

Western Isles Forum of Tenant and Residents' Associations.
In Collaboration with Hebridean Housing Partnership.

Aims and realities

In Tenant Participation Strategy

Calum Mackay - Chair

09

Forward

Calum Mackay Chair Western Isles Forum of Tenant's and Residents' Associations and HHP Board.

"We would like to take this opportunity to present our Tenant Participation Strategy Consultation Document 2009, which aims to highlight ways to encourage as many tenants as possible to influence the services we deliver. Whilst we recognise that aims and realities seldom match we believe our tenants have much to contribute to our goal of being a landlord who is inclusive and ever striving for improvement. Our strategy must chart our commitment and show our desire to develop more modern and innovative ways to involve tenants. Especially those tenants whose voices are often unheard, younger people, older people, the disabled and all minority groups who live within our communities. Our staff must support existing Tenant Groups, actively encourage the formation of new groups and encourage individuals to express their views and opinions on all housing management issues. Most importantly tenants should be able to become involved at a level that suits them, when they have the time, not only when an issue arises that they feel strongly about."

"The next year will provide challenges and opportunities which Hebridean Housing Partnership, with the help of tenants can use to grow into the landlord our islands deserve."

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The Legal Framework

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced a legal framework for tenant participation. Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) is obliged to:

- Provide a range of information to tenants. This has been done through a range of leaflets but more recently with the introduction of our Tenants Information Pack. This pack has replaced all the leaflets with a handy guide that covers all aspects of being a tenant of HHP, from tenant rights and responsibilities through to our investment plans and repair responsibilities.
- Have a Tenant Participation Strategy. The Tenant Participation Strategy is currently due to be reviewed (this document).
- Allow Tenant Organisations to register and keep a publicly available register of Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) and encourage the formation of new RTO's. Hebridean Housing Partnership have negotiated with the Western Isles Forum of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (The Forum) a funding package where RTO funding is controlled by the Forum, allowing them the autonomy to be proactive and creative in the development of Tenant's Groups.
- Consult with tenants and RTO's on a range of housing and related services. HHP have encouraged tenants through the Forum to be part of working groups and area committees looking into strategy and policy evaluation, also giving them input into our investment and development plans. The investment and development plans are a constant agenda item at Area Committee and Forum meetings. This allows HHP to consult both individual tenants and RTO's on issues affecting them. We have to take account of the views of tenants and RTO's within a reasonable timescale, therefore HHP brings issues identified by tenants to the notice of the relevant committee or the Board at the earliest opportunity. Set timescales have been adopted for responding to tenants and these are set out in the tenant's handbook along with all contact details and also online.

Good Practice

In 2004/05 Communities Scotland produced the "Good Practice Framework for Tenant Participation in Scotland" to provide support and guidance for landlords in implementing the legal provisions, HHP have used this document in:

- Publishing a Tenant Participation Strategy.
- Encouraging tenants to become members of Tenants' Associations.
- Supporting the formation of Tenants' Associations, Tenants' Consultative Panels, Focus Groups, Area Committees, and at a national level the Region 9 National Community Engagement Committee.
- Adopting initiatives to involve tenants generally in Registered Social Landlord matters, including policy reviews and estate management.
- Explaining clearly the nature of tenant participation to new tenants through the handbook.

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. The field staff who make home visits, mainly our housing officers, area supervisors and clerks of works, are therefore required to bring to individual tenants the range of services normally provided by our larger offices (Uist, Stornoway and Harris). This includes asking tenants to give their views about our services through customer satisfaction forms and tenant surveys also encouraging them to take part in consultations and focus groups where they can influence decision making.

What is Tenant Participation?

“Tenant participation is the active, constructive and informed involvement of tenants leading to plans and decisions which will enable Hebridean Housing Partnership to provide services of a kind and quality which meet their changing expectations.”

Tony Pendle, Director of Operations.

In order to reflect the particular circumstances in which we are working, the following statements summarise the values which HHP attaches to tenant participation:

- Our vision is for HHP and our tenants to become a partnership that will lead to sustainable improvement of our services and the environment of our properties.
- We recognise that our tenants possess skills, knowledge and experience which are valuable and complementary to those of our staff and board.
- We eliminate as far as possible barriers of all kinds which may discourage tenants from making active and constructive contributions to partnership working.
- We make appropriate training and personal development opportunities accessible to staff, board, committee members and all interested tenants.

Our Commitments to Inclusion.

Hebridean Housing Partnership is committed to:

- Ensure barriers to participation such as language, accessibility, timing, tenants' costs and childcare have been considered.
- Consider the needs of equalities groups and proactively involve traditionally excluded groups in the participation process.
- Ensure RTOs promote equal opportunities and are open and accessible to all tenants through the criteria for registration.

The Forum and all RTOs are also required to promote equal opportunities for those in the communities they represent and their commitment to do so should be included in their constitution. 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.

What we at Hebridean Housing Partnership and The Forum will do.

- We will implement a recording system for feedback from tenants, future tenants and other customers, integrated with our Housing Management IT system.
 - We shall provide staff representatives to attend, by invitation, meetings of RTO's and other tenant and community groups. Whilst actively promoting the formation of new groups. We will provide web space for the Forum and community groups to communicate with our tenants and publish reports, agendas and minutes of all meetings in a timely manner.
 - We shall involve tenants in all four localities (Barra, Uist, Harris and Lewis) in the preparation of investment plans. Through the expansion of the Village Voice network and Register of Interested Tenants.
 - We shall invite tenants to contribute to reviews of our policies and the ways they are implemented i.e.:
 - Repairs contracting.
 - Estate management.
 - Tenant participation.
 - Equal opportunities in housing.
 - Allocations.
 - Anti social behaviour.
 - Rent setting.
 - Voids & relets.
- Most policies will be reviewed at three yearly intervals.

- We shall involve tenants in the four localities in the preparation of pilot neighbourhood plans, working to understand the wider needs of communities. This will apply to works which are disruptive in the contract stage but make a lasting difference for tenants and their households, such as:
 - Window replacements
 - Kitchen replacements
 - Bathroom replacements
 - Central heating renewals
- We shall report on the extent of participation during the year to the Board and the Forum.
- We shall review feedback recorded and report back to the Board and Forum.
- We shall look to introduce 'Mystery Shopping' and call recording as tools to improve performance.