



A Review of Tenant & Resident Participation in Aberdeen City Council



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Foreword by Chair of Group Paul McMenemy

In 2004, the Aberdeen Tenant Service Review Group was established to review the Council's services. Following the implementation of the Scottish Social Housing Charter (known as the Charter) on 1st April 2012, it was renamed the Aberdeen Housing Service Review Group (AHSRG) to include not only tenants but other customers/service users.

The group is very proud of the awards we have won but also, we have travelled all over Scotland to other landlords and their tenants promoting the work we do – Working Together for Better Services.

This is the Group's seventh review – Tenant & Resident Participation having carried out our first report of the Housing Repairs in 2010- 2012. Community Safety in 2012-2013 and after a delay, the Housing Management in 2015-16, a re – review of Repairs in 2017, feedback review in 2019 and a review of Asset Management in 2021.

We would like to thank all the staff, tenants and residents who have participated in this review. They have provided great ideas and suggestions Thank you to Carol Hannaford, Development Officer, Tenant & Resident Participation, Ellie McDonald Communication Business Adviser for her advice on the report, and Katrina Angus, Design and Graphics Officer, for the fantastic visual design.

I would also like to thank all the Members of the Review Group who gave of their time – John Duncan, Norma Groves, Geraldine Matthew, Vicky McKenzie, Lewis McGill, Fay Morrison, Betty Simpson, and Alex Wilson. Special thanks must also go to Lewis McGill, for the many hours he spent collating and producing this report.

The group are delighted the Action Plan has been presented to the Communities, Housing & Public Protection Committee as part of the Housing Improvement Plan Report.

Paul McMenemy

Chair of Group

Foreword by Chief Officer Housing – Jacqui McKenzie

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Housing Service Review Group who have undertaken a review of tenant and resident participation in our housing services. Your dedication, time, and insightful contributions will be invaluable in shaping the future of our services, given the importance of tenant and resident participation in achieving this.

Your efforts in this review process have demonstrated a sense of responsibility and a genuine desire to enhance the quality of our housing services for everyone. Listening to your thoughts, experiences, and suggestions is so important. It is through this collaborative approach that we can identify areas for improvement, celebrate our successes, and work together to address challenges.

Your voices are essential in ensuring that our housing services remain responsive and meet the needs of all tenants. By participating, tenants can help shape policies, improve services and have a say in the decisions that affect their homes and communities.

As we move forward, we remain committed to ensuring there are opportunities for all tenants to participate in shaping our services, at a level they are comfortable with.

By working together, we can create a more connected and supportive environment, where every tenant feels heard, valued, and empowered.

Thank you once again for your commitment and I look forward to continuing working with you.

Jacqui McKenzie

Chief Officer - Housing

Context

Tenant Participation (TP) is a legal requirement as stated in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter. This set the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities. Under the 2010 Act, the Scottish Housing Regulator is responsible for monitoring, assessing, and reporting on how well social landlords, individually and collectively, achieve the Charter's outcomes.

The Guide to Successful Tenant Participation by the Scottish Government states:

"When working well, TP delivers clear benefits for tenants, staff, and landlords alike."

These include:

- ▶ Better service delivery and improved outcomes for tenants which give value for money.
- Working together for common goals with respect and understanding.
- Informed and knowledgeable tenants who have the skills and confidence to influence decisions.
- Increased tenant satisfaction with their home and neighbourhood.
- ldentifying actions for service and performance improvements and working together to implement these recommended improvements.

"The benefits of Tenant Participation and the improvements in service delivery they bring will evolve over time as effective information, communication and participation structures strengthen.

"TP and scrutiny can only be effective where landlords are committed to and have a culture of involving tenants in their decision-making process and where the principles of TP are adopted throughout the organisation.

Its success very much depends upon landlords embracing TP at the most senior level, including elected members and committee members who are responsible for setting the strategic direction of the organisation and its culture."



or Service User

Why did we choose Tenant Participation?

