

Agenda Item	12
Report No	HP/43/25

The Highland Council

Committee: **Housing and Property**

Date: **5 November 2025**

Report Title: **Tenant Participation and Engagement Update**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive - Place**

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update to Members on the work carried out by the Tenant Participation Team in the last 12 months to encourage engagement and participation with tenants across Highland, and ensure their voices are represented when considering decisions impacting them.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
- i. **Note** the ongoing activities and commitment to tenant engagement demonstrated by tenant volunteers and officers; and
 - ii. **Consider** and **agree** the progress made on the Tenant & Customer Engagement Action Plan detailed in the report and at **Appendix 1**.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - There are no resource implications arising from this report.
- 3.2 **Legal** - Tenant Participation has been a legal requirement for all social landlords since the introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 with additional regulatory requirements to report annually on outcomes set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- 3.3 **Risk** - Risk is managed through regular review and reporting to allow corrective action to be taken if necessary.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no health and safety risks arising from this report.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Background

- 5.1 The Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) first came into effect in April 2012 and was reviewed in 2016 and 2021 with the revised Charter approved by the Scottish Parliament coming into effect in November 2022.

The purpose of the Charter is to improve the quality and value of the services social landlords provide to tenants and other customers such as homeless households and Gypsy/Travellers. The Charter supports the right to adequate housing as a human right in international law by setting out standards and outcomes that should be met by social landlords.

- 5.2 One of the fundamental Charter principles is that social landlords need to involve tenants and other customers in the design and delivery of housing services. There are four outcomes that directly relate to Tenant Participation which are listed below:-

Outcome 2 - Communication: 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.

Outcome 3 - Participation: Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlords' decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Outcomes 14 and 15 - Rents and service charges: a balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and to what extent current and prospective tenants and service users can afford them. Tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent.

6 Communication

6.1 Events and meetings

- 6.1.1 Acting on feedback from our tenants, who told us they would like to see more local, area-based meetings and activities, the team have been organising a variety of different meetings and drop-in sessions to see what works across the different areas.

6.1.2 The Lochaber Tenant Forum restarted in April 2025 and is meeting quarterly, inviting various officers from relevant services. For example, at the summer meeting the group received an update from the Housing Investment Team about the ongoing energy efficiency works and the draft priorities for the 2027-2032 Capital Plan.

6.1.3 There have also been in-person meetings and drop-ins held in Thurso, Wick, Dingwall, Inverness and Nairn. These sessions have been attended by Housing & Maintenance colleagues as well as Welfare & Employability teams, Age Scotland, Allenergy, Fire & Rescue, Police Scotland amongst others.

6.2 Digital Bulletin

6.2.1 Feedback from tenants has highlighted a desire for more regular updates on tenant participation activities. In response, the Tenant Participation team explored a range of communication methods and, in August, launched the first edition of a new bi-monthly digital bulletin. Designed with accessibility in mind, the bulletin is compatible with screen readers and can be provided in printed format upon request.

<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/r5nXPfvE97tr7vuh?ref=Link>

6.2.2 Initial feedback has been positive, with tenants expressing appreciation for being kept informed about local events and opportunities to get involved. This initiative is helping to strengthen connections between tenants and their communities, while promoting greater awareness of participation activities

6.3 Website review

6.3.1 The Housing Policy Team has been part of the corporate My Council Programme. One of the key objectives is to enhance customer contact through the redesign of the Council website and there has been considerable engagement with tenants to gather insights to inform improvements and the overall customer experience. This collaborative approach ensures that tenant voices are central to shaping how we present and deliver information.

6.3.2 Key areas of focus include:-

- **Reviewing content for clarity and ease of use** – ensuring that language used is straightforward, jargon-free, and easy to understand;
- **Improving accessibility** – making sure that digital content is compatible with assistive technologies and meets accessibility standards, so that all tenants can access the information they need; and
- **Ensuring relevance and accuracy** – regularly updating online materials to reflect current services, policies, and opportunities for engagement.

6.3.3 This work is ongoing and forms part of our commitment to delivering a more inclusive, transparent, and user-friendly digital experience for all tenants.

