

**Tenant Participation Strategy for Shetland
2016-2019**

“Working together to provide a quality housing service”

Shetland Islands Council and Shetland Tenants Forum

Our commitment to Participation and involvement

Tenants are at the very heart of the service we provide. We are committed to providing quality services to our tenants and to ensuring that all tenants have access to participate in shaping the service that they receive. This strategy document sets out a variety of ways that we have agreed will help enable this to happen. Tenant participation is a two-way process that involves sharing information and ideas to help improve standards and services.

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Executive Manager - Housing

Aims and objectives

- ✓ To actively encourage and involve tenants in decisions which will affect them, their homes and communities
- ✓ To support Tenants and the Council working together to improve services for all tenants
- ✓ To offer a range of options for tenants and residents to participate collectively through tenant and resident groups and individually.
- ✓ To ensure tenants have the support and information needed to enable them to get involved.
- ✓ To provide tenants with up to date information
- ✓ To develop training opportunities for elected members, staff and tenants across a range of housing activities
- ✓ To ensure tenant participation activities reflect equal opportunities and are accessible

Equal opportunities - we recognise the importance of equality of opportunity for all our tenants. We will not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership. We will assist tenants who may need support to participate.

Introduction to the Strategy

This Strategy sets out what we plan to do, how we will consult with our tenants and residents, options available for getting involved, how we will take account of tenants and residents views and how we will feedback to tenants and residents.

The strategy 2016-2019

The past the present and the future

Shetland Islands Council is committed to ensuring tenants take part in decisions that affect them. The Council has a long and strong history of tenant involvement and since 2000 has supported the Shetland Tenants Forum (STF), the representative body for tenants and residents in Shetland. The Shetland Tenants Forum has a tenant participation worker to support and promote participation.

The past - Our strategy was out of date and needed a complete review. Since our first strategy, housing law has changed, more opportunities for tenant involvement have been introduced. TPAS Scotland, a national social enterprise organisation has worked with us to develop our new strategy.

The present - A draft strategy which incorporated new legislation and new opportunities for involvement was sent to tenants groups, STF members and tenants seeking their views on the draft in 2016. A large scale Tenants Satisfaction Survey in 2014 also informed the development of the revised strategy.

The future - The strategy 2016-2019 was approved by STF in July 2016. It is a “living” document, which will change over time to take account of emerging initiatives and tenants’ ideas.

Shaping the Strategy – new opportunities

The Scottish Social Housing Charter was developed by tenants in Scotland for tenants in Scotland. It sets out housing standards and outcomes that all Councils and housing associations should achieve in performing housing activities for tenants. It outlines what tenants should expect from their landlords.

The Charter is important to tenants; homeless people and other service users because it will help tenants have

- a clear understanding of what they can expect from their landlord
- It will give landlords clarity and certainty around what they should be achieving for their tenants and other service users

The Charter gives tenants more opportunities to get involved in developing good housing services. A copy of the Charter is available from the Council’s Housing service or STF offices or www.scotland.gov.uk

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

The SHR’s role is to safeguard and promote the interests of current and future tenants, homeless people and other people who use the services provided by all social landlords. The SHR monitors and regulates the Council’s housing services. The SHR requires landlords to work with their tenants to make sure tenants are at the heart of their organisation and tenants have opportunities to monitor performance and improve services.

The Annual Report to Tenants

Annually, landlords must complete the Annual Return against the Charter (ARC) and It must be delivered to the SHR by the end of May each year.

The Council and tenants will work together every year to develop a report card for tenants. This will be a summary of information on the Councils housing service performance over the year. The report card is to be completed by the end of October each year. In August of each year, the SHR will publish on line the performance of every landlord in Scotland and this information will be available to every tenant in Scotland. www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk.

Getting involved

Open to all – equal opportunities

We will ensure that we actively promote equal access to participation. In all our participation and consultation activities we will promote and encourage our tenants to get involved regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership. We will use a wide range of methods to consult, involve and enable participation which reflects and respects the diversity of our tenants.