The Group decided to review Tenant & Resident Participation because:

- The 2021 Tenant Satisfaction Survey said only 46.3% of tenants were satisfied with the opportunities to participate and only 69.5% were satisfied with the overall performance of the housing service.
- The current Tenant Participation structure is over 12 years old.
- The Tenant Participation Strategy is still in draft form, presenting an opportunity to quickly build the learning from this review into the final strategy.
- Due to a reduction in the number of dedicated Tenant Participation Officers over the last few years, although we recognise that to make sure the TP is recognised as everyone's job it may require a different approach in the longer term.
- The number of tenants getting involved in the citywide groups is declining. Over the last five years numbers have fallen from 20 tenants per group to 10 tenants per group.
- There are very few local tenant groups. With numbers falling from 25 groups approximately to 12 and these are mainly Sheltered Housing Groups.
- There are very few meaningful tenant consultations. The number of tenants participating in consultations is decreasing. Consultations tend to be done at the last minute, officers who deal with tenants are not informed of consultations, decisions are taken with no consultation, for example, the minimum letting standard and consultations regarding housing improvements are not done effectively and should be improved.
- The housing volunteers feel their knowledge and expertise is not used effectively by the Council.
- While there will always be a place for traditional tenant participation, increasing the use of digital methods continues to be adopted, bringing TP into the 21st century.



General Findings

- Aberdeen City Council has 69.5% satisfaction with the Council's overall service. (These figures were from the 2023 Annual Return on the Charter). From a review of the Scottish Housing Regulator webpage there appears to be a direct link with effective TP and higher rates of tenant satisfaction suggesting we need to strengthen our TP arrangements.
- The decreasing numbers of tenants engaging with TP suggests that our Tenant Participation structure and officer arrangements should be reviewed.
- Other Councils' give their tenants a room or TP hub, for example, East Ayrshire to drive participation. There could be considerable value in establishing an accessible and tenant friendly space to drive participation through the use of a hybrid meeting room which can be used out of hours and on weekends.
- ▶ Tenants find the response time frustrating when contacting the Council using the 03000 number.
- Communication with tenants and the Council needs to be improved. As a group we attend various community events throughout the city. The main complaint is "we can't contact the Council waited on the phone for over 45 mins." Quote from Tenant.
- As one tenant who continues to be involved in TP for over 25 years said "Within the Tenant Participation structure, non-digital tenants should be taken into consideration. They should be included in the relevant consultations of landlord policies and investment plans as they contribute to the Housing Revenue Account by paying their rent. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator recognise that there are non-digital tenants."

The recommendations made by the Group:

- The current tenant participation structure and staffing should be reviewed.
- 2. Continue to explore options for a tenant participation room with hybrid facilities.
- 3. Utilise the expertise of the Tenant Participation Group as existing policies, leaflets, notices etc are reviewed.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) should have more information regarding the cost of housing improvements and this group should be more involved in the consultation process.
- Tenant Participation group should be more involved when there are changes to the TP budget and should have a greater say in how this budget is spent.
- The start up and annual grants of RTOs need to be fairer to represent the demographics of the RTO. (Registered Tenant Organisation).
- 7. The Group and Officers should explore how tenant participation can be more involved in improving services.
- The Communication Group must evolve becoming a much more digital group, in addition, to improving traditional methods of engagement.
- As part of the Tenant Participation review, explore opportunities for Tenant & Resident Forum (TARF) members to have a greater voice.
- 10. Present the final version of the review to the relevant committee.
- 11. Contact arrangements should be reviewed to improve the ability of tenants to contact housing.
- 12. Corporate Landlord to have a calendar showing when housing improvements are to take place in properties.
- 13. Establish a Housing Communication Plan for the year.

- Notice Boards in Multi Storeys and Sheltered Housing complexes need to be kept up to date.
- 15. Improve joined up working with SHMU and ACVO with the area housing teams using these magazines, web pages and radio shows to improve communication with tenants.
- 16. Work in collaboration with Housing and Support Officers at drop in events to promote area/citywide tenant participation.
- 17. All staff to promote and support tenants through consultations.
- 18. A dedicated officer(s) is identified at the start of a service review to consult with the group, attend meetings and keep the group updated with actions and progress.
- Frontline staff should be included in improvement activity, including reviewing policies and procedures.
- 20. Explore options to improve tenant participation to ensure it is promoted within the Council and that there is consistent engagement when officers attend meetings with Tenant Groups.
- 21. Housing & Support Officer and Bon Accord Care staff to set an agenda for monthly meetings and attend.
- 22. Tenants are to receive a professional service and be given the support they require.
- 23. Tenant participation activities to be recorded in the Housing System by the Housing and Support Officer with the goal of providing tenant participation indicators.
- 24. Housing and Support Officers should have access to improved training in tenant participation to achieve better customer engagement and increase customer satisfaction.
- 25. The Chief Officer of Housing should meet regularly with the Housing Service and Review Group to address issues and provide feedback in an informal setting.