7 Participation

7.1 Objectives

7.1.1 The objectives of the Tenant Participation Team are:-

- To actively encourage and empower tenants to be involved in decisions that affect their homes, communities, and the housing service they receive;
- To support collaborative working between tenants and the Council to identify and implement service improvements that benefit all tenants;
- To offer a flexible range of participation opportunities, enabling tenants and residents to engage collectively or individually, at a level and pace that suits their circumstances;
- To ensure tenants are equipped with the necessary support and information to participate meaningfully and confidently in engagement activities;
- To provide clear, timely, and accessible information about housing services and tenant participation activities;
- To develop and promote training opportunities for both staff and tenants, supporting capacity-building across a range of housing-related topics; and
- To embed equality, diversity, and inclusion in all tenant participation activities, ensuring they are accessible and welcoming to all members of the community.

7.2 Team Activity

7.2.1 Over the past year, the team has:-

- Conducted both online and face-to-face tenant surveys to gather feedback and identify priorities.
- Facilitated tenant meetings and forums, offering opportunities for tenants to engage directly with officers and elected Members.
- Delivered a comprehensive housing training programme, in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing. This training covers key topics including:-
 - The history of social housing in Scotland
 - Housing and homelessness legislation
 - Tenant rights
 - Repairs and maintenance
 - Asset management.

7.2.2 These activities support informed tenant participation and help build capacity for constructive dialogue between tenants and the Council.

7.3 Estate Walkabouts

7.3.1 Since April, a total of 15 estate walkabouts have been completed across various communities. These events have been well attended by tenants, residents, Council officers and Elected Members, demonstrating strong local interest and engagement.

7.3.2 The walkabouts have been positively received by tenants, who welcomed the opportunity to have their views heard and considered in efforts to improve their local areas. Walkabouts provide a valuable platform for tenants and residents to raise issues of concern, identify local priorities, and contribute to shaping the environment in which they live.

7.3.3 Action plans have now been developed for each area visited, and work is underway to address the issues raised. These plans are being progressed in collaboration with relevant services, ensuring that tenant feedback directly informs local improvements. More walkabouts will be organised in the coming months where these are requested by tenants and Members.

7.4 Involvement in Policy & Strategy Development

7.4.1 Tenant involvement continues to play a key role in shaping housing policy and service delivery. Over the past year, tenant volunteers have contributed meaningfully to several strategic developments.

7.4.2 Highland Tenant Scrutiny Group

The group has been instrumental in the development of new procedures for managing reports of suspected damp, mould and condensation. Their input has helped shape updated staff guidance, which promotes a fabric-first approach to inspections — focusing on identifying and addressing underlying causes before moving on to look at household factors.

7.4.3 Contractors Code of Conduct

A group of tenant volunteers reviewed the draft Code of Conduct for contractors. Their feedback has been incorporated into the final version of the Trades Framework public tender documentation which will be issued pre-Christmas. The Code of Conduct now better reflects tenant expectations around behaviour, communication, and accountability.

7.4.4 Annual Review of the Tenant Participation Action Plan

Tenant volunteers met in September to carry out the annual review of the Tenant Participation Action Plan. They noted positive progress, particularly in the increased availability of in-person engagement opportunities. It was highlighted the response to tenant feedback, 'You said' we could improve communication, 'We did' with the launch of the digital bulletin in June. Continuing the theme of communication, it was noted the extensive work being carried out to improve the accessibility of information available online. It was also agreed that rather than a 3-yearly term the tenant representative role should reflect that of Council Administration term. Suggested actions for the coming year include potential monitoring of the energy efficiency programme within the Housing Capital Plan.

7.4.5 Domestic Abuse Policy – Focus Group

A dedicated focus group have met to discuss the development of the Council's Domestic Abuse Policy. Tenants with lived experience have been invited to contribute, helping to ensure the policy development is both trauma-informed and grounded in real-life scenarios. The policy is being presented as a separate agenda item to this Committee.

7.4.6 Rent Consultation – Value for Money Group

This group met with senior officers to look at the budget planning, exploring the investment priorities of tenants, how these compare to statutory requirements and how they impact on the overall HRA. The group also discussed the rent consultation process and how we can make the process more meaningful to participants.

7.4.7 Allocations Policy Review

Tenants will be invited to participate in the upcoming review of the Allocations Policy, ensuring that the revised policy reflects tenant priorities and lived experiences.

