaboratively with tenants with the aim of improving opportunities for tenant participation across Highland, with a variety of formal and informal involvement options to improve the participation two way process and therefore the standard of housing conditions and services.

3. Purpose of the Strategy

- 3.1** *‘to ensure that tenants have the capacity to influence and that the council is open to influence and that we can achieve this by objectives which aim to encourage, promote, develop and maintain effective working relationships between the council and tenants in the design and delivery of housing services and services which affect them’*
- 3.2** The principles, aims and objectives of this second strategy continue to link with the themes of the governments National Strategy for Participation (Partners in Participation) which are now further consolidated by the more recent National Standards of Community Engagement.
- 3.4** The Strategy sets out what we want to do to encourage, promote, develop and maintain Tenant Participation and the section on Objectives provides information about what we will do to achieve these objectives.
- 3.6** The Strategy includes a separately available Action Plan which sets out our more detailed actions for each of these objectives. The Action Plan is at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.5** Minimum Standards for information and communication at the different levels of tenant involvement have been agreed to consolidate the commitment to the strategy objectives. The council is committed to maintaining these standards to make sure that tenants are better informed about housing services and so can make a more effective contribution through consultation and participation methods.
- 3.7** Central to delivery of this second Tenant Participation Strategy is the revised formal structure for participation which was developed by tenants. The new structure offers a decentralised model of organised tenant participation by means of a Tenant Area Panel (TAP) in each of the council’s 3 operational areas. Detailed information on the structure is outlined in the section Tenant Participation Structure in Highland.
- 3.8** The strategy includes a section on resources. The council recognises the importance of being transparent about Tenant Participation investment in order that we can work with our Tenant Area Panels through the term of the strategy to monitor our expenditure and assess the effectiveness of this investment as well as the need for any additional resources required to help meet our Tenant Participation Strategy objectives.

4. Principles of Tenant Participation – Working Together

The Highland Council Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan 2009- 2012 adopts the following principles to help build and maintain effective tenant participation in the Highlands.

- 4.1** Tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, elected and committee/board members, and housing officers at all levels, working together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.
- 4.2** 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.
- 4.3** Good tenant participation allows all parties to contribute to the agenda. All participants require to have all the information needed to consider issues properly; that information requires to be clear, timely and accessible and to take account of equal opportunities concerns.
- 4.4** Processes of decision making should be open, clear, and accountable
- 4.5** 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 landlord's representatives.
- 4.6** Good tenant participation requires the landlord to recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
- 4.7** Good working relationships evolve gradually and are flexible to adapt to local circumstances
- 4.8** Tenants' organisations require adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
- 4.9** Tenant participation in rural areas must be tailored to suit the particular circumstances and needs of tenants in such communities.
- 4.10** Tenant Participation must meet the requirements of equal opportunities legislation. Good practice in participation removes barriers to effective participation arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

5. Strategy Objectives

- 5.1 Equality** – *‘We will work together to promote equal opportunity and remove barriers to participation.’* The council recognises that certain groups may be under – represented and that a special effort may require to be made to encourage involvement. The Action Plan identifies such groups and the council will support informal and innovative methods of engagement that may better meet needs. Appropriate methods to involve under-represented groups will be explored and investigated, for example, partnership working with other agencies and informal discussions. A full Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategy will be undertaken.
- 5.2 Information** - *‘We will ensure good quality, clear and full information is provided on housing services, meeting all legal requirements.’* The council is committed to improving the quality and variety of information provided to tenants about housing services and wants to make sure that the information supports a developing awareness of these services and Tenant Participation activity for the purpose of promoting and encouraging involvement. The Action Plan details how the council proposes to achieve this over the term of this strategy and has also introduced minimum standards in support of this objective.
- 5.3 Consultation** – *‘We will ensure that tenants, Registered Tenants Organisations and Tenant Area Panels are consulted and informed of the outcome of the consultation on aspects of housing service delivery which affects them.’* The council has been promoting a register of Interested Tenants as a mechanism to consult a broader range of tenants and this will continue to be actively encouraged to improve the effectiveness of consultation at a more informal level. Equally, the council is committed to jointly developing a Consultation Framework at the more formal level for Registered Tenants Organisations and Tenant Area Panels. Minimum standards are intended to consolidate this objective together with the more detailed actions in the Action Plan.
- 5.4 Participation** – *‘we will promote formal involvement of tenants in policy development and performance monitoring through the revised formal participation structure.’* There are a number of Registered Tenants Organisations in Highland who work collectively to influence our services and through the participation process have contributed to the revised formal structure for participation introduced in this revised strategy. The Action Plan commits to a range of jointly developed mechanisms to support the effectiveness of participation within the new structure at Tenant Area Panel level and at Registered Tenants Organisation level, including a Performance Monitoring Framework and the Consultation Framework. In addition, focus and working groups of representatives from these groups will be established for more specific areas of policy development as required. The new structure is aligned with the council’s operational areas to benefit links with emerging community planning arrangements in Highland.

