



MUIRHOUSE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Title of Policy: Tenant Participation Strategy

Date of Adoption or Last Review: 11 April 2016

Lead Officer: Ainan Groat

Date of Next Review: April 2017

Scottish Social Housing Charter Outcomes & Standards: Outcome 2: Communication
“Social landlords manage their businesses so that 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
“Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord’s decisions at a level they feel comfortable with”.

Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management Standard 1: The governing body leads and directs the RSL to achieve good outcomes for its tenants and other service users.
Standard 2: The RSL is open and accountable for what it does.

Tenant Participation Strategy

1. Our Commitment to Involving Tenants

1.1 We are committed to working with our tenants to improve the services we provide and to involve them in influencing decisions about their homes and their communities. We will provide a variety of opportunities for tenants to participate in a way and at a level that suits them best. We are committed to promoting equality and treating people respectfully, fairly and equally. We will actively make sure that all groups and individuals have equal access and opportunity to engage in our tenant participation activities.

2. What is Tenant Participation?

2.1 *“Tenant Participation is about tenants taking part in the decision making process and influencing decisions about:*

- *housing policies*
- *housing conditions*
- *housing and related services*

It 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”

(National Strategy for Tenant Participation – Partners in Participation, the Scottish Executive 1999)

3. Why Tenant Participation is Important

3.1 Benefits

There are clear benefits for tenants, staff and Housing Associations when tenant participation works effectively throughout the organisation. These include:

- better services giving more value for money
- more effective policies and procedures
- better communication between staff, board members and tenants
- improved trust between tenant and landlord
- increased tenant satisfaction with their home and neighbourhood

3.2 We have certain duties and responsibilities under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 which also introduced the right for tenants to be involved in decisions which directly affect them.

3.3 We have a duty to:

- consult with individual tenants and tenants groups
- prepare a tenant participation strategy which gives equal opportunities to all
- set up a register of tenants organisations
- take into account the views of individual tenants or tenants groups
- inform tenants about proposals for housing management, standards of service and the Tenant Participation Strategy.

3.4 Tenants have the right to:

- form independent associations to represent their area and to apply for registration from their landlord
- ask for information about policies regarding housing and related services
- be consulted on issues that affect their homes and local area
- participate in decisions that affect the services they receive
- have enough time to consider draft proposals and put forward their views

3.5 Social Housing Charter

We have a duty to meet the standards and outcomes from the Social Housing Charter. This strategy sets out how we plan to meet the Social Housing Charter Outcomes on:

- **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”* and
- **Participation** *“tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord’s decisions at a level they feel comfortable with”*

3.6 Valuing Complaints

We have adopted a standard approach to handling complaints with other Scottish landlords. Complaints give us valuable information we can use to improve customer satisfaction. They highlight problems we may otherwise miss and can also help us continuously improve our services. Tenants can become involved by using our complaints procedure and we will let them know how their feedback has helped shape our service.

4. How we developed the strategy

- 4.1 We sent all tenants a leaflet in April 2013 explaining how to get involved, the benefits and all the different options available. We put an article in the April 2013 newsletter 'Your Association Needs You!' to announce we were working on a strategy and asking for opinions and volunteers.
- 4.2 We set up a Tenant Involvement Group to oversee how we involve tenants and to help develop the strategy. This was made up of local people with a lot of skills and experience of being involved in committees and the community. This group helped prepare the strategy and Action Plan to make sure we are keeping on track.
- 4.3 The Management Committee and Tenant Involvement Group agreed a timetable for consulting with tenants on changes to our policies for 2013 to 2014.
- 4.4 In our June 2013 newsletter to tenants, we explained the aims and objectives of our draft strategy, the main methods we would use to involve tenants and asked for views, comments and ideas. We also sent out a communication survey in May 2013 to ask tenants how they would prefer to be contacted and to make sure we have up-to-date information.
- 4.5 Staff held a meeting in May 2013 where we looked at the benefits of tenant participation, how it fits in with each individual's role and the aims and objectives of the draft tenant participation strategy.
- 4.6 We sent copies of our draft strategy to the Council and local community organisations to ask for their views.
- 4.7 As part of our drive to deliver excellent housing services and in discussion with our Tenants Panel, we made a commitment in our Business Plan 2016-2018 to develop tenant scrutiny in line with current sector best practice.

5. Our Aims and Objectives

- 5.1 Our aim is to involve tenants at a level which suits them best in making decisions and influencing policies about the houses they live in and the services they receive.

5.2 Our objectives are to:

- provide tenants with good quality, accurate and easily understood information
- promote tenant participation and increase opportunities to participate
- consult tenants in reviewing and developing services and policies
- meet the outcomes for communication and participation in the Social Housing Charter
- feedback to tenants how their views and complaints have helped us to improve and shape our service

5.3 This strategy outlines how we will consult, involve and communicate with tenants over 3 years from 2013 to 2016. It includes an Action Plan which details how we will meet our objectives. We will review the Action Plan every year in consultation with tenants and staff.

