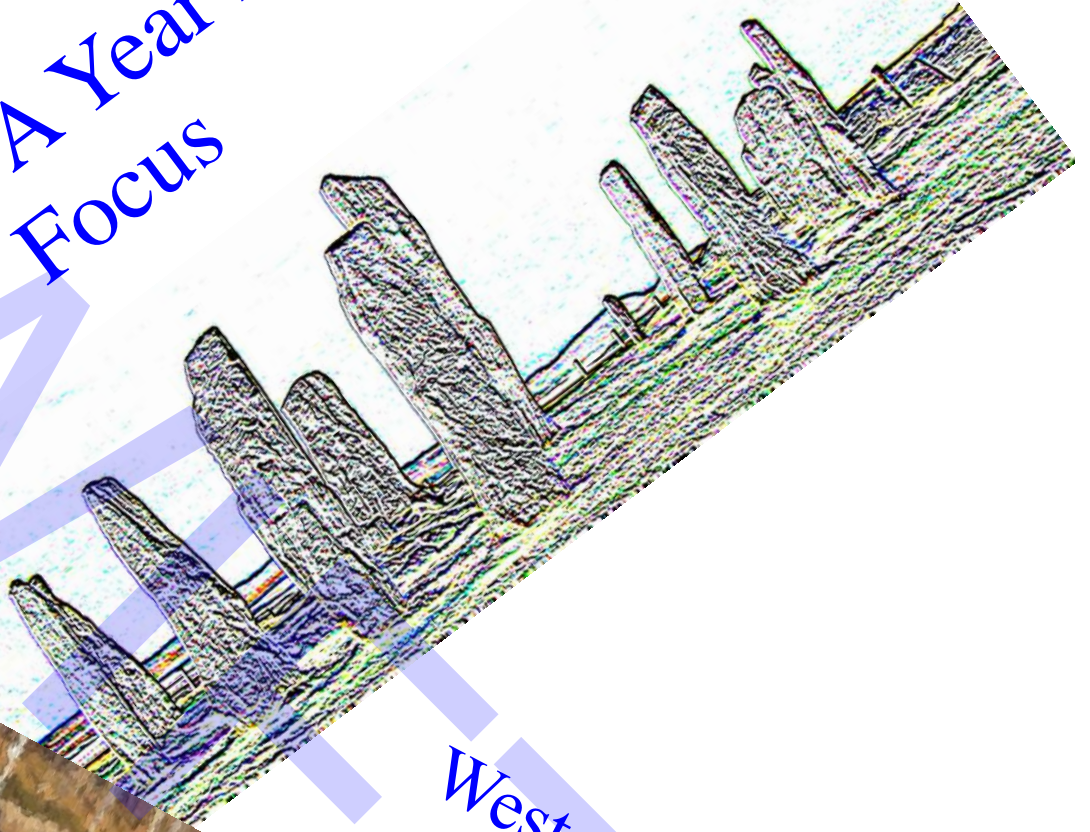


2008 A Year in
Focus



Western Isles Residents'
Forum

A View From The Chair



hebridean housing
partnership



2008

As we look forward to a new year it is time to reflect on what was a busy year for the Western Isles Residents Forum.

The forum has been heavily involved in consultations and responding to various Government documents produced throughout the year, also pushing Tenant participation locally.

The Forum's National profile has never been higher and with our local presence growing, this report reflects the number of achievements made by the forum in the past year.

We have been working within constraints of extremely tight budgets which in turn makes any significant improvements difficult to achieve, however as you read through this report you can see, despite these restraints the forum have made incredible moves forward.

At this stage I have to give credit to the Forum's Vice Chair (Kevin Paterson) who took the lead role with the consultations and responses.

My personal thanks and that of his colleagues on the Forum go to Kevin for his very professional contribution.

I am looking forward to 2009 building on the excellent work done by the Forum in 2008.