Strategy Objectives continued

- 5.5 Developing skills** - *'we will promote training and briefing sessions for tenants, staff and councillors.'* The council recognises that developing skills and confidence is central to enabling people in the community to take a more active part and that this can encourage fuller participation including influencing decision making. The Strategy commits to a reviewed Training Programme with opportunity for joint training where appropriate, and encourages skills development at a more local level, for example, through the CVS network. The council also recognises that learning can also be informal and therefore that flexibility is required in terms of capacity building Tenant Participation. The benefit of peer networks as a means of sharing skills, developing awareness and building confidence is recognised by retention of the Tenant Area Forums in the revised structure.
- 5.6 Wider Action** - *'we will explore and develop integration of tenant participation processes with local community planning arrangements.'* Community Planning is the process through which the connections between national government priorities and those at highland, local and neighbourhood levels are improved. The council is committed to exploring how consultation and participation with tenants on issues which affect them and their environment can be connected formally to the community planning processes, and how council tenants can link with other tenants in the social rented sector on issues which more widely affect them and their communities. It is intended that progress with these actions will be monitored and reviewed jointly through the formal participation arrangements.
- 5.7 Progress and outcomes** - *'we will jointly review progress of the strategy with the Tenant Area Panels, examine the outcomes and encourage continuous improvement across the network of stakeholders in Tenant Participation.'* A monitoring and evaluation framework will be jointly developed as part of the delivery of this strategy. Progress will be reported by operational area and/or specific consultation issues, and will be communicated to all tenants through the Highland Tenant Newsletter.

Progress monitoring will include the level of tenant satisfaction with

- the ways in which there is an opportunity to be involved
- on the issues tenants have an opportunity to be involved in
- on the quality of feedback from the council
- on the way in which services which have been reviewed have improved
- and on the council as landlord as a whole

6. Minimum Standards - Supporting Tenant Participation

To support effective implementation of the Strategy the following minimum standards will apply:

6.1 Information

- All new tenants will be provided with the Tenants Handbook
- All tenants will receive 3 copies per year of the newsletter Highland Tenant
- All tenants will receive a calendar including useful information
- Information on Tenants Organisations can be made available on request
- Information on all council policies can be made available on request
- Information on forthcoming consultations will be publicised in the Highland Tenant Newsletter and invitation made for involvement in the consultation process
- All tenants will have opportunity to raise issues or queries through feedback forms included in the Highland Tenant newsletter, or through the council's web-site on the Tenant Participation pages

6.2 Consultation

- Non registered and Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) and tenants with a registered interest will be consulted on areas of Housing & Property Service policy development in line with the Consultation Framework (separately available).
- Consultations will include information on the policy or issue, how it will affect tenants, how and in what timescale tenants can make their views known, how and when the final decision will be taken, and who the contact officer is.
- Feedback will be provided on all consultations by the contact officer

Minimum Standards - Supporting Tenant Participation - continued

6.3 Participation

- RTOs and Tenant Area Panels (TAPS) will be involved in the policy process through the formal structure for Tenant Participation either by identifying issues or developing proposals.
- Briefing papers on previously publicised consultations will be provided to RTOs on areas of Housing & Property Service policy development
- Participation methods will be flexible to suit the circumstances, e.g. focus or working groups.
- Where time limited groups are established the membership, purpose, chair, secretariat, role & remit, venue and decision- making powers of the group will be agreed.
- RTOs and TAPs will be involved in monitoring progress and outcomes of the Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan.
- RTOs and TAPs will have access to independent Tenant Participation Advice
- RTOs and TAPs will have access training to support effective participation.

6.4 Meetings

- All stakeholders will be required to provide a minimum 10 working days notice for invitations to meetings.
- All stakeholders undertake to make sure that representatives or replacements are fully briefed.
- All stakeholders to expect a set of minutes for meetings which they have attended.
- Meetings will be held in fully accessible venues, with interpreting or support services available if necessary, by prior arrangement, and with resources for crèche facilities available if required.

