

## 2.2 Tenant participation strategies

The term ‘tenant participation strategy’ comes from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Under the Act, landlords must publish a tenant participation strategy in consultation with their tenants and registered tenant organisations. The strategy should be reviewed and monitored regularly to ensure that it is working.

A strategy is a flexible action plan that:

- outlines the landlord’s commitment to involving tenants and tenant organisations in decisions about their homes and communities;
- says how this will be carried out;
- details the resources available;
- sets out a range of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) targets.

For more information on strategy, see “Does your Strategy Document Measure Up” which can be accessed on [www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk](http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk).

Implementing an effective tenant participation strategy or reviewing an existing strategy requires landlords and tenants to review their current participation arrangements and progress against targets. Reviewing tenant participation will help landlords and tenants to determine:

- where they are starting from;
- what progress has been made;
- if effective participation is taking place ‘on the ground’;
- what factors are limiting tenant participation;
- what needs to be changed or built upon;
- training and support needs;
- adjustments to the resources required.

You might find it useful when carrying out a review to undertake an audit of what you are doing well and what needs to be improved. You may decide to use the checklists at Section 3 or enlist the support of a specialist organisation to help you review your tenant participation strategy.

The review process must involve staff at all levels, elected members and governing bodies and of course tenants and tenant groups. We recommend that the implementation of the strategy is subject to ongoing monitoring and is reviewed at least every three years. These timescales however should be agreed with tenants.

A comprehensive and robust strategy will include:

- an introduction/foreword;
- the strategy’s background (including the legal framework);
- aims and objectives;
- how the strategy was developed and who was involved;
- why the strategy is in place and the benefits of tenant participation;

- links to other strategies and services;
- how tenants will be kept informed;
- consultation;
- giving tenants feedback;
- how the strategy will be monitored and reviewed;
- working with registered tenant organisations (RTOs);
- resources;
- timescales;
- training;
- equal opportunities;
- action plan.

Looking at these headings in more detail, the following information should be included:

### **Introduction/foreword**

This should be from the convenor of housing, the chair of the management committee, chief executive or director of housing. This shows the organisation's commitment at the most senior level.

The introduction should demonstrate from the outset that the landlord recognises that tenants are at the heart of its business and that tenant participation is a continuous process which must be constantly reviewed.

### **Background**

It is useful to provide an outline of the duties and responsibilities that the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places on landlords and the rights tenants have to be involved in housing and related matters. This section can also highlight previous commitments and achievements in tenant participation and give details of current tenant participation structures and activity.

### **Aims and objectives**

This section should set out the aims of the organisation in developing the strategy. It should recognise the benefits and importance of involving tenants in decision-making processes, and of committing to continuous improvement in tenant participation, not simply meeting the minimum legal requirements.

### **How the strategy was developed and who was involved**

The Act says that landlords have to gather and take account of the views of registered tenant organisations and tenants in matters that affect them, including the tenant participation strategy. Within this section you could give examples of how tenants and registered groups were involved in developing the strategy and how this consultation has helped to influence decisions and outcomes.

It is also useful to specify members of staff who tenants can contact about tenant participation and to give contact details for local tenant groups.

### Why the strategy is in place and the benefits of tenant participation

This section can be used to highlight and promote the benefits of tenant participation to tenants, staff and the wider community. If tenants have a meaningful role in making decisions and understand the processes, greater trust and a better working relationship will develop. Ultimately, this will increase the levels of satisfaction with the services landlords provide.

### Links to other strategies and services

When reviewing a tenant participation strategy, think about how it links with other strategies, for example, the local housing strategy, the community plan and equal opportunities policy. By making links with other strategies you can make the most of opportunities to consult people and increase tenants' awareness of local issues. Tenant participation should not be seen in isolation, but as an integral part of the way landlords operate.

### How tenants will be kept informed

This section should set out the range of methods that will be used to keep tenants informed. It should show that tenants have been asked how they want to be kept informed and what information they want. Tenants' preferences, circumstances and priorities may change over time and how they want to be kept informed will depend on the particular issue. When consulting with tenants, regularly review how they want to be kept informed. Consider using a mix of:

- newsletters and information leaflets;
- a tenants' handbook;
- open days and conferences;
- road shows;
- consultation registers;
- website and IT developments;
- focus groups;
- text messages;
- email bulletins; and
- village voices or street representatives (see section 2.9 for more details).

### Consultation

This section should set out what issues landlords will consult tenants on and what methods they have decided, with tenants, to use. Landlords have to show that they have asked tenants what housing and related issues they want to be consulted on. Some organisations may have little or no formal history of asking for tenants' views, so this may require a change in the organisation's culture. This may be a gradual process which will have to be developed and strengthened over time. However, supporting and encouraging tenants to get involved can mean that information, ideas and power are shared successfully.

Effective consultation is not just a one-off process. It encompasses a wide range of methods so tenants can become fully involved if and when they choose. Consultation methods need to be reviewed regularly to make sure that they are working and that they meet the needs of all groups of people. You can use different methods including:

- focus and working groups;
- postal, phone and door-to-door surveys;
- house visits;
- conferences;
- road shows;
- tenants' forums; and
- consultation registers.

Communities Scotland's 'Community Engagement How To Guide' features information on these practical techniques and others. You can find this guide on Communities Scotland's website at [www.ce.communitiesscotland.gov.uk](http://www.ce.communitiesscotland.gov.uk).