- 26. The action plan developed by the group and the service should be routinely updated and the group is kept informed of the progress.
- 27. Performance figures on annual visits by Housing and Support Officer should be provided monthly.
- 28. Repairs Service should provide monthly performance figures when the new NEC system is in place.
- 29. Tenant participation should be promoted by Group members developing various short tenant participation videos and displaying them on social media.
- 30. All Sheltered Housing complexes to be fitted with WI-FI capability in their common rooms.

- 31. Tenant participation introductory sessions are to be provided at locality events supported by area housing teams.
- 32. Improve all communication with tenants, listen, consult and feedback to ensure consistency of service across the city no matter where you live.
- 33. Promote tenant participation on social media.
- 34. The Communication Group should be involved in suggesting topics for the monthly emails issued to all tenants.
- 35. Review the name of the Events and Communication Group.
- 36. Review the name of the Citywide Sheltered Housing Group.



Citywide Groups

All these groups were established in or before 2012 when the first Scottish Social Housing Charter became law, and the new independent Scottish Housing Regulator was established. These groups are all Registered Tenant Organisations and they are registered with the Scottish Government. The City Centre Groups have to evolve to ensure they are still relevant to tenants but also as we move into localities, there is an opportunity to deliver TP differently.

There are currently six citywide groups:

- ▶ Tenant & Resident Forum for tenants who want to be involved at a strategic level.
- ▶ Housing Service Review Group for tenants who want to review Council services.
- ▶ Housing Performance & Budget Group for tenants interested in facts and figures.
- ► Communication & Events Group for tenants who want to improve communication and organise/attend events.
- ► Citywide Sheltered Housing Group for tenants who want to get involved at a more strategic level with sheltered housing.
- ► Citywide Multi Storey Group for tenants who want to get involved at a more strategic level re multi storeys. Now dissolved.

For further information about these groups go to www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/housing/tenant-and-resident-participation.

Tenant & Resident Forum was established to be the top tier of Tenant Participation, but it is not recognised by the Council. The group would like to have a more productive role with senior management.

Housing Service Review Group is the scrutiny group to review and does physical reviews of Council services. This group would like to thank the Council Staff, especially the front-line staff, who participated so openly in these reviews. They explained what worked and what was not working. Many suggested great ideas/suggestions to improve their service to tenants/residents.



Housing Performance & Budget Group is a subgroup of the Housing Service Review Group and provides the facts and figures to the group monthly. The group would like to thank Susan McLeod (Quality Assurance & Performance Manager) and all her staff who have worked with this group for many years. Her enthusiasm and her commitment to involve tenants is appreciated and valued. Currently Hayley Deans (Strategic Performance and Improvement Officer) attends the monthly meeting. The group would like to thank Hayley for continuing to listen to the group and improving the report with the group.

The Housing Revenue Account is discussed at this group as well as the Tenant Participation Budget. We appreciate the work Helen Sherrit (Finance Partner) has tried to do for the group in trying to get information about the HRA.

Communication & Events Group is a group for tenants who want to improve communication. This group is currently involved in helping to produce Newsbite and any leaflets get the customer approved logo. Although members attend various events, we tend to piggyback on to locality events. The use of Facebook has increased due to a tenant taking the lead. There are Facebook pages for Citywide Tenants & Residents, Citywide Sheltered Housing, all mainstream multis, the Clinterty Traveller's site and all new build sites. Certainly, in some multis, this has brought "communities" together, with items like sofas, cots, buggies being offered free in the building. Information and promotional material from Aberdeen City Council, Community Councils, Priority Neighbourhood Groups, Partnerships, Fire Service, Police, and voluntary organisations have been posted.

