

Western Isles Forum of Tenant and Resident's Associations

The Dundee Experience- TPAS Cow Pies and all

Participation Through Motivation

Dolina Swanson



08

The Dundee Experience- TPAS Cow Pies and all.

This year's TPAS Conference once again travelled to "Bonnie Dundee" the home of marmalade and Dennis The Menace. The Apex Hotel has become a bit of a favourite with delegates and this year was no exception, with many old friends making the trip. With 340 delegates this was a large conference and the foyer of the Apex was a lively place indeed.

The opening plenary was from William Fleming a Senior Civil Servant from Housing and Regeneration one of the Scottish Governments most senior "policy deciders", and the author of Firm Foundations – The Future of Housing in Scotland. The discussion paper that, love it or hate, has galvanised the tenant's movement throughout Scotland.

William was there to explain how Firm Foundations will form the basis of The Housing Scotland Act 2009, which will be out for consultation in early 2009. The basis of William's speech was to outline the increasingly important role of the private sector in Social Housing, both in providing accommodation and in new build provision. The latter will be through a competitive HAG programme, allowing design and build social housing initiatives to bypass social landlords until completion. Mainly by the opening up of HAG funding to private developers, along with alternative types of tenancy and shared equity schemes. The "right to buy" is also up for discussion with a working group having been set up with The Scottish Government, charities, The SFHA and the National Engagement Committees all taking part.



The first workshop I attended was the National Engagement and The Regional Networks with Hugh McClung and Anne Cook. Hugh is Chair of the Central Region Committee and Anne is head of The Scottish Government's Tenant Participation Development Team.

The Government is committed to engaging with stakeholders through a number of avenues, one of which is the 9 Regional Committees set up to bring tenant participation to the highest level. Hugh reiterated the importance of Registered Tenant Organisations and their role in providing the members of the regional committees and through that onto national committees. The motto of the network is "engagement from the bottom up" and reinforced the point that these are autonomous committees and not an arm of the government. With the chairs having ultimate responsibility for the direction their committees take.

Anne went on to discuss the role of the Tenant Participation Development Team as facilitators, and reiterated that should the committees as one or individually decide that they wish to use other facilitators or go it alone then they are bound by that decision.

The first plenary session followed the workshop. The session I chose was The Role of Housing Associations – Building Communities not Just Houses. This was delivered by Steve Gibson the Director of Cordale Housing Association and its subsidiaries. Steve outlined the problems that Cordale faced in regenerating Renton a very run down area of Renfrewshire that had been stock transferred from the council. This involved demolishing the old housing and building new community targeted housing. Cordale also set up development arms to regenerate the commercial and social care centres of Renton; building a doctor's surgery a supermarket and a care centre for community care plus a childcare centre. More details can be found at www.cordalehousing.org.uk but the ten year regeneration has been remarkable in its scale and its community involvement.

My second plenary session was a thought provoking short play by Naomi Breeze of Breeze Productions, giving an insight into how homelessness affected the life of one person. Entitled "H is 4" this followed the path to and through homelessness exploring how the loss of control over your life and the reliance on others is one of the hardest things to deal with. The discussion at the end of the production did however bring to light a few misconceptions of homeless people and a little prejudice against them. Which tied in nicely with Dr. Stewart Montgomery's excellent workshop entitled "Tenant Participation needs an Equality Focus" which attempted to dispel many of the myths of allocations and equalities issues. Although an excellent insight into what equalities legislation means to the tenant movement, it failed to encourage people to recognise their own prejudices and face up to them. A little less didactic and more interactive would have helped.

Over all the conference was very positive and the mix of workshops and plenary sessions was excellent, adding up to a fantastic conference.

Dolina Swanson HHP

The 2008 TPAS conference was my first experience of such an occasion. An interesting, informative event indeed it was, exceeding my expectations of quality, content and organisation.

Morning session. Raising the bar for tenant participation by Jamie Ballantine was a lively discussion. One view expressed by a member of a Glasgow local housing organisation (membership 5,000), commented on the fact that the association is very happy with the progress made since transfer, particularly by their Chief Executive. The CE personally has set a target to visit ten tenants a week. For many of whom do not have many visitors, a welcomed opportunity to have personal dialogue, this more hands on approach towards tenants has proved very effective in their community.

Afternoon Plenary Session. Improving your powers of persuasion and influence by Nick Davies (The Really Great Training Company). The fuller than capacity audience enjoyed his techniques of embracing two essential components of successful influence and persuasion, developed on Credibility and Trust. Mr Davies also demonstrated the importance of being assertive and not aggressive.

A humorous professionally conducted session, which was interesting with invaluable information that I could assume would be beneficial to all who attended, not only the way in which we may deal in business but to all traits in life. Thank you to HHP for the opportunity to attend this conference.