



hebridean housing
partnership

HEBRIDEAN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

2010 - 2012

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FOREWORD

My own background is from the tenant movement in the Cearns in Stornoway and it is personally important to me that tenant participation is at the forefront of everything we do.

We want to involve you in shaping our services and our highest priority is to work with you to ensure your voice is heard and acted on. Over our first three years we have begun to develop a service that involves and consults with tenants in a range of different ways and on a range of topics.

We are listening to what you tell us about how you want to be given information and how you would like to influence decisions. This strategy sets out the ways we will work with you and outlines the opportunities to get involved and explains how we will provide feedback.

We want to develop an approach to tenant participation that meets your wishes and which is based on comments from tenant representatives, staff and other interested parties. We realise that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to involving you and we will develop a menu of options so that you can decide what level of involvement you are happy with.

I hope you will find this strategy helpful and we would welcome your views on it. We know that we can only improve the services that we provide through meaningful and effective involvement from you. We look forward to working with you and your communities in the future.

**GEORGE LONIE
CHAIR
HEBRIDEAN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP**

WE WANT TO INVOLVE YOU

My commitment is to place tenant participation at the forefront of planning and delivering housing services. This means keeping you informed and listening to you, so that you can influence how the service is run. The strategy sets out how we will do that. It explains what information we will provide, how we will consult with tenants and how we will take account of their comments.

I believe that the most effective method of improving services involves working co-operatively and in partnership with you.

I believe our tenants have much to offer in pursuing our goal of being the landlord that you want and we aspire to be. Our strategy charts this commitment and shows our desire to develop more modern and innovative ways to involve you. Our staff will support existing groups, and actively encourage the formation of new groups and encourage individuals to become involved at a level that suits them.

You should be able to become involved when you have the time in a way that meets your circumstances about issues that interest you

The next 2-3 years will provide challenges and opportunities which we can together use to develop into the landlord our islands and you deserve.

**ANGUS LAMONT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
HEBRIDEAN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP**

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is the second Tenant Participation Strategy, produced by HHP in co-operation with tenants, tenants groups, and other key stakeholders.
- 1.2 It reflects HHP's commitment to work in partnership with tenants to improve the development of housing services. This strategy describes a series of actions that HHP intends to implement to support and enable tenant participation. It:
 - Describes a series of objectives and actions for the period 2010-2012.
 - Outlines the resources available to support tenant participation.
 - Sets out our priorities for tenant involvement for 2010-2012.
 - Provides a focus for individual tenants, tenants groups, Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs), residents and other community groups who wish to jointly work with HHP to improve services.
 - Shows how we will assess our progress and measure the impact of the strategy.
- 1.3 HHP has worked in partnership with tenants to develop a tenant participation strategy that offers effective and practical methods for tenants to get involved in the delivery of housing services.
- 1.4 HHP is committed to developing successful tenant participation. We believe that only by working with tenants, providing good quality information and listening to tenants views can we provide first rate housing services. The objectives of this strategy include involving all tenants and stakeholders equally and providing them with the opportunity to take part in decision making.
- 1.5 As required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, this strategy sets out how we will consult with tenants and how we will take account of their views. The strategy outlines the mechanisms we will seek to put in place and the resources that are available to ensure the strategy is successful.

PROGRESS

- 2.1 We have made progress over the first 3 years of HHP to improve and develop participation and tenant involvement. We have:
 - Held annual Tenant Conferences with tenants, residents, staff and members identifying key priorities for developing participation.
 - Strengthened our partnership working with Western Isles Federation of Tenant and Resident Associations.
 - Updated our register of tenants and residents groups.
 - Begun to develop a list of interested tenants, called a Tenants Panel, to help maximise the numbers of tenants becoming involved.
 - Published a tenants handbook and repairs handbook.
 - A Focus group of tenants has recently been held on rent collection and further ones are planned on repairs and customer service.
 - Published regular newsletters and our annual report.