We will make every effort to ensure that any barriers that may prevent tenants from participating are addressed. We will for example:

- ✓ When requested provide information in a range of formats
- ✓ Make sure all our information is easy to read and understand, written in plain language
- ✓ Make sure all our information, before it is published is approved by STF and has the Tenant Tick approved logo
- ✓ Hold meeting, events and other activities in places that are accessible
- ✓ Pay reasonable travel expenses or provide transport to attend events
- ✓ Pay reasonable care costs to enable tenants to attend events
- ✓ Provide additional support as required such as digital hearing systems

The Council is a member of Language Line.

How can you get involved?

There is no one way of getting involved that suits everyone. We recognise that some tenants will be more interested in participating than others.

There are a range of ways you can get involved and give your opinions. The Council and STF welcomes the view of all its tenants and residents, and there may be some occasions where only the views of tenants are taken into account, for example in annual consultations over rents; only tenants pay rent so only tenants views count.

Shetland Tenants Forum

What is it? – tenants from all over Shetland meet monthly and discuss and give their views on a range of local housing issues, local community issues, as well Council and Scotland wide issues for tenants. The forum is run and controlled by a committee of tenants.

The STF works in partnership with the Council to ensure tenants are actively involved in shaping proposals to change services, new initiatives, consultations etc.

The STF is open to all tenants in Shetland;, it is funded by the Council and employs a worker to actively encourage and support tenants to get involved as individuals or to help set up and support existing and new tenants and residents groups. The STF gives grants of £300 to help with the start-up costs for new groups and annual grants of £300 to support groups activities.

The STF also offers an advice service for tenants;, if you have a complement, complaint, issue or problem you can take that to STF.

The STF has its offices in Lerwick –

Shetland Tenants Forum

1a Water Lane

Lerwick

ZE1 0AG

Email: joann@shetlandtf.plus.com

Tel / Fax: 01595 695197

If you would like more information about STF or to join the STF and to take part in shaping the future of Council housing services in Shetland contact the Forum. It doesn't involve a huge amount of time or effort and STF will pay towards your travel to attend meetings.

Information from STF – STF keeps tenants up to date through its newsletter, which will be full of topical information and will give you a chance to have your say.

All publications from the Housing Service are edited by the STF . On approval new publications will show the tenant tick logo.

The website www.shetlandtenantsforum.com gives up to date information on consultations, forum meetings, groups in your area, up and coming events.

STF is an equal and active member on a range of Housing Service working groups, such as rent setting, satisfaction surveys etc.

Annual quality audits are carried out on all aspects of the housing service by STF members .

STF can make positive change to tenants' lives – it's easy to get involved and be part of that change.

Tenants and Residents Groups

A Tenants and Residents Group is made up of local people who represent the interests of everyone living in their area. It plays a large part in dealing with problems that people come up against, as well as organising things like social events. Groups are set up for everyone to join and membership is open to all local people.

The Council and STF actively promote the setting up of groups to discuss local issues and to represent local communities directly with the Council. STF gives annual and start up grants to help support groups. Help and guidance to form a group is available from STF.

A Tenants and Residents Group must have a constitution and an active committee to qualify for a grant. STF has a constitution which groups can use as a guide. To become a Registered Tenants Organisation (RTO) the Scottish Government has laid down certain requirements; for more information please contact STF.

The Council is obliged to maintain a register of RTOs as a public document.

Formal and informal groups have access to support, information and training through STF and the Council.

Register of Interested Tenants

If you want to keep up to date with what is happening, and you want to have your views heard on one or a range of subjects, join the Register of Interest. You will be invited to take part in surveys, working groups and meetings. Or if you prefer, you can choose to take part only by surveys. You can express an interest in all topics or just ones which are of particular interest to you. Joining the Register is a way of getting your views across without leaving your armchair. To find out more contact STF.