7. Tenant Participation Structure in Highland

The Council has introduced changes in the formal participation structure in the Tenant Participation Strategy 2009 – 2012. Detailed procedural guidance for Registered Tenant's Organisations, Tenant Area Panels and individual tenants registered with an interest in formal participation will be developed as the structure is implemented. In summary:

- 7.1** Tenant and Resident Groups will continue to be supported and new ones will be encouraged to develop and register as a statutory Registered Tenants Organisations.
- 7.2** Existing Area Tenant forums will continue to meet and will provide the groups in their areas with the opportunity to discuss local and wider issues to do with housing and the environment, share skills, knowledge and experience.
- 7.3** The previous Highland-wide Tenant Consultative Group will be replaced by three Tenant Area Panels (TAPs) covering the Council's operational areas, Inverness, Nairn & Badenoch Strathspey, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross, Ross, Skye and Lochaber.
- 7.4** The Tenant Area Panels (TAPs) will meet four times each year in their own area and once a year the three Panels will meet together.
- 7.5** There will be up to 9 representatives on each TAP and each will have voting rights.
- 7.6** 5 of these 9 places will be reserved for tenant representatives elected from registered groups in each area.
- 7.7** The other 4 places will be for individuals elected to represent tenants in their communities, who need not be Council tenants themselves.
- 7.8** There are also non-voting places at the TAPS for housing staff to provide support and information and for a councillor from the Council's Housing and Social Work Committee.

8. The Role of Tenant Area Panels

- 8.1** Formal consultation and participation, including performance monitoring, Tenant Participation Budget monitoring, influencing policy review of the Council's housing services and services that affect tenants
- 8.2** Identify and raise issues about policy, procedures and service quality / performance and consider resources for local tenant participation.
- 8.3** Monitoring progress with the Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan 2009 – 2012.
- 8.4** Provide a formal opportunity for issues to be brought to the attention of the Housing & Social Work Committee.

9. Register of Interested Tenants

- 9.1** The Register of Interested Tenants will continue to be promoted and encouraged for tenants who are either unwilling or unable to take part in formal organised group arrangements, but nevertheless wish to be kept informed in greater detail and contribute to consultation.
- 9.2** This register now contains 250 tenants and is increasing. This mechanism is an important way of exchanging views on housing and related services in terms of improving the opportunities, methods and effectiveness of Tenant Participation.
- 9.3** Registration as an interested tenant is a commitment to regular information about what is happening with housing service and an opportunity to be consulted either through general surveys or in focus or themed working groups on specific issues.
- 9.4** Registered tenants can also propose agenda items for the Tenant Area Panel meetings.
- 9.5** In terms of the Strategy and Action Plan it is intended for this Register to develop to include wider methods of consultation such as internet, email and texting in the hope that young tenants and other under-represented groups may be encouraged to take an interest through alternative methods.

10. Resourcing Tenant Participation

- 10.1** The Council recognises that tenants need time and proper resources to fully participate in the influencing and developing of services. The council can provide a range of direct and indirect resources and support for Tenant Participation including:
- Grants for tenants groups
 - Training costs
 - Conference attendance
 - Membership Costs to external organisations, e.g. TPAS, TIS, TIGRA
 - Travel and subsistence expenses
 - Free access to council venues for meetings
 - Provision of refreshments for consultative meetings
 - Tenant Newsletter and calendar
 - Dedicated staff resources
 - Venue hire and crèche costs
 - Access to independent advice
 - Assistance to organise events
 - Staff time, including other services
- 10.2** As part of the 2009 – 2012 Strategy the council has committed to undertake a joint review of the Grant Funding Arrangements and the Travel, Subsistence and Allowance Arrangements currently in place.
- 10.3** In addition to this resource implication there will be additional costs over the 3 year of the strategy following implementation of the Action Plan. There has been an outline assessment of additional resource needs and the revised budget will take account of the cost implications where this cannot be met from within existing resources.
- 10.4.** The budget for 2009 – 2010 onward will also be increased to reflect an additional dedicated Tenant Participation staff resource for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, completing recruitment into this role across the three operational areas.
- 10.5** The Tenant Participation budget of £135, 000 for 2008 - 2009 will be reviewed to take account of these resource implications.
- 10.6** In addition, the Action Plan provides for Tenant Area Panels to be involved in Tenant Participation budget monitoring as part of the commitment towards more effective participation.