7.4.8 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy

An officer review of the ASB Strategy and Policy commenced in September with various community partnership agencies. The review is currently focused on potential legislative changes following a Scottish Government report released earlier in 2025.

The Highland review is in its infancy but will include gathering tenant feedback on how anti-social behaviour is reported, managed, and communicated, with the aim of improving transparency and responsiveness.

7.5 Tenant & Resident Groups

- 7.5.1 The Tenant Participation Team continues to provide dedicated support to our active resident groups. Over the past 12 months, two new groups in Broadford and Lochaber been successfully formalised, reflecting ongoing efforts to strengthen community engagement.
- 7.5.2 The team has however observed a growing pressure on volunteers, as a result of time limitations on those involved, many of whom are already heavily committed volunteering within their communities. These circumstances have unfortunately led to several established groups choosing to formally dissolve. These are South Kessock, Smithton, Windsor Place and most recently Queenspark. The Council has expressed appreciation to all tenants that have been involved with these groups and a commitment to working alongside tenants wishing to restart these groups.
- 7.5.3 Despite these challenges, Tenant Participation Officers maintain regular contact with individual tenants to ensure continued engagement and support.

7.6 Tenant Representative Recruitment

- 7.6.1 Following a very successful term, our Tenant Representatives, Angus Dick and Liz Richardson have decided to stand down in 2026, and we would like to acknowledge their valuable contribution during this time. The Tenant Participation Team have been seeking suitable volunteers to take up this important role to ensure that tenant voices are represented at the Housing and Property Committee and at other opportunities.
- 7.6.2 The role has been advertised to our interested tenants, with a detailed job description of what is expected of a Tenant Representative and what support is in place to assist them in this important role.

7.7 Professional development

- 7.7.1 The Tenant Participation Team are always looking for ways to build their skills and improve how we engage with our tenants. Over the past year the team has:-
- Undertaken housing options toolkit, a learning and development resource to aid staff providing housing options advice.
 - Completed the Abilitynet training on creating accessible documents.
 - Attended Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) housing professionals conference.
 - Attended the Tenant Information Service (TIS) workshop on rent setting and rent consultation.
 - Attended Share training on maintaining engagement in a digital environment.

7.8 Contributing to Corporate Objectives

7.8.1 The Tenant Participation Team continues to support the Council's strategic aims by embedding tenant voice into broader policy and service development. Key contributions include:-

- **Equality and Inclusion:** Participation in the Fair Highland Group and input into the Council's Equality reporting, ensuring tenant perspectives are reflected in efforts to promote fairness and inclusivity across services.
- **Joined-Up Engagement:** Collaborating with other Council services to explore more integrated approaches to consultation and engagement. This includes identifying opportunities to align tenant participation with wider community engagement activities, improving consistency and reach.

7.8.2 These contributions help ensure that tenant engagement is not only meaningful at a local level but also informs and supports the Council's wider priorities around equality, inclusion, and service improvement.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 30 September 2025

Author: Suzy Boardman, Principal Tenant and Customer Engagement Officer

Background Papers: None

Appendices: **Appendix 1** –Tenant Participation Action Plan.

Highland Council Tenant Participation Action Plan November 2024-2029

*Reviewed September 2025

Area	Actions	Responsibility	Timescales
Organisational Change	Promote Tenant Participation (TP) across all Council staff in line with new Highland wide Customer Charter and My Council Project. Sharing TP Training module as part of the induction process.	TP Team, Council Officers, Tenants	My Council roll out and for staff induction training
	Mainstream tenant engagement into practice, reviewing, planning and decision making - Keeping tenants informed of their right to participation - Keeping Elected Members informed and aware of TP activities - Reporting successes to all tenants.	TP Team, Senior Housing Staff	Ongoing
Performance Monitoring & Scrutiny	Review TP Strategy Action Plan - Carry out Annual review to monitor progress and recognise when actions have been met - Add new actions as required.	Principal Tenant & Customer Engagement Officer & TP Working Group	Annually
	Reporting performance - Publish performance indicators on Highland Council website, Highland Tenant Network and in Newsletter - Include any positive statements / feedback.	TP Team, Tenants	Annually
	Improve communication with all tenants - Making information available and easily obtainable in a variety of formats - Linking in with Highland Council new website design.	TP Team, Communications Groups, Tenants	Ongoing
	Scrutiny and Tenant Representatives - support development of Tenant Scrutiny groups across Highland. Offering continuing training for panel members, create opportunities to meet with other scrutiny groups – TP scrutiny forum. Continue supporting development of Highland Tenant Forum to bring together interested tenants, and representatives from the Strategic groups.	TP Team, Strategic Tenant Groups, Tenants	Ongoing