Tenant Information Volunteers (TIVS)

TIVs represent their local community by speaking to their neighbours, asking their views on a variety of issues or topics and reporting these views back to the Forum. TIVs will be supported by STF by keeping you up to date with what's new, what's being consulted on, methods of gathering your friends and neighbours views etc. You will be trained and supported by STF.

Working Groups

The Council and STF often get together to look in depth at a subject and form working groups. Tenants' voices are very important in these working groups to drive forward change and improvements. These working groups focus on a range of key issues and are set up as required with timescales attached. They are informal groups and are used to look at, for example, a housing policy review or a change to a policy for example, repairs, communications etc. These groups will be made up of tenants, service users, council officers and elected members as appropriate.

If you have a particular area of interest look out for adverts in the newsletter on the website, or if you are on the register of interested tenants, you will be invited to take part.

Surveys

The Council will carry out a tenant satisfaction survey of all tenants every two years. The Council and STF will undertake short surveys, on for example your satisfaction with the quality of repairs.

Tenant conference/information day

Every year the STF and Council along with other local organisations such as the CAB and credit union will hold an information day or conference for tenants. The day will enable tenants to pick up information and have a say in an informal setting.

Meetings

The Council or the STF might occasionally organise a meeting in your local area to discuss a project or an issue, to give you information or to get your view on a specific issue.

Service Enquiry Group

Tenant Service enquiries are carried out by a team of informed council tenants and other service users. They will closely examine a particular area of Housing and the Repairs Service to identify strengths and recommend areas for improvement in the service. This will allow tenants to review the services delivered by the Council and work in partnership to deliver better more efficient services in the future. The Council provides training and support to enable this group to undertake the service enquiry reviews.

The Council and STF have set up a panel of tenants to look in depth at a service area or at the how the Housing Service performs in a particular area. The Group members will all be fully trained and supported to undertake their scrutiny role.

The Group will thoroughly investigate a specific area or service and recognise things that are done well and make recommendations for improvement.

Keeping you up to date

It is important that you are kept up to date with information. The Housing Service and the STF will provide you with a range of good quality information which is accurate, up to date and written in plain language. You can receive information in a number of ways, face to face, by post, by email, through the STF or Council web site and through local papers and radio.

The information will include:

- ✓ Your tenancy agreement
- ✓ Tenants handbook
- ✓ Newsletter from STF
- ✓ Newsletter from the Council
- ✓ Any proposed changes to policy or services
- ✓ Annual rent consultation
- ✓ Annual tenants report card on how we are performing
- ✓ And feedback on any consultation exercises

You will be asked your views on?

The Housing Service and STF will ask you for your views on and consult you on for example:

- Any changes to our housing management policies and procedures such as
 - Allocations
 - Repairs service
 - How we manage our estates
 - Anti-social behaviour
 - Tenant participation
- Our rents
- How satisfied you are with our services
- Our service standards for example our relet policy
- Our new build homes
- Any proposals to transfer our homes to another landlord
- Any changes in Scottish Government laws
- Any other local or Shetland wide issue

The Housing Service and STF will:

- make sure you have all the information you need
- have a named person to contact for further information or to ask a question
- give you time to consider your view
- give you a range of options to express your views, for example by survey, by phone, email or at a meeting etc

- make sure your views are taken into account before any decision is taken
- let you know what is the process for reaching a decision
- let you know the final decision and reasons for the decision

Support for participation

The Housing Service has given funds to the STF to give grants to local groups.

Tenants organisations can receive a start-up grant to get going of £300

An annual grant of £300 is awarded to existing groups, to receive this grant groups must provide their annual accounts.

Groups will have support from STF and Housing Service staff

Training can be given to groups either from STF, the Housing Service or from an independent organisation.

Transport and reasonable care costs will be covered for attending Housing Service or STF events and meetings.

Have we got it right?

This strategy is a working documents, it is a living document. We need to make sure it continues to be fit for purpose. We will review this strategy with tenants every 3 years. We will include any new legislation updates in newsletters etc.

STF and the housing service will develop and monitor progress through an annual action plan

This strategy can be given in different formats and languages on request.