Can I on behalf of the forum wish you all a Merry Christmas and a very successful new year. *Calum Mackay (Barney)*

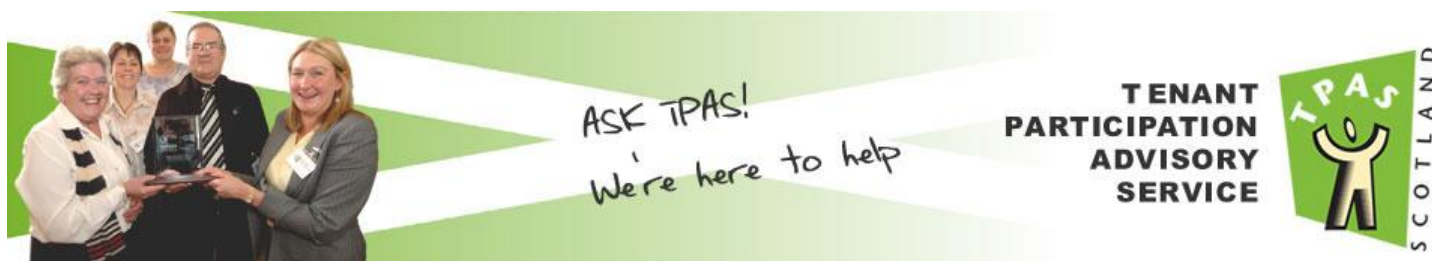
January

January saw Firm Foundations—The Future of Housing in Scotland Reach its consultation conclusion. The Vice-chair met with William Fleming, the lead Civil Servant, in Glasgow before finalising the forum's response. This response was well met by both tenant's groups and landlords.

February

It was in February that The Local Health Care consultation paper arrived. The Forum again formulated a response, after meeting with Andy Smith the lead Civil Servant in Glasgow. This response was especially well received by Stephen Kirkwood who asked for follow up responses regarding the idea of recruiting to Health Boards via Community Councils.

February also saw The TPAS conference Hopes and Realities held in Cardiff. Two delegates from the forum represented the Western Isles in this joint Scottish, Welsh conference. This conference explored the reality of devolution and its affect on community empowerment.



March

After years of preparation this month saw the launch of the National Engagement Regional Networks, with our own Region 9 having their AGM at Highlander House in Glasgow. This was a well attended AGM co-chaired by Kevin Paterson and George McGuinness M.B.E.. Three delegates from the forum attended along with a group of tenants from the Western Isles and many more from Glasgow.



April

April saw fuel poverty taking centre stage both locally and nationally. The Poverty Alliance published their “Heat or Eat” report on the effects of fuel poverty, from a female viewpoint. Whilst the Forum joined the campaign for fair fuel prices across the Isles.

The Vice-chair attended the Poverty Alliance play “Heat or Eat” joining the discussion session afterwards and being the only male amongst seventy women. (*TOUGH GIG!!!! Kevin.*)

April also saw the publication of all the responses to Firm Foundations, with the Forum’s response amongst them.



The Forum’s response is under the Scottish Government button to the left.



Click to see the report.

May

May saw the new Housing Association Grant (HAG) funding regime come into force with for the first time since devolution a real cut in social housing investment. HAG was capped at £73,000 per unit regardless of build cost, meaning for the Western Isles a cut from 83% to 62% in real terms. The forum and HHP were involved in frank discussions with the Scottish Government over these issues.

The first formal meeting of the Region 9 National Engagement Committee took place at Highlander House in Glasgow. The office bearers were chosen with Kevin being elected chair, giving us a firm regional presence for the first time.

June

The first National Community Engagement Committee was called in June and was chaired by our Vice-chair, again pushing the Forum to the forefront of Community Engagement. This committee discussed HAG funding, homelessness and the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). Also on the agenda was the network's meeting with the Minister for Communities and Sport Stewart Maxwell (see July).