TENANT PARTICIPATION IN SCOTLAND

- 3.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 ('the Act') introduced a legal framework for tenant participation. By virtue of having a Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) and a Short SST, tenants have rights to information and consultation. The aim of the legislation was to develop a platform on which successful and meaningful tenant participation can be built. The Act introduced new rights for tenants and placed new duties on landlords.
- 3.2 Landlords now have to:
- provide a range of information to their tenants;
 - have in place a tenant participation strategy;
 - have a registration scheme for tenant organisations to register with them and keep a publicly available register of these registered tenant organisations (RTOs);
 - consult with tenants and registered tenant organisations on a range of housing and related services .
- 3.3 Section 54 of the Act introduced provisions to enable both individual tenants and registered tenant groups to be consulted by their landlord on issues affecting them. Landlords have to take account of the views of tenants and RTOs within a reasonable timescale.
- 3.4 Further information about the tenant participation requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 is available at www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2001/20010010.htm.
- 3.5 This strategy has been developed with reference to the Scottish Government's 'Guide to Successful Tenant Participation' which is available on their web site and provides useful advice and guidance both for tenants groups and for landlords.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- 4.1 HHP embraces the principle of equal opportunities. Hebridean Housing Partnership is committed to:
- Ensuring barriers to participation such as language, accessibility, timing, tenants costs and childcare have been considered.
 - Considering the needs of equalities groups and proactively involving traditionally excluded groups in the participation process.
 - Ensuring registered tenant organisations (RTOs) promote equal opportunities and are open and accessible to all tenants through the criteria for registration. Hebridean Housing Partnership has a responsibility to ensure, through support and encouragement, that equal opportunities are at the centre of all their activities. RTOs should proactively seek the participation of excluded groups in their own organisation. Examples may include:
 - holding events in venues that are accessible to those with physical disabilities;
 - providing transport to and from events;

- using venues that are used by community organisations working with excluded groups and tapping into cultural events;
 - holding meetings and events at suitable times;
 - using information technology to communicate with those living in remote areas or those with mobility difficulties;
- 4.2 Details of how to become a registered tenant organisation are available on our website at www.hebrideanhousingpartnership.co.uk
- 4.3 HHP will strive to encourage equal opportunities and diversity, responding to the different needs and service requirements of people regardless of sex, race, colour, disability, age, nationality, marital status, ethnic origin, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or gender re-assignment. We embrace the spirit of equalities legislation and regulatory frameworks, including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

CONSULTATION IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS STRATEGY

- 5.1 This draft strategy has been prepared in partnership with Western Isles Federation of Tenant and Resident Associations (WIFTRA) and is based on the Aims and Realities consultation document launched at the tenants annual conference in April 2009. Consultation in the preparation of this strategy involved a series of measures such as:
- An assessment of the existing strategy for participation.
 - A review of best practice.
 - Consultation with tenants and other stakeholders through the Tenant Conference.
 - Tenant surveys.
- 5.2 Several key priorities were identified throughout the consultation process. These included:
- Reviewing tenant participation resources and identifying how wider resources could contribute to tenant participation.
 - Raising the profile of tenant participation and creating opportunities for effective participation to be highlighted and encouraged.
 - Reviewing the quality and range of information provision to tenants and tenants groups.
 - Developing an annual schedule of consultation in partnership with tenants.

OUR VISION

- 6.1 Our vision for Tenant Participation is:
- To place tenants at the centre of all that we do.
 - To make the Western Isles a place where tenants can influence decision making through a range of involvement opportunities working with, and through HHP.
 - For HHP and our tenants to become a partnership that will deliver sustainable improvement of services and the housing environment.

PRINCIPLES

- 7.1 We recognise that our tenants possess skills, knowledge and experience which are valuable and complementary to those of our staff and board.
- 7.2 Our guiding principles are as follows:
- We are committed to creating a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, board members, and officers working together towards improving housing conditions and housing services.
 - We will ensure tenant participation is a continuous process.
 - We are committed to open and accountable decision making.
 - We recognise that adequate time and resources should be given to tenant representatives to consider the issues properly.
 - We recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
 - We recognise that good working relationships evolve gradually and must be flexible to adapt to local circumstances.
 - We will tailor tenant participation opportunities in remote areas to suit the particular needs of tenants in such communities.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 8.1 Our overall aim is to enable tenants to have real opportunities to become involved in the decision making process of HHP.
- 8.2 Our specific aims are to:
- Offer a range of options for tenants to become involved, both collectively through tenants and residents groups, and on an individual basis.
 - Ensure tenants are encouraged and resourced to fully engage in the participation process and to be involved in decisions affecting them.
 - Continuously develop ways of improving communication and information dissemination to meet the needs of all our tenants.
 - Develop and support tenant participation HHP wide.
 - Provide support and assistance to tenants groups to help them become involved.
 - Improve communication and information dissemination to meet the needs of all our tenants.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- 9.1 We recognise that in order for Tenant Participation to successfully develop it has to be properly resourced and supported. Resources include financial, physical and staff assistance.
- 9.2 The annual budget for tenant participation will be reviewed in consultation with WIFTRA on a year by year basis. A budget will be allocated for Tenant Participation to fund a number of activities as follows:

- Annual grants to tenant organisations
- Homeward newsletter
- Tenant Satisfaction Survey
- Funding tenant-led inspections and mystery shopping
- Consultation with tenant organisations and individual tenants
- Tenant conferences
- Administration

9.3 To support and encourage the development of tenant participation tenants have access to the following resources:

- Tenants and residents group grants.
- Opportunities to attend joint development events and local and national conferences.
- Training events and information including joint training with housing staff.
- Support of HHP staff including attendance at meetings, where appropriate.
- Access to independent advice and assistance.
- Guidance and support to all groups to enable them to become RTOs.

ACTION PLAN

10.1 This section summarises the main actions we intend to undertake to develop tenant participation and deliver the aims and objectives of the strategy.

10.2 Keeping tenants informed

HHP aims to provide tenants with good quality information that is relevant, up to date, informative and easy to understand. HHP will keep tenants informed through a variety of different methods such as:

- the tenant newsletter “Homeward” will be produced at least twice yearly. We will tell tenants how their comments and views have helped us make changes to policies and services. The information we provide will explain important aspects of the housing service and give information on what is going on in local areas.
- the tenant handbook. The easy to read tenant handbook is provided to all HHP tenants. It provides tenants with key information on their tenancy and services provided by the HHP. In addition this information will be made available on our website.
- the website: www.hebrideanhousing.co.uk This will be developed to provide information on a wide range of housing related issues and service provision.
- Leaflets - we will develop a range of information leaflets providing information and advice on key aspects of services.

10.3 Use of new technology

- We wish to develop the use of new technology as a means of providing information to tenants and to deliver services. We believe there is significant potential to improve access to services particularly for people living in more rural areas or who are unable to access services in more traditional ways. This includes the potential for tenants to participate in service planning and development. Examples of services that could potentially be delivered through the internet are:
 - Viewing your rent account and making payments
 - Applying for housing and updating your application
 - Reporting and tracking a repair to your home

10.4 Menu of options for getting involved

Traditionally, tenant participation has focused on consulting with formal tenant associations. HHP recognises that not all tenants want to get involved in this way and will develop a 'menu of options' to enable tenants to get involved in ways that suit them. These options will include:

- **Tenants Panel**

Often tenants who would like to get involved in tenants and residents associations have other commitments that prevent them from attending meetings regularly. HHP will develop a 'Tenants Panel' to ensure that individuals, who are not attached to a tenants and residents associations are able to have their voice heard.

The register contains contact details of those tenants that would like to be consulted. HHP will regularly consult with and involve tenants on the register over a variety of housing issues.

- **Working Groups**

Often tenants have a specific interest in certain areas of the housing service. A good way of having your say on these issues is to join a working group. This is a short life project which often gives tenants a 'hands on' option of developing new services or policies. Working groups are attended by both tenants and staff members. Tenant representatives would be paid a fee to cover their time and expenses.

- **Focus Groups**

Focus groups give tenants the opportunity to have their say on aspects of policy or service and are usually a one-off meeting. They can provide valuable information to HHP on how tenants perceive the organisation and the services it delivers. Again tenant representatives would be paid a fee to cover their time and expenses.

Board Membership

10.5 An important opportunity for tenants to become involved is through membership of the Board. There are 5 places available for tenants on the Board and we will encourage tenants to use this opportunity.

10.6 Young Tenants

Young tenants are often underrepresented by mainstream tenant involvement techniques such as tenant and resident associations and attendance at tenant conferences. We will explore the possibility during 2010 of establishing a group or forum to involve tenants from the age of 16-25 on their own terms.

10.7 Mystery shopping & Tenant-led inspections

HHP will seek to introduce mystery shopping and tenant-led inspections as an alternative way of involving tenants in the review of housing services. Tenant inspectors would be given training on policies and procedures and would then be able to use a variety of different methods to 'test' services, with the support of officers. The inspection team produce a report on their findings. The purpose of mystery shopping and tenant-led inspections is to test tenant experiences of services and policies and whether they are operating effectively from a customer perspective. They highlight opportunities to improve housing services.

10.8 Satisfaction Surveys and Tenant Questionnaires

HHP carries out a major tenant satisfaction survey every two years to ask tenants their views on many aspects of housing services. We will also seek views on services on an ongoing basis through more informal ways such as survey cards and phone surveys and will develop feedback mechanisms across the range of services that we deliver. Tenants will be informed of the results through 'Homeward'.