Citywide Sheltered Housing Group is an award-winning group which was the first group in Scotland to receive a TPAS group award. Previously there was poor consultation and communication with tenants, so this group was established in 2011 and is a strategic group. However, due to poor communication the group started to be for individual issues for tenants and their complex. It was agreed that monthly meetings with Bon Accord Care and Housing & Support would take place monthly, with a poster with monthly dates for the year displayed as agreed with tenants. There is a Sheltered & Amenity Housing Facebook Page to encourage digital engagement.

Citywide Multi Storey Group this group was dissolved this year due to falling numbers but could also be due to better engagement at a local level. Bi-annual resident led inspections are being conducted in all mainstream multis. Various drop-in sessions are taking place by Housing & Support Officers and their tenants. All these Multi Storeys have their own Facebook pages.

Tenants Survey

During the second half of 2023, group members conducted a survey at various events and online about Tenant Participation.

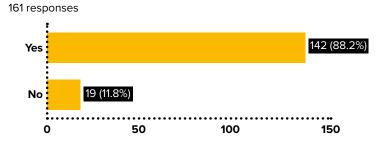
Three questions were asked:

- Are you a tenant of Aberdeen City Council?
- ▶ Have you heard about Tenant Participation?
- Would you be willing to come to an introductory session about Tenant Participation?

Although disappointing, it is not surprising to see that half of the tenants have not heard about tenant participation. This fits in with the Tenant Satisfaction results of 2021. This was the first-time tenants had used an online portal as well as paper.

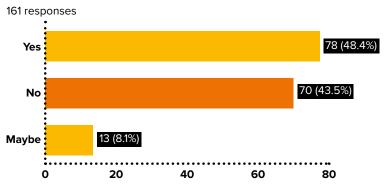
Tenant Participation Survey Results

Are you a tenant of Aberdeen City Council?

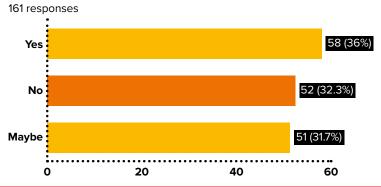


Have you heard about tenant participation? For more information please visit:

www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/housing/tenant-and-resident-participation



Would you be interested in coming to an introductory session about Tenant Participation? This is to give you a better understanding of the groups without feeling overwhelmed at a meeting.



Interviews with Staff

Senior Housing & Support Officers and Housing Support Officers were interviewed by group members in various locations and the following questions were asked to all officers.

- 1. How does Tenant Participation impact your role?
- 2. Did you receive any training on TP?
- 3. Do you think the tenants reviewing services benefits ACC and tenants?
- 4. Do you think community-based TP would be more effective than citywide group?
- 5. Do you think that we as a council (ACC) provide good customer service?
- 6. What would improve staff engagement with tenants?

The findings were that although Tenant Participation did impact on their role, it was not seen as a priority. The need to get more tenants involved was noted but there are no records of TP records being kept.

- The majority had received one off training but didn't have access to on-going training in TP.
- ► Tenants reviewing services was seen as positive as they use the services but the Housing Staff interviewed felt that communication with our tenants was poor as there should be a two way conversation with tenants rather than the Council telling them this is the way it is.

Community Based Tenant Participation would be beneficial to the housing teams, but citywide groups are important as well. Some staff liked the idea of the Multi Storey clusters – saw the benefits but some staff were concerned there would be too many tenants.

Staff interviewed felt that there would be better engagement with their tenants by the following being encouraged:

- An understanding of the role of the Housing & Support Officer by tenants.
- H&SOs being more involved in what a tenant in rent arrears has to pay back as they know their vulnerable tenants.
- Better communication with tenants.
- Being able to receive a better service from the Contact Centre and when they enter a Council building.
- More Tenant & Resident Groups.
- More TP Training.
- Building a rapport with your tenants from the beginning.
- A consistent non judgmental approach for all tenants from all Housing Teams.

Acronyms

ACVO Aberdeen Council of voluntary organisations.

SHMU Station House Media Unit TPAS Tenant Participation Advisory Services TP Tenant Participation.

