Forth Housing Association Ltd

Tenant Participation Policy

Code: GOV 07

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Cross reference: HR20 Dealing With the
                        Public – Risk Assessments
                        HR 21 Customer Service
                        HM 19 Start of Tenancy
                        M10 Reactive Repairs
                        GOV09 Equalities
                        GOV05 Complaints

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1.0   Introduction

The Management Committee wish to ensure that tenants are at the centre of our business. This policy establishes the principles by which Forth Housing Association will seek to ensure that this is the case.

2.0   Our Aims and Objectives

2.1   We aim to:

- Improve housing services by involving tenants, and tenants/residents groups, in decisions about housing services.
- Promote tenant participation as an integral part of the housing service.
- Provide good quality, accurate and easily understood information to tenants, and tenants/residents groups.
- Improve communication and feedback to tenants and tenants/residents groups.
- Encourage and support tenants and tenants/residents groups who express an interest in being involved.
- Provide appropriate training on the tenant participation process.
- Ensure that appropriate resources are in place to meet these objectives.

3.0   What Do We Mean By Tenant Participation?

3.1   The National Strategy for Tenant Participation uses the following definition: "Tenant participation is about tenants and tenants/residents groups taking part in the decision-making processes and influencing decisions about:

- housing policies
- housing conditions
- housing and related services

3.2   Tenant Participation is a two-way process, which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve housing conditions and services."

3.3   The results are that: "effective participation leads to better and more responsive management and this helps inform decisions about improving service delivery and providing value for money."

4.0   Background - Legislation

4.1   Housing Scotland Acts 2001/2010

4.1.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 provides a legal framework for tenant participation to take place in Scotland. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 refocused but does not supersede the Tenant Participation obligations of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out the standards that are included in the Scottish Social Housing Charter 2012(SSHC). Refer to section 4.3.

4.1.2 **Tenants have the right to:**

- access information on policies about housing and related services.
- be consulted on issues that affect their homes.
- participate in decisions that affect the services they receive and have enough time to consider draft proposals and put forward their views.
- form independent representative organisations and apply for registration from their landlord.

4.1.3 **To this end we will:**

- incorporate a tenant participation strategy into the Internal Management Plan (IMP) and put it into practice.
- provide resources and support to make sure tenant participation is effective.
- regularly review how well tenant participation is working.
- set up arrangements for registering tenants groups.
- consult tenants and tenants/residents groups about proposals for housing management and the standard of service we provide.
- consult tenants and tenants/residents groups on the tenant participation strategy and ensure that it complies with equal opportunity requirements.
- consult tenants and tenants/residents groups on proposals to sell, transfer or demolish our housing.
- take on board tenants' views before decisions are taken.
- provide a statement of the amount of resources which we propose to commit to tenant participation.
- maintain a register of residents groups.

4.2   Equality Act 2010

4.2.1   The Equality Act 2010 applies to everyone who provides a service to the public, and is based on everyone having the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

4.2.2   Landlords must encourage and promote active measures to ensure that all customers have equal access to participation and that no customer is excluded from the participation process. We recognise that our customers may wish varying degrees of involvement and this policy provides a range of options and opportunities for this to happen.

4.2.3   To this end when we organise events, which involve customers, we will ensure that consideration is given to the following:

- Location and timing.
- Using barrier free meeting venues.
- Allow carers, family members and /or advocates the opportunity to participate.
- Making information available in appropriate community languages and other forms including, for example, DVD and braille, tailored to customer's needs, interests and lifestyle.

4.3   Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) 2012

4.3.1   The SSHC came into force in April 2012 setting the results and standards that all social landlords should achieve for their customers. It encourages us to work closely with our customers to deliver high quality services. Tenant scrutiny forms a key element of the Charter requirements. The Charter outcome for Tenant Participation is No 3:

4.3.2   "Social landlords manage their businesses so that:
Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with." (Scottish Social Housing Charter - April 2012)

4.3.3   Measurement of our achievement of the Charter outcomes will be based upon our self-assessment of performance. Although the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is not prescriptive it must fulfil a number of requirements. *Log on to : www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk for more information on the Scottish Housing Regulator and for a landlord performance comparison tool.*

4.3.4 **To this end we will:**

- Measure and assess progress towards or achievement of the Charter outcomes and any local outcomes that have been agreed with tenants.
- Provide SHR with key performance information on achievement of the outcomes.
- Report on the outcome of the assessment to tenants and others who use the services.
- Provide SHR with a copy of the annual report that we publish for tenants and other service users.
- Provide a Tenant Report on Charter Performance, annually by end of October, on our website and in other formats as required.
- Provide a statement of how tenants have been involved in the self-assessment process.
- Provide a statement on how areas for improvement will be addressed.
- Provide a statement on how the self-assessment was carried out and how assurance on findings was obtained.

5.0 Tenant Participations Standards

5.1 In delivering tenant participation we will apply the following standards:

- Provide support and information within 10 working days of the request on setting up and running a tenants/residents group.
- Provide information which is in Plain English and jargon free.
- Attend meetings as appropriate when requested by tenants, or tenants /residents groups, where reasonable notice is given.
- Provide information, support and advice on housing related issues to tenants and tenants groups, within 10 working days of the request.
- Undertake an annual review of information provided to ensure we provide information in an easy to understand way and in accessible formats.
- Facilitate and arrange training to meet the joint needs of tenants and staff where a need is identified.
- Undertake an annual review of the register of tenants groups.
- Provide advice and support to groups on achieving registration status within 2 working weeks of their request.
- Provide a minimum of 2 working weeks consultation period for seeking views from tenants and tenant/residents groups.
- Take on board views given by tenants, and tenants/resident groups, and record feedback within 3 working weeks following consultation exercises, making it available upon request and on the website.

5.2   Where either tenants or tenants/residents groups feel that we are not applying the standards detailed above they should use our Complaints Leaflet – titled Your Right to Complain. (Copies available from the office).

6.0   Information, Consultation and Participation

6.1   To maximise tenants opportunities to raise issues and be able to influence decisions we will use a wide range of participation and consultation methods.

6.2   Information

       We will provide tenants and tenants/resident groups with information through the following:

- Letters/ Flyers
- Newsletters and Information Leaflets
- New tenant packs
- Tenants Handbook
- Information sheets
- Annual report
- Tenant Report on Charter Performance
- Website
- E Mail updates to E Group
- Annual Statement of Rent Account

6.3   Consultation

       We will consult with tenants through the following:

- Tenants View Forum
- Surgeries/ meetings
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Residents events
- Focus and working groups
- House visits
- Conferences