10.9 Tenant Conference

A Tenant Conference is held annually in partnership with WIFTRA. Presentations are made by HHP staff and guest speakers and a choice of workshops is offered. The conference is open to all tenants and provides an opportunity to come along and discuss housing issues. We will work with WIFTRA to agree how this can best be organised to reflect the geographic barriers in the Hebrides.

10.10 Consultation or Information Events on specific issues

Consultation events will be held on specific issues when this is appropriate. These will be held in local venues to seek the views of all relevant people within the area.

10.11 Estate Inspections

We have introduced a new, more structured approach to inspecting housing estates on an annual cycle but we recognise the need to involve tenant representatives in this process. The purpose of these inspections is to look at the overall appearance of each estate, including open spaces and not to deal with individual tenancy matters. We will seek to identify tenants from the tenant's panel and through the village voice approach who would be interested in taking part in these for their area.

10.12 Representing all Tenants

HHP is aware that there are groups of tenants that are often under represented in tenant participation. These are sometimes referred to as 'hard to reach' groups and include:

- Young people
- Black and minority ethnic groups
- Gypsy travellers
- Elderly tenants
- People with disabilities
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups

As noted above we will seek to develop a specific forum to engage with young people. We will examine whether a more targeted approach is required to involve other 'hard to reach' groups. We will collect information directly and seek feedback from tenant and community groups on the need to establish specific mechanisms for these groups.

10.13 Tenants and Residents Groups

- WIFTRA - HHP is committed to working closely with WIFTRA as the umbrella group for tenant and resident groups in the Hebrides. We will specifically consult with them on an annual and ongoing basis on tenant participation issues. This will include discussing issues such as tenant priorities, consultation schedules, funding, forward planning and overall performance and progress. HHP will financially support the Forum, allowing them the autonomy to be proactive and creative in the development of tenant participation and Tenant Groups.
- Tenant and resident groups will be consulted over changes to housing policies, service levels and also local issues. We will also provide support to tenants and residents groups including an annual grant to help with administrative costs, such as stationery and postage. Training is also available for groups as required. HHP can arrange for discounted rates for meeting venues, provide travel expenses to consultation events and can fund some places to the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and Tenant Information Service (TIS) annual conferences. Tenants and Residents Associations also receive support from officers through attendance at meetings and Annual General Meetings and offering administration support.
- Informal groups - some groups wish to exist and be involved in a more informal setting. HHP will work with such groups in a manner that suits the group and meets their requirements.
- New groups - HHP will provide support and help to tenants who are interested in setting up tenants and residents associations and will work with WIFTRA to promote the advantages and benefits of more formal groups.

10.14 Village Voice Initiative

HHP realise there are under represented groups across the area and are currently exploring new ways to engage with under represented communities. 'Village Voices' are being developed and encouraged for communities where there are no tenants and residents associations.

10.15 Field Staff

Hebridean Housing Partnership's houses are located in many widely scattered places throughout the Western Isles, often in small clusters. There are several residents groups, some formally registered, which serve several of the larger concentrations of our houses. However, we recognise that we have to take our services out to tenants at their homes because many tenants are remote from any of our offices. We seek to equip the field staff who make home visits, to bring individual tenants a range of services. This will include asking tenants to give their views about our services through customer satisfaction forms and tenant surveys and also encouraging them to take part in consultations and focus groups where they can influence decision making.

10.16 Training

To be able to fully participate, tenants need access to information, training and development support. They may require some or all of the following:

- training and the opportunity to meet with other tenants and learn from their experiences;
- funds to cover administration costs;
- access to suitable premises;
- support to gradually develop their group;
- access to wider tenant opinion;
- attendance at seminars and conferences;

Training needs will be agreed with individual groups. Joint training sessions for staff and tenants will be held where appropriate to reinforce the message that tenants are equal partners. This will also help to strengthen relations between tenant representatives and staff.

Training can be delivered in different ways as appropriate. This may be 'in-house' or may involve external trainers as appropriate.

MONITORING AND REVIEWING THE STRATEGY

11.1 We will also ensure that when we are providing printed feedback on our progress we will do so in Plain English, which is easy to understand and free of jargon. Where possible we will present information using graphs, charts and other visual signposting techniques to make it easier to understand.

11.2 The Tenant Participation Strategy will be a working document subject to continuous review to ensure it is meeting objectives and achieving targets. Progress on implementing and monitoring the strategy will be reviewed annually and reported to the relevant HHP Committee.