Appendix 4: A Review Tenant & Resident Participation Action Plan Housing Service Review – Action Plan

Red	commendation	Action	Responsible Team	Aberdeen City Council Response
Ten	ant Participation Review			
1	The current tenant participation structure and staffing should be reviewed.	Tenant participation structure to be reviewed.	Housing Strategy	Review of tenant participation is ongoing. Recommendations from this review will form part of the review.
2	Continue to explore options for a tenant participation room with hybrid facilities.	Continue to explore options and assess budget implications.	Housing Strategy	Explore feasibility of recommendation.
3	Utilise the expertise of the Tenant Participation Group as existing policies, leaflets, notices etc are reviewed.	Inform relevant services/ teams of the recommendation and include as an agenda item for discussion at relevant tenant group.	Housing Strategy	Housing Strategy to send all policies for review to Tenants and Residents Forum.
4	The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) should have more information regarding the cost of housing improvements and this group should be more involved in the consultation process.	The HRA Business Plan is currently being reviewed and will be shared with the tenant group.	Finance Partner	Share HRA Business Plan as part of each update.

5	Tenant Participation group should be more involved when there are changes to the TP budget and should have a greater say in how this budget is spent.	Consultation with the Tenant Group should be ongoing and when there are changes to this budget.	Finance Partner	Share HRA Business Plan as part of each update.
6	The start up and annual grants of RTOs need to be fairer to represent the demographics of the RTO. (Registered Tenant Organisation).	Proposal to be developed with tenants for approval at Senior Management Team.	Housing Strategy	Proposal to be developed for consideration by April 2025.
7	The Group and Officers should explore how tenant participation can be more involved in improving services.	Discuss with tenants what they would like to be involved in.	Housing Strategy	Discussion to form part of an agenda at a future meeting.
8	The Communication Group must evolve becoming a much more digital group, in addition, to improving traditional methods of engagement.	A Communications Business Advisor is to attend the Communication Group meetings to offer advice.	Housing Strategy & Business Advisor	Business Advisor attends monthly meetings.
9	As part of the Tenant Participation review, explore opportunities for Tenant & Resident Forum (TARF) members to have a greater voice.	Consideration should also be given to other ways tenants can be involved.	Housing Strategy	Opportunities to be explored and considered.
10	Present the final version of the review to the relevant committee.	Present the final version of the review to Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee.	Housing Strategy	The Council recognises the value of the Housing Service Review Group and will present the review to committee.

Con	Communication with Tenants			
11	Contact arrangements should be reviewed to improve the ability of tenants to contact housing.	Invite Customer Service Manager to the tenant participation groups to explore options.	Customer Service	Customer Service Manager to be contacted to arrange a meeting.
12	Corporate Landlord to have a calendar showing when housing improvements are to take place in properties.	New asset management model is under development, and this will be included.	Corporate Landlord	Include recommendation as an action.
13	Establish a Housing Communication Plan for the year.	To include Rent Consultation, Tenant Satisfaction Survey etc.	Housing Strategy	Communication Plan to be developed.
14	Notice Boards in Multi Storeys and Sheltered Housing complexes need to be kept up to date.	To be included in the resident led inspections, drop ins and monthly sheltered housing meetings.	Locality Inclusion Manager	Assess feasibility of tenants being provided a key to notice boards.

Ten	Tenant Participation Events			
15	Improve joined up working with SHMU and ACVO with the area housing teams using these magazines, web pages and radio shows to improve communication with tenants.	Regular meetings to take place with ACVO and SHMU.	Housing Strategy and Locality Inclusion Manager	Regular meetings to be scheduled to improve communication.
16	Work in collaboration with Housing and Support Officers at drop in events to promote area/citywide tenant participation.	Improve collaboration with Housing and Support Officers and tenant participation groups.	Locality Inclusion Manager	Regular meetings to be scheduled to improve communication.
17	All staff to promote and support tenants through consultations.	Senior Management Team to lead on this approach.	Locality Inclusion Manager	Staff to provide further support to tenants with consultations.