Many tenants often do not want to be involved in formal forums or meetings, so a useful way of getting people's views is to set up a consultation register of interested tenants. Landlords could invite every tenant to be included on a register so they can be contacted when their specific area of interest arises. This allows people with a genuine interest in a topic to be involved and provides a database of interested people for landlords to use in the future.

### Giving tenants feedback

This is one of the most important areas in the participation process and often one which is forgotten. You must carefully consider how you will give feedback following all consultation processes, and the method of feedback should be agreed with tenants themselves. This section should clearly set out how you will let tenants know how their opinions helped shape policy and service delivery, and where it hasn't explain the reasons for this. Tenants take the time to respond to a questionnaire or attend a meeting but are not often made aware of the outcome of their involvement. By keeping tenants informed of how their contribution has influenced an issue, they may be more willing to continue being involved. Tenants should decide how they want to receive feedback, whether it is in the form of:

- individual letters;
- newsletters and information leaflets;
- open days;
- a website;
- text messages; and
- follow up meetings or focus groups.

## How the strategy will be monitored and reviewed

This section should set out the arrangements to monitor and review the strategy on a continuous basis against objectives. Landlords should develop and agree these arrangements in consultation with tenants and tenant organisations. They should also develop ways to test how the strategy is working and involve tenants and tenant organisations in this. One way of showing that the strategy is working would be to include examples of how and on what issues tenants were involved and the outcome of that involvement. This may also encourage others to get involved, if they see tenants making a difference to policies and practices.

An annual review could include:

- progress with the annual action plan;
- tenant and staff training (what training they have had and what they need);
- reviewing minutes from tenants' and residents' meetings to monitor progress;
- feedback and follow up on surveys; and
- the number of events held and the numbers attending.

For more information on monitoring and evaluation see section 2.3.

## Working with registered tenant organisations (RTOs)

The Act gives tenant organisations who register with their landlord a recognised role in the tenant participation process. A registered tenant organisation is an independent organisation set up to represent tenants' interests on housing and related issues. Tenant organisations can register with more than one landlord if they represent tenants from different landlords.

Landlords must have a scheme in place for registering tenant groups and maintain a public register of RTOs that is available for inspection at reasonable times (for example, during office hours). The register should contain:

- the name of the organisation;
- the area it covers;
- a contact address; and
- any other relevant information (for example, when meetings are held).

This section should set out the ways in which landlords will work with and support new, developing and established tenant organisations in terms of staff and financial resources (for example, training, administration support and making premises available to hold meetings).

The strategy should set out the arrangements for registering tenant organisations. It should also set out the procedure for an organisation appealing against not being registered or being removed from the register. For more information see section 4.3.

## Resources

The strategy should set out the resources to be given to tenant participation. This will include:

- training requirements (for tenants, staff, elected members and committee members);
- hiring meeting rooms;
- the cost of providing lunch, teas and coffee;
- providing crèche facilities;
- out of pocket expenses;
- consultation costs;
- travelling expenses for tenants going to meetings;
- printing and posting newsletters and other information;
- grants to help new, developing and established tenant organisations;
- access to IT and support networks;
- staff time;
- going to conferences and seminars.

For more information on resourcing tenant participation see section 2.4.

## Timescales

It is essential to plan and include enough time to consult tenants and RTOs, so that they have sufficient time to debate and discuss issues with the tenants they represent, and have a real opportunity to influence the landlord's service and performance. Tenants need enough time to consider options fully. The time required will vary depending on the issue and RTOs should be involved in setting acceptable timescales. Tenants should also be involved in agreeing priorities for services and issues they are consulted on. One effective way of doing this is to produce a yearly action plan or a participation calendar that clearly sets out achievable priorities for the year ahead. These should reflect both the landlord's and tenants' priorities.

## Training

This section should set out the landlord's commitment to make sure that tenants, staff, elected members and committee members have the necessary skills to allow them to get involved. Tenants and landlords together should assess training needs and make the appropriate training courses available. An effective way of breaking down barriers and building positive relationships is to hold joint training sessions that bring together tenants, staff and elected members and committee members. This also gives everyone involved the opportunity to hear the views and perspectives of others. Regularly monitor and review training needs as these will change over time. The learners' resource pack developed by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration (SCR) will help everyone to regularly monitor and review training needs. Details are available on the centre's website at [www.scr.communitiesscotland.gov.uk](http://www.scr.communitiesscotland.gov.uk). For more information on training see section 2.5.

## Equal opportunities

Under the Act, landlords must assess the needs of equalities groups living in the area and ensure tenant participation is accessible to all. Everyone has a responsibility to break down barriers and to involve as many people as possible. The SST sign up stage is a good opportunity to find out any needs of new tenants and from there put in place procedures to meet these needs. Landlords should proactively encourage participation from particular groups as they may have specific housing needs and concerns.

The strategy should be a framework that allows everyone involved in delivering and receiving housing and associated services to work towards continuously improving these services.

More information on equal opportunities is provided in section 1.6.

## Action plan

Within the strategy should be an action plan that sets out what policies and practices are to be reviewed and/or introduced, what events are being held and how tenants will be involved in the process. Broad information, support and learning needs should be outlined and realistic timescales should be set.

## Beyond the strategy

Having a strategy document is only the start of the process to develop and improve tenant participation. Organisations, including directors, managers, frontline staff, elected members and management committee members, need to support tenants to be involved in the decision making process. The commitments and actions in the strategy should support the organisation's commitment to work in partnership with its tenants.