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE STRATEGY

12.1 You can write with your comments to:

Hebridean Housing Partnership
Creed Court
Gleann Seileach Business Park
Willowglen Road
Stornoway
HS1 2QP

Or email us at: hhpcs@cne-siar.gov.uk

OTHER FORMATS

13.1 We will seek to make the strategy available in other formats. Please contact us on 0845 603 9180 for further information or copies.

Becoming a registered tenant organisation

The concept of registered tenant organisations (RTOs) was introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and gives important rights to groups who register with their landlord. RTOs are independent organisations set up primarily to represent tenants' housing and related interests. Registration gives groups a recognised role in the decision making process. Landlords should help guide groups through the registration process.

Basic features of registration

Every landlord must keep a register of tenant groups in their area, which is open to public inspection at reasonable times.

Criteria for registration is set by Scottish Ministers.

Tenants' groups can register with the landlord, provided they meet the criteria set by Ministers about being democratic and accountable.

To receive the full benefit of the legislation, tenants' organisations should register with every landlord whose tenants they represent.

Tenants' groups can appeal to Scottish Ministers if they are unhappy about a decision reached about registration.

Landlords are responsible for ensuring that registered groups meet the registration criteria and that this is regularly reviewed.

All groups wanting to become registered must provide their landlord with:

- a copy of their constitution;
- a list of office bearers and committee members;
- a contact address for correspondence which can be made public (this could be c/o the landlord);
- a description of the area the group operates in;
- details of other landlords they are registered with or applying to become registered with

Registration criteria

There is a range of criteria groups have to meet. The group must have a written constitution that is available for inspection and which details:

- the group's objectives;
- the area in which it operates;
- the membership process;
- how the committee operates and is elected;
- how business is conducted;
- how funds are managed;
- when meetings are held, including the Annual General Meeting;

- how the constitution can be amended;
- the group's commitment to equal opportunities;
- how the group intends to promote housing and housing related matters.

The group must have a committee that:

- is elected annually and committee members must be required to stand down after a certain period (this period should be included in the constitution);
- consists of at least three members who can co-opt other members on;
- reaches decisions democratically (the decision making process should be included in the constitution).

The group must operate within a defined area that includes the landlord's housing stock, and it must be open to all tenants within that area.

The group must have proper accounting records showing income and expenditure, assets and liabilities. The constitution must require an annual audited financial statement to be presented at the Annual General Meeting.

The group must be able to demonstrate how it plans to represent the views of its members and how it will keep them informed.

Tenant federations

The criteria for the registration of tenant federations will be the same as for individual tenant organisations.

Groups who do not wish to register

Not all tenant groups will wish to register. If this is the case, individuals still have a right to be consulted. Landlords should encourage groups to register by providing training, information and support.

Changes made by registered tenant organisations

If a tenants' organisation changes its constitution, office bearers, membership or area of operation, they are required to inform their landlord. Providing the changes mean that the registration criteria are still met, landlords will amend the register of tenant organisations accordingly. The failure of a registered group to meet the criteria for registration would constitute grounds for deregistration.

Where groups no longer meet the registration criteria, landlords should provide support to help them meet the criteria again, but should not shy away from deregistering them if need be.

Rights of registered tenant organisations

Registered tenant organisations should work with their landlord in a variety of ways, in addition to any specific consultation with tenants as a whole. Landlords and RTOs should work together to identify policies and practices that they think should be revised. RTOs should be notified by the landlord of their intention to review policies and practices at the planning stage, and should not be presented with proposals as a fait accompli. Areas that are likely to be subject to review, or new proposals that landlords should involve RTOs in, include housing services, housing standards, tenant

participation strategies and stock transfers. RTOs should be given information on the background to proposals and reviews, and given a reasonable timescale, that has been agreed between the RTO and landlord, to consider the issues and give their own views and suggestions.

Landlords should take these views into account and provide feedback to RTOs on the outcome of the review and proposals.

RTOs should also be involved in Scottish Government inspections and be kept involved at every stage by their landlord.

Appeals procedure

A tenant's organisation may appeal against the landlord's decision:

- not to register the organisation; or
- to remove the organisation from the register; or
- not to remove the organisation from the register.

The appeals process will be considered by the Scottish Housing Regulator on behalf of Scottish Ministers. It is important to note, however, that an appeal should be presented only after the landlord's internal appeal procedures have been exhausted. The internal appeals procedure should be initiated without delay and should be completed within three months of the appeal being made, or as otherwise agreed between the landlord and the RTO.