

HORIZON HOUSING ASSOCIATION	HOUSING SERVICES POLICY
TITLE	TENANT PARTICIPATION POLICY
DATE OF APPROVAL	JUNE 2007
DATE OF REVIEW	JUNE 2011

1.0 AIM

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced a legal framework for tenant participation by introducing new rights for tenants and placing new duties on landlords. Communities Scotland has set down through their Guiding Standards what is expected of Registered Social Landlords and our effectiveness will be monitored through the inspection process.

The key standard (GS2.2) that relates to tenant involvement states:

We have published and are implementing a sound strategy for encouraging and supporting tenants, residents and service users to participate actively in all areas of our work. We support tenants who take an active interest in managing their homes.

This strategy, which is to be published as a corporate document, complements this policy. It is intended as a flexible action plan that outlines Horizon's commitment to involving tenants and details how this will be carried out, the resources available to do so and sets out how this will be monitored. The strategy must be reviewed every 3 years and this review must involve staff at all levels, committee members and of course tenants.

In addition to GS2.2 there are a number of other guiding standards that relate to the involvement of tenants.

GS3.1 – Responsiveness to service users

We place the people who want to use our service at the heart of our work. We treat people with respect and are responsive to their views and priorities.

GS3.2 – Information and advice

We provide or secure effective information and advice, in line with the national standards for housing information and advice services.

GS3.4 – Performance reporting

We give our stakeholders the information they need about the organisation and its plans, services and performance.

GS3.5 – Openness and confidentiality

We respond openly to requests for information, unless there are justifiable reasons for withholding it.

This policy aims to set out the general principles behind our commitment to involving tenants and our objectives in doing so.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

2.1 ENCOURAGE JOINT WORKING BETWEEN TENANTS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND HOUSING STAFF AT ALL LEVELS

- The Association will encourage membership throughout its stock. Each new tenant will receive a letter of introduction, a share form for membership and guidance on how to become a Committee Member.
- During the follow up visit, staff will seek the tenant's interest on membership and will explain benefits of membership.
- Small working groups, telephone surveys and questionnaires will be formed and carried out to allow access to staff and information.
- The Association will maintain a website with key information.
- The Association will use other available media, such as the quarterly newsletter and annual report to promote membership.
- Committee members will receive induction training from staff and be encouraged to attend official openings allowing opportunities for meeting tenants.
- The Association will publicise the names of staff and Committee Members and offer opportunities to meet with tenants.

2.2 DEVELOP A CLEAR, OPEN AND ACCOUNTABLE PROCESS FOR DECISION MAKING

- The Association will hold regular committee meetings in accessible buildings allowing those who wish to attend the opportunity as an observer. This may lead to Committee Membership status.
- The Association will reimburse Committee Members their reasonable expenses in order for them to attend.
- The Chief Executive will brief staff after each Management Committee meeting informing them of key decisions.
- Tenants and interested parties may also request copies of minutes.
- Involve tenants in key policy reviews. This may be by telephone, interview, attendance at meetings, questionnaire or via a working group.

2.3 CONTINUALLY SHARE INFORMATION, IDEAS AND POWER

- In order to achieve this, we need to generate an interest and provide evidence of how tenants views influence the decision making process.
- We acknowledge that there is a risk of over burdening tenants, therefore we will provide summary information for example, using our

newsletter, rent statement letters and leaflets. In each instance we will seek to identify tenants who may wish to become more involved.

2.4 STRIVE FOR A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEMS AND A CONSENSUS ON SOLUTIONS

- We believe that by receiving information, tenants will gain a clearer understanding of the aims of the Association. Our aim is to share the outcomes with tenants and seek their representation and opinions when it is appropriate to do so.
- We appreciate that there will always be occasions when we will be unable to meet everyone's aspirations. Our aim is to reach a consensus with reasonableness at the core of our decisions.

2.5 ALLOW ADEQUATE TIME FOR VIEWS TO BE GATHERED AND ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED BY TENANTS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

- In order to encourage debate, groups or individuals will be afforded a reasonable time for discussion and opinions to be expressed.
- In such circumstances, the date for submission of responses will be highlighted at the outset.
- On occasions when opinions and views are expressed, the Association will endeavour to inform each participant as soon as possible after a decision/outcome has been made.

2.6 CREATE FLEXIBLE AND LOCALITY SPECIFIC MEANS OF WORKING WITH TENANTS

- In view of the spread of our stock it is important that the Association recognises the local differences and makes adequate provisions to allow participation at a local level.
- The Association staff will engage with other providers and registered groups to keep abreast of the wider social factors in our areas of housing management.
- The Association recognises that there are limited opportunities for tenants to visit our offices. Therefore, we will aim for all staff to utilise visits to our developments to engage with tenants.
- Groups, tenants and representatives will always be encouraged to give their opinion on outcomes expected from a service, e.g. reactive repairs, cyclical painting etc.

2.7 ALLOW FOR ADEQUATE RESOURCING IN BOTH THE ASSOCIATION AND TENANTS' GROUP INCLUDING SUPPORT AND TRAINING

- It is the Association's aim to ensure that staff are equipped to engage with tenants. Whilst the majority of tenant contact will be with Housing Services Staff, all staff have a role and will be given an understanding of the principles of this policy.
- Staff will be encouraged to attend training and conferences to engage with tenants and techniques.
- Within the organisation we will seek volunteers to take on a responsibility for tenant participation tasks, for example when organising the tenant conference.
- The Association will set separate budget headings annually for tenant participation techniques. These will be presented annually for approval.
- With regards to those tenants who have expressed an interest in either forming a forum or association of tenants' interests, we will provide financial support and guidance in order to set up the group. A constitution with guidance will be issued to groups.

2.8 RECOGNISE THE INDEPENDENCE OF TENANT GROUPS

- Despite the provision of support, the Association will recognise the independence and constitution of the group.
- To this end, the Association will seek to agree a protocol and rules of engagement with the group.

2.9 MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF LEGISLATION SURROUNDING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, BY REMOVING BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION ARISING FROM ETHNICITY, GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION, SPECIAL NEEDS, LANGUAGE AND LEARNING DIFFICULTIES, AGE, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR DISABILITY

- The Association has for a long time advocated equality of opportunity for minority groups and evidence of this is provided in its work with disability groups, support providers and its own design brief.
- Key objectives of the Association are "Social Inclusion" and "integration" of disabled people. The Association will continue to meet these objectives and seek to extend them to other minority groups who have been historically difficult to attract to our housing stock. (Reference should be made to our Equal Opportunities Policy).

2.10 MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF TENANT PARTICIPATION

- Our key objectives are challenging, particularly for an organisation with housing stock spread throughout the central belt. It is therefore important that we work hard to encourage a belonging/ownership by tenants throughout our housing stock.
- Our success in participation will be assessed on efforts as well as

outcomes. Therefore, we need to be clear on each occasion what the aims of participation are.

- There is no doubt, those services received by tenants provide the greatest opportunity to engage with them, therefore we will set standards and targets that meet the **S.M.A.R.T** objective, ie that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Due to the dispersed nature of our stock involving tenants in meaningful engagement is always going to be a challenge for Horizon. However, despite this, we will ensure that we have a strategy which tenants have been instrumental in reviewing. That will look for innovative, diverse and appropriate ways to engage with tenants leading to genuine improvements in service delivery.