The committee went through all the responses from Registered Tenant Organisations drawing up a list of questions to put to the Minister. As well as prompts for supplementary questions and workshop topics they also discussed which departments should send representatives.

At the local level the Forum produced its report into Tenant Participation "Aims and Realities" and entered into discussions with HHP over proper Tenant Participation funding.

July

This glorious summer month was quiet in the most part with few meetings taking place. The Forum, however, continued its excellent work with HHP at both Board and Area Committee level. The Forum making up a fifth of the board and over half the Lewis area Committee.

The 29th July saw the years main national event at the Radisson Hotel in Glasgow with Stewart Maxwell Minister for Communities and Sport answering a range of questions on housing and regeneration issues. Unfortunately Kevin who was to chair the event was fogbound at Stornoway airport, which meant there was no Forum delegates at the conference. However George McGuinness M.B.E. a great supporter of the Western Isles and friend to the Forum stood in at the last minute to deliver Kevin's speech.



August

Always a quiet month August's Forum meeting concentrated on the forthcoming visit to the Western Isles of the Regional Committee. With all the preparations for study visits being arranged.

August also saw our thoughts turning to the tenant's conference, with HHP offering a grant to the forum to arrange an April conference in conjunction with TPAS at the Cala Inn. The date has been confirmed as the 16th and 17th of April 2009.

The Forum also contributed to HHP's newsletter "Homeward", the first for a long time.

Follow this link to Homeward.



September

A very busy September saw the ranks of the forum swelling by three new members and a warm welcome to you all:

Anne Maclean (South Dell Village Voice).

Helen McRae (Lionel Village Voice).

Paul Alldred (Leverburgh and South Harris Village Voice).

Paul also became the fourth forum member to join HHP's Board of Management and we wish him well.

Also at a well attended meeting in Graham Park Ness, Kevin and Tony Pendle (Director of Operations HHP) addressed tenants on the benefits of Community and tenant participation. As a result of this meeting the Forum will be travelling to Ness Early in the New Year.



The visit of the regional committee for a meeting and study visit took place at HHP's H.Q. in Stornoway. The group plus The Scottish Government's Ann Marie Stanley (a familiar face to the Forum) enjoyed great weather and even greater hospitality in the Western Isles. Thanks must go to all HHP staff who made the visit so successful. (See Vice-chair's October report copies from him.)

October

This, of course, was TPAS Conference month, and as usual a group of Western Isles delegates set out for the bright lights of Bonnie Dundee. Despite the best efforts of the weather our forum delegates made the trip and declared the conference a roaring success. Sadly this is Barney's last year as Chair of TPAS but we hope to continue our successful affiliation through our own tenants conference. (See Dolina Swanson's November report - *The Dundee Experience* (Copies available from secretary)).



Also in October the forum was asked to contribute to the Scottish Government's Policy Review Advisory Group on the modernisation of the Scottish Housing Regulator.

November

The Forum in November was granted funding towards Tenant Participation by HHP, this will enable us to pursue our T.P. Strategy as set out in "Aims and Realities - A T.P. Strategy Discussion Document" (copies available from the Chair).

The November meeting discussed National Engagement protocols allowing the Forum to engage at the national level without calling interim meetings. The protocols were adopted and will be appended to the constitution. The meeting in the Cearns Ceilidh Hoose was a lively affair with HHP's Chief Executive and Director of Operations in attendance.

At the national level the Forum was invited to contribute to a Policy Review Advisory Group on Housing Allocation.

December

The last Regional Committee meeting of the year discussed "Firm Foundations" the way forward and the forthcoming "Affordable Social Housing" discussion paper into lead developers and Registered Social Landlords.

In December Kevin also chaired the National Engagement Committee, discussing selection protocols for government groups and sounding boards. A difficult meeting was followed by a forward agenda planning session.

The Chair attended the Chartered Institute of Housing's one day conference on the economic aspects of Social Housing. A report will be sent to the next meeting on January 15th 2009 at HHP's offices in Stornoway.