

2.5 Training and support for staff and tenants

Training for staff

Staff need to be clear about their roles in relation to consulting and working with tenants and tenant groups. As tenant participation develops a range of staff will spend more time working with tenants. While some landlords may employ specialist tenant participation staff to oversee tenant participation, good tenant participation is the responsibility of all staff. Tenant participation therefore has time implications for all staff.

The staff most involved in working with tenants and tenant groups will be front line staff who meet tenants and managers who have decision making authority. It is essential that all staff who meet with tenants understand the legal duties regarding tenant participation and consultation. Senior managers need to ensure that staff are properly trained and supported to work with tenants, as well as having appropriate delegated authority to make decisions and respond to requests from tenants.

Tenant participation can no longer be viewed as a specialist area – all staff have a role to play. All departments within a landlord organisation will be involved at one time or another in planning, assisting or delivering information or consultation events to tenants and should therefore be aware of good practice.

Training for tenants

In order to be able to fully participate, tenants need access to information, training and development support. They will 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;
- encouragement and support to form representative organisations;
- independent advice.

Training needs should be assessed and agreed with individual groups.

Development support

It is important that tenants have access to staff who are able to help them build their skills, knowledge and organisational ability to participate, when they want it. Development support includes:

- support and advice for tenants who want to form a group;
- supporting the growth of existing groups;
- supporting individual office bearers and committee members to be effective;

- helping tenants identify their needs through use of approaches such as the Scottish Centre for Regeneration's skills framework and learners' resource pack;
- providing training to increase organisational skills and knowledge of housing issues;
- providing relevant and timely information;
- enabling groups to network with other tenant organisations and agencies;
- independent advice.

For more information on working with tenant groups see section 4.4.

Joint training

It is beneficial, and often more cost effective, to hold joint training sessions for staff and tenants. Joint training reinforces the message that tenants are equal partners and can strengthen relations between tenant representatives and staff.

Accessing training

Training for staff and tenants can be delivered in different ways. Depending on the issue, landlords may have the skills and capacity to deliver tenant and staff training themselves 'in house'. In some cases external trainers will be invited to the organisation to give training to staff and tenants on a particular subject. The delivery of training sessions such as these is useful because they are usually focused on issues or needs specific to your particular area and local circumstances.

Remember that training comes in a number of formats, including shadowing an individual, and visiting another tenants' group, tenants' federation or landlord. It is up to you to think about your own and your group's training needs, and to find the appropriate training available to meet those needs.

More general training in a number of areas is available through the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), Tenants Information Service (TIS) and TIGHRA. The Scottish Centre for Regeneration runs a number of free events across the country throughout the year on a wide range of areas related to community regeneration. See www.scr.communitiesscotland.gov.uk for more information.

Independent advice

Organisations such as TIS, TPAS and TIGHRA provide impartial information and advice to tenants. The role of independent advisors is well established in the community ownership process and they are also frequently used to advise tenants on carrying out policy reviews and developing and reviewing tenant participation strategies. Contact details for these organisations are available at Appendix 2.