6. How Tenants Can be Involved

6.1 Tenants can be involved either as individuals or as part of a group.

Individual Tenants

Individual tenants can become involved in shaping the services we deliver in a variety of ways including:

- completing our customer satisfaction forms
- letting us know if things go wrong through the complaints procedure
- reading our newsletter and giving back their views
- giving us comments and feedback via the website, by phone, email or visits to the office
- coming along to meetings
- becoming a member of Muirhouse Housing Association
- joining our tenant involvement group
- joining a tenants panel
- being part of a focus group
- joining the Board of Management
- joining a tenants and residents association

6.2 Tenants Groups

Tenants groups are a useful way for people to get together to discuss how their area is being managed and to have a collective voice to suggest improvements. They can be formally constituted groups with specific rights under the Housing Act or a more informal tenants group. Tenants groups have opportunities to be involved in developing our services by:

- representing the views of their members
- replying to consultations and questionnaires
- providing feedback to our staff

We will support tenants who want to form a group by giving them staff time, training and advice on access to grants for setting up and running costs.

7. How We Will Communicate with Tenants

7.1 Information

The information we provide will be in plain English, clear and relevant. We provide information through:

- our tenancy agreement and information for new tenants
- our newsletter 'MHA News' 4 times a year
- letters
- information leaflets
- email
- text messaging
- website
- home visits
- drop in events and meetings
- facebook and twitter

7.2 We will review the content of information and leaflets regularly in consultation with tenants to make sure that they are easy to understand, up-to-date and accurate. We will ask tenants and other community organisations for their views on:

- the content of our information booklets and leaflets
- what information leaflets are needed
- what information tenants and others would like to see in the newsletter
- other ways to give out information
- the content of our website and how easy it is to use

8. How We Will Consult with Tenants

8.1 We will consult with our tenants if we want to make changes to policies and service standards which will have a significant impact on them. We will produce a timetable for consultations every year and we will agree the methods and timescales for these consultations with tenants. We will consult in a number of ways including the following:

- our newsletter

- focus groups
- surveys by post or by phone
- tenants panels
- home visits
- meetings
- telephone
- through tenants groups
- email

8.2 Where properties are being upgraded, whenever possible, we will involve tenants in making choices on details for their homes. After each project, we will ask tenants for their views on the work carried out as a part of a tenant feedback survey.

8.3 Tenants in newly built houses will be given the opportunity to feedback their views on the design etc by taking part in a survey to appraise the new scheme.

9. How We Will Develop Tenant Participation

9.1 We aim to increase our tenants' involvement in making decisions about their homes, our services and the area they live in. We will identify more opportunities for participation and ways for tenants to become involved.

9.2 Tenants Panel

We will build up our list of interested tenants to develop our Tenants Panel. They will meet when needed to look at a policy or service, or will be asked to reply to questionnaires. We will also set up a list of tenants who may find it hard to come to meetings but are interested in being consulted by email.

9.3 Tenant Scrutiny

We will work with our tenants to develop scrutiny of our performance with initial support from the Tenants Information Service/ Tenant Participation Advisory Service. The aims will be to:

- raise tenant, staff and the Board's awareness of the Charter and what can be achieved in developing tenant scrutiny.
- help tenants, staff and Board members to develop a scrutiny framework that embeds the role of tenant scrutiny into our operations and governance.
- develop ways to involve more tenants and recruit more volunteers
- learn about good practice in scrutiny around Scotland and the UK.

9.4 Working Groups

We will set up a working group with tenants to review the information we send out to tenants, and to agree the style and content of the annual reports we need to give tenants on our performance.

9.5 Focus Groups

If we find that certain groups of tenants are not represented on our Tenants Panel or Groups, we will contact them specifically to find out their views and to encourage them to take part.

9.6 Open Meetings

When needed, we will hold open meetings for all tenants to exchange information and give them an opportunity to air their views. Tenants will be given the chance to put their questions in a box or hand them to staff before the meeting so that they can be read out on their behalf.

9.7 Neighbourhood Walkabouts and Stair Inspections

We will invite tenants to neighbourhood walkabouts and stair inspections to involve them in improving the local services and area.

9.8 Tenant Satisfaction

As part of the Social Housing Charter, we will ask tenants how satisfied they are with how we keep them informed, and the opportunities they have to participate. We will issue a customer satisfaction survey in 2013 and feed back the results into our yearly tenant participation action plan.

9.10 Training

Appropriate training will be provided to our Board of Management, staff and tenants to ensure they have necessary information, skills and self confidence to contribute effectively.

9.11 Support

There is an annual budget agreed by the Board for tenant participation. Staff time will also be made available to attend meetings and provide support.

To help people get involved with tenant participation, we will:

- provide transport to get to events/meetings

- provide crèche/care arrangements (when required)
- make sure any of our meetings are accessible to all those wanting to attend.
- provide information in different formats (e.g. languages, audio, Braille etc) as required
- support Tenants & Residents Associations to get training and grants.

10. How We Will Feedback to Tenants

We will explain how our tenant's views, opinions and complaints have been used to help inform and change our policy or service. We will give feedback through our newsletter, our website and at meetings.

11. How We will Monitor our Progress

We will regularly monitor and review our strategy to make sure that we are keeping to our aims and objectives. Our Action Plan will be reviewed every year in consultation with staff and tenants. We will provide tenants with regular information about progress against our strategy mainly through our newsletter.