Staf	Staff Development				
18	A dedicated officer(s) is identified at the start of a service review to consult with the group, attend meetings and keep the group updated with actions and progress.	Senior Management Team to lead on this approach.	Housing Strategy and Locality Inclusion Manager	Staff to engage more with tenants on reviews of service.	
19	Frontline staff should be included in improvement activity, including reviewing policies and procedures.	Frontline staff are included in improvement activity.	Housing Strategy	Frontline staff are currently involved in improvement activity and this will be further strengthened.	
20	Explore options to improve tenant participation to ensure it is promoted within the Council and that there is consistent engagement when officers attend meetings with Tenant Groups.	When invitation is sent out, information about the group and what to expect at the meeting will be provided.	Housing Strategy	Further information to be sent to those who attend the tenant participation groups will be issued.	
21	Housing & Support Officer and Bon Accord Care staff to set an agenda for monthly meetings and attend.	Joint agenda to be set and issued.	Locality Inclusion Manager	Agenda also to be displayed on the notice board.	

22	Tenants are to receive a professional service and be given the support they require.	Housing and Support Officer induction to show the importance of effective tenant participation and customer satisfaction.	Locality Inclusion Manager	Induction to be amended.
23	Tenant participation activities to be recorded in the Housing System by the Housing and Support Officer with the goal of providing tenant participation indicators.	Assess the feasibility of recording this information on the Housing System.	Locality Inclusion Manager	Feasibility of this action to be assessed.
24	Housing and Support Officers should have access to improved training in tenant participation to achieve better customer engagement and increase customer satisfaction.	Assess the feasibility and cost of this action.	Locality Improvement Manager	Feasibility of this action to be assessed.

Imp	Improving Tenant Participation Engagement			
25	The Chief Officer of Housing should meet regularly with the Housing Service and Review Group to address issues and provide feedback in an informal setting.	Meetings to be scheduled on a quarterly basis.	Housing Strategy	Quarterly meetings have been scheduled.
26	The action plan developed by the group and the service should be routinely updated and the group is kept informed of the progress.	Action Plan to be shared at meetings on a quarterly basis.	Housing Strategy	Quarterly update to be provided to the group to monitor progress against the actions.
27	Performance figures on annual visits by Housing and Support Officer should be provided monthly.	Assess the feasibility of sharing this information.	Locality Improvement Manager	Establish if Housing System can provide this information.
28	Repairs Service should provide monthly performance figures when the new NEC system is in place.	Figures will be provided when the housing system is in place.	Corporate Landlord	Performance figures will be provided.
29	Tenant participation should be promoted by Group members developing various short tenant participation videos and displaying them on social media.	Promote tenant participation.	Housing Strategy	Further tenant participation will be supported.
30	All Sheltered Housing complexes to be fitted with WI-FI capability in their common rooms.	Assess the feasibility and costs associated with this.	Corporate Landlord	Feasibility and costs to be developed.

31	Tenant participation introductory sessions are to be provided at locality events supported by area housing teams.	Assess different options available to improve communication.	Locality Improvement Manager	Develop a Communication Plan to improve tenant participation.
32	Improve all communication with tenants, listen, consult and feedback to ensure consistency of service across the city no matter where you live.	Assess different options available to improve communication.	Housing Strategy	Develop a Communication Plan to improve communication.
33	Promote tenant participation on social media.	Tenant participation to be further promoted.	Housing Strategy and Corporate Communications Team	Tenant participation is promoted through social media. Explore options for further improvement.
34	The Communication Group should be involved in suggesting topics for the monthly emails issued to all tenants.	Include in meeting agenda for suggestions.	Housing Strategy	To be taken forward in monthly meetings.

Inter	Internal TP Review			
35	Review the name of the Events and Communication Group	Review the name of the group	Housing Strategy	Name reviewed with the group and changed to Communication Group
36	Review the name of the Citywide Sheltered Housing Group	Review the name of the group	Housing Strategy	Name reviewed with the group and changed to Citywide Sheltered & Amenity Housing Group.



HOUSING WALLINE

The Housing Service Review Group would like to thank the Council for working with Tenants and Residents to improve our Housing Online Experience.

They have made a number of changes to the portal, and have listened to what the customers said. It is now so much easier and simpler to use.

Tenants and residents are now able to:

- Access Your Rent Account
- Update your contact details
- Give your notice to terminate your tenancy

And so much more – why not go to **Housing Online** to discover this new experience.





