

The Highland Council

# GETTING INVOLVED A' GABHAIL COM-PÀIRT

## Tenant & Customer Engagement Strategy



2015  
2020

Getting  
involved  
volunteer



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## Clàr-innse

*We value the opinions of tenants and other customers about the housing services we provide...*

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Getting  
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## What's it all about? Cò mu dheidhinn a tha e?

National research tells us that two of the things most closely associated with overall tenant satisfaction with housing services are:

- landlords keeping tenants informed about their services and decisions
- tenants having opportunities to participate

Community Services has worked with tenant volunteers to produce our Getting Involved Strategy. **Getting Involved** sets out the approach we are taking to achieve our ambition of making it easier for tenants to get involved. We want to change how we work, placing tenant and customer involvement at the centre of our service activities and standards.

We value the opinions of tenants and other customers about the housing services we provide, and working together we hope to learn more about what we are doing well, and not so well, to help us focus our activities during 2015 - 2020.

We want to:

- ✓ improve the information we provide about housing services and show how tenant feedback and involvement is being used to help inform our service planning.
- ✓ improve the opportunities for routine customer feedback on the services we deliver to make this part of our formal approach to how we do our business.
- ✓ develop opportunities, structures and capability for improved tenant and customer involvement in our scrutiny arrangements.
- ✓ build on the success that tenant volunteering is bringing to Highland communities by increasing our support for individual volunteering and continuing our support to organised voluntary tenant groups.
- ✓ promote and support tenant and other customer involvement in other services provided by the Council's Community Services teams, and strengthen the links with wider social, health, community and voluntary sector initiatives.

A full copy of the actions we will take to work toward our commitments on tenant and customer engagement for 2015 – 2020 is available from your Tenant Participation Officer - see page 9 for details.



# Terminology - What do we mean? Briathrachas - Dè tha sinn a' ciallachadh?

The use of terminology and jargon can often be a barrier to tenants with an interest in getting involved.

There can be some confusion over what we mean by the terms 'tenant participation', 'tenant involvement', 'tenant engagement', 'tenant empowerment', 'tenant scrutiny' and 'tenant volunteer' - particularly as some terms are often used inter-changeably.

Don't be put off by this. Each of these terms has the same general sense, which is that social landlords must provide tenants (and other customers) with opportunities for participation in the decisions that affect them.

Here's what we mean we say:

Term	What we mean
<b>Tenant involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include tenants when considering issues affecting housing services.</li> <li>● Support or encourage tenants to participate in an activity or event.</li> </ul>
<b>Tenant engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Attract tenants' interest or attention to housing services.</li> <li>● Involve tenants in a conversation or discussion about housing services.</li> <li>● Enable tenants to participate more closely in housing services.</li> <li>● Establish a meaningful contact or connection with tenants in relation to housing services.</li> </ul>
<b>Tenant participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about housing policies, housing conditions, housing and related services.</li> <li>● This 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 services.</li> </ul>
<b>Tenant scrutiny</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To support and provide arrangements for tenants to be involved in examining services carefully.</li> </ul>
<b>Tenant empowerment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Give tenants the status and capability to influence the design and delivery of housing services.</li> </ul>
<b>Tenant 'Volunteer'</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A volunteer is someone who freely offers to take part in or undertake a task.</li> </ul>

**Getting Involved** is the title of our 'Tenant and Customer Engagement Strategy'. Our aim is to improve how we do all of these things in the delivery and planning of housing services.







## How to get involved? Ciamar a ghabhas sibh com-pàirt?

We have dedicated tenant and customer engagement staff who work directly with individual volunteers and voluntary tenant and resident organisations. You can contact them for more information or to arrange an informal chat at tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk

You can also speak to any of our staff that you might be in contact with, and they can help to put you in touch with our specialist workers.

There is a wide range of ways for you to get involved in housing services as a volunteer. Our staff can provide you with more information about our volunteer roles and our timetable of events and activities. Many of the volunteer options are one-off and some can be carried out from home. Others offer a longer term commitment for tenants with a keen interest in making a difference in their communities or more specifically on social housing services and issues.

We offer support and training to volunteers and cover out of pocket expenses.

*There is a wide range of ways for you to get involved in housing services as a volunteer.*



## What can I get involved in? Dè na rudan anns an urrainn dhomh com-pàirt a ghabhail?

### Types of volunteering roles

Our volunteering roles fit into 4 main categories and there is a good range of opportunities in each category. Some roles require skills and/or experience. We offer support and training to help volunteers develop the skills and experience needed for these for roles.