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	Explore how we can involve tenants in monitoring feedback from contract works and sharing satisfaction feedback from large capital projects. Potential for Tenant Working Group to review customer care aspects of contracts.	TP Team, Tenants	October 2025 With ongoing project monitoring
Consultation and Decision Making	Continue to seek views of tenants, tenant groups and other customers on: • our policies in relation to housing management, repairs or maintenance • rent setting & annual rent increases • tenant satisfaction with services in relation to housing management, repairs and maintenance • Tenant Participation Strategy • Capital Investment works	TP Team, Tenants	Ongoing
	• Improve tenant opportunities to input into Committee providing the necessary information, skills and knowledge to empower our Tenant Representatives with regular training and briefing sessions with key staff. • Include potential new tenant representatives in pre committee meetings. • Council induction for Tenant Representatives. • Tenant Representative, nomination and selection, volunteer term to mirror Council Administration term.	Housing Management Team, Tenants	August 2025
Information, Communication and Feedback	Improve how feedback is shared with tenants • Use the You Said, We Did, did we get it Right? Format for sharing results of consultations • Explore involving tenants in gathering feedback, tenants talking to tenants and provide a route for capturing this feedback.	TP Team, Tenants, Strategic Groups	Ongoing
	Promote and support a local network of tenant representatives to help cascade information and two-way communication. Support and empower tenant representatives to actively engage with tenants in their community with clear guidance on their role and conduct.	TP Team, tenants, elected members	Ongoing
	Carry out comprehensive satisfaction survey to provide baseline of customer knowledge to help understand and plan for communication expectations.	TP Team, tenants	Three yearly

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Involving all	Continue to develop and support Tenant representatives on Committee, Tenant Forum, RTO's, Strategic Groups (Communications, Scrutiny, Value for Money, Action Plan Monitoring), interested tenant groups, individual interested tenants.	TP Team, tenants	Ongoing
	Highland Tenant Forum • Ensuring new tenants are informed of the forum and invited to join • Promote the use of Highland Tenant Network to share information between meetings • agendas to be set and agreed by tenants at pre meetings • Hybrid format to be further developed • Meetings to be more focused on single issues, with relevant officers attending.	TP Team	Ongoing
	Transport for tenant volunteers • Ensure that tenant volunteers are provided with suitable transport options to enable and encourage their participation	TP Team	Ongoing
	• Continue to develop and promote local networking events, workshops and fun days linking to wider public and Third sector community development initiatives and activities • Linking with Community Planning Partnership.	TP Team/partners, tenants, registered tenant organisations, community councils, elected members	Ongoing
	Overcoming barriers and encourage the involvement of under-represented and hard to reach groups such as: • young people ○ work in partnership with schools / youth groups / youth development officers ○ work with care experienced young people / young carers • minority ethnic communities ○ working with residents on Gypsy Traveller Sites	TP Team / partners	Ongoing

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	○ making links through organisations already working with Refugee programme and migrant communities. • tenants with support needs ○ working in partnership with organisations already supporting these tenants ○ supporting tenants with literacy issues. • Homeless ○ Temporary accommodation surveys.		
	Review and consider other good practice approaches to incentives to participate Improve co-ordination and delivery of volunteer training	TP Team	Ongoing
	Review of the Northern Tenants Partnership - staff/tenant organisation for sharing good practice, joint training etc.	TP Team / Landlords / Tenants	Ongoing
Resources and support	Promote opportunities for skills development and training with accredited qualifications with tenant reps completing the Tenant Participation level 2 certificate. Review next steps for training with Chartered Institute of Housing.	TP Team	
	Continue with other resource supports as set out in the 'Grants for Groups'.	TP Team	