#### A. Information, communication and feedback about our services

- Under this category the type of volunteering roles include getting involved in the tenant web-site 'Highland Tenant Voice', Facebook or our newsletter, either as a contributor, administrator, editor, or by supplying photos. You might want some help and support to organise and produce a local community newsletter and we can help with that too.
- This category also includes volunteer roles in helping with phone surveys, or community surveys that will help us understand more about what other tenants think about our service or service standards. Tenants talking to tenants in this way is a consultation approach that we value.
- You might want to get better informed about housing services by becoming a member of a local housing forum where tenants and staff meet to consider housing and community issues. You could develop your role in the forum if you wanted, to take on a role supporting or helping organise the forums or any special events or workshops that the forum agrees – such as networking trips to meet other tenants in Highland or invitations to speakers or projects or organisations that local forum members are interested in.
- There are also opportunities to take part in national tenant conferences where you represent Highland Tenants and produce a short report to feedback your experience and highlight issues of interest and national importance for the social housing tenant movement.

#### B. Monitoring, reviewing and scrutiny of our services

- There are opportunities under this category for more interested or active tenants who want to develop a more detailed knowledge of housing services and want to use their experience as a customer to work with staff to help improve how we do things.
- The volunteering roles include taking part in Focus, Review or Working groups on specific topics, such as repairs, council house-building, rent setting, estate management or any other area of service. Some groups are for one off consultations, while others last longer as part of a full service standard review.
- Under this category there are also opportunities to monitor service standards by being a volunteer mystery shopper. We aim to develop and test this method as part of our new strategy and will be offering training to volunteers specifically designed for tenant mystery shoppers. This is a useful way to help us check that we are doing what we say, to help us highlight and promote good practice, and to recognise and reward staff who are providing an excellent service.
- We have opportunities for tenants to work with us in the design and content of our annual performance report to tenants. We produced our first annual report Housing Matters in 2014.

Volunteers for this role can also promote Housing Matters at events and workshops designed to provide information to tenants on how the Council is performing in its landlord role.

- Under our Getting Involved Strategy we will be joining a national programme called 'Stepping up to Scrutiny'. There are opportunities for tenants to work with the Council on this programme, and test out how tenants and the Council can deliver this in practice as part of our approach to tenant involvement in our services. This role can include gaining an accredited qualification in resident involvement for those with an interest in taking their volunteering to another level.
- We will be developing volunteer opportunities in complaints scrutiny. This is a highly specialist area of volunteering which will require particular competencies and a commitment to training and learning.

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## **C. Activities and tasks relating to events, forums, workshops and conferences**

- These roles include more social and fun activities, and are often informal. They can range from helping organise meetings, get-togethers, lunches, or speakers – or just taking part in these kind of events for the chance to meet old and new friends or find out more and feedback about what's happening in your community.
- We can offer other opportunities, such as photographer to help record and promote what's going on, or as volunteer driver to help other people take part in the events. Some tenant volunteers help with writing articles for local or Highland wide newsletters sharing and promoting what they've been involved in.
- These type of events can include healthy eating projects with a chance to develop a 'come dine with us' group, or light exercise sessions such as Otago or carpet bowls.
- We can also organise sessions to help people improve their use of technology or social media, and we have opportunities for tenant volunteers to share these new skills.

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## **D. Activities and tasks relating to wider community events and initiatives**

- Many volunteers are part of organised tenant groups, and many of these groups are registered tenant and resident organisations. We provide support to groups to help them achieve their aims, which range from environmental and landscape improvement projects, to children's play schemes, estate management initiatives and much more.
- There are opportunities to form groups in your street or community, to develop your skills as a committee member, minute taker, secretary or treasurer. If there's already a group in your area there are opportunities to attend to promote other things you might be involved in.
- Many groups carry out consultations with the local community, so there are opportunities to help out, as well as more practical roles like taking part in estate walkabouts, or helping out at open days or events.
- Many groups have successfully applied for grant funding to meet their ambitions. You can develop your skills in making grant applications and find out more about wider voluntary sector grants that might help you and your neighbours achieve ambitions you have for your neighbourhood.
- You can find out more about the type of benefits that organised tenant groups can achieve through our regular newsletter as many tenant volunteers promote their activities in this way. Or you can get details or find out how to get organised in this way from our staff.



# Menu of Volunteer Options

## Clàr de Roghainnean airson Obair Shaor-thoileach

### Some of our Volunteer Roles

Estate inspectors	Working group representative	Housing Forum member	Tenant researcher
Mystery shopper	Tenant & residents organisation member	Housing Forum representative	Volunteer promoter
Satisfaction surveyor	Housing Forum note taker	Events photographer	Satisfaction data inputter
Focus/review group representative	Volunteer driver	Tenant-led inspection representative	Money savings tenant expert
Conference, workshops & events planner	National conference delegate	Village/community voice	Newsletter contributor /editorial
Tenant Facebook/Website administration	Sheltered housing representative	Tenant Scrutiny Panel member	Tenant volunteer mentor
Good neighbour promoter/member	Green Dog Walker promoter/member	Junior Wardens Promoter	Other community initiatives promoter

### What's in it for me?

As a tenant volunteer you have a chance to help improve services for all tenants in Highland. On a more personal level, tenant volunteers tell us their top reasons for volunteering are:

- ✓ It's fun
- ✓ You'll make friends
- ✓ Learn how to do new things
- ✓ Make a difference to other people
- ✓ Build your confidence & self esteem
- ✓ Get a qualification
- ✓ Get unpaid work experience, and help with employment prospects
- ✓ Travel







## Our Housing Services Ar Seirbheisean Taigheadais

Volunteers can take part in a volunteer role within any of our service areas, depending on the time they have available and what type of housing service interests or matters to them. Our service areas reflect those set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

### Housing Services

- Equalities
- Communication
- Participation
- Quality of Housing
- Repairs, Maintenance and Improvements
- Estate management
- Housing options
- Access to social housing and allocations
- Tenancy Sustainment
- Homelessness
- Value for Money
- Rents and Service Charges
- Anti-social behaviour
- neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes
- Gypsies and Travellers
- Sheltered housing



## When can I volunteer? Cuin a dh'fhaodas mi obrachadh gu saor-thoileach?

You can volunteer at any time, on a one off basis, or more regularly or for a fixed period of time to tie in with your availability or your interests. You can speak to our Tenant Participation Officers about what's on offer when, and consider if there's anything you'd like to join or attend to begin with. Many of our options are light, informal and fun and are focussed on meeting new people with similar interests, finding out about or taking part in what's going on locally or Highland wide, or setting up something new that you are interested in.

For people who develop a greater interest in housing, we also have more formal volunteer opportunities which are connected to how we manage and deliver our services. There's often training involved in these opportunities, and some of them can lead to accredited qualifications. The more formal volunteering opportunities are timetabled and you can also find out more about these volunteer roles from our Tenant Participation Officers.

*You can volunteer at any time, on a one off basis, or more regularly or for a fixed period of time to tie in with your availability or your interests.*





## Tenants & residents associations Comann an luchd-màil is an luchd-còmhnaidh

The Council has a legal duty to promote and support organised tenant groups and to provide a publically available list of registered tenant organisations. You can find out if there is a registered group in your area by asking our staff, or checking our web-site. If there isn't a group in your area, we can arrange for you to visit an existing group and hear from other tenants about how an organised tenant's association can make a difference. If you want to set a group up in your area we can support you and other interested tenants to do just that.

### Consultations

The Council and the Scottish Government consult with registered tenant organisations on any changes and proposals that relate to housing issues or housing policy, so being in a group can also help keep you more informed about the national housing agenda if you are especially interested in social housing matters.

Many tenant volunteers in Highland, including volunteers who are not in an organised group, took part in the Scottish Government's proposals to develop the Scottish Social Housing Charter which was introduced in 2012. Their feedback helped shape the standards that tenants can expect from social landlords in Scotland. Getting involved as a tenant volunteer helps take you closer to this kind of influence and decision-making.

### Grants and other support for groups

We provide a range of support to organised groups, from financial help with start-up and annual running costs to:

- ✓ Provision of refreshments for consultative meetings
- ✓ Dedicated staff resources
- ✓ Venue hire and crèche costs
- ✓ Access to independent advice
- ✓ Assistance to organise events
- ✓ Training costs
- ✓ Conference attendance
- ✓ Membership costs to external tenant participation national organisations
- ✓ Travel and subsistence expenses
- ✓ Free access to council venues for meetings

*You can find out if there is a registered group in your area by asking our staff, or checking our web-site.*



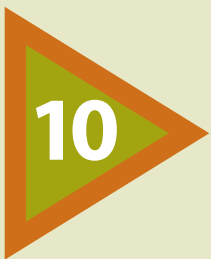
## Planning for change A' Planadh airson Atharrachadh

To help us achieve the aims of our Getting Involved strategy and plan for change we have developed a 5 year action plan. This plan is built around themes identified by a group of tenant activists who worked with us as part of the review and development of this strategy.

### The themes of our Action Plan are:

- Organisational Change
- Performance and Scrutiny
- Information and Communication
- Volunteering
- Resources & Support

If you would like more information about the actions we will take to help change our approach to tenant involvement under the Scottish Social Housing Charter please email us at:  
**tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk**



## Compliments, comments & complaints Molaidhean, beachdan agus gearanan

We value your feedback, whether that's to tell us where we've got it right, where we could do better, or to make a complaint. Email us at: **community.services@highland.gov.uk**

### Contact our Tenant Participation Team:

If you live in:	Contact	Contact details
Caithness, Sutherland, Easter Ross	Lorna Simpson	07774337689 lorna.simpson@highland.gov.uk
Inverness	Wilma West	07990565755 wilma.west@highland.gov.uk
Lochaber, Badenoch, Nairn	Kate MacLennan	07557744420 kate.maclennan@highland.gov.uk
Mid and Wester Ross, Skye	Mandy Macleman	07557744413 mandy.macleman@highland.gov.uk



If you would like more information about the actions we will take to help change our approach to tenant involvement under the Scottish Social Housing Charter please email us at:

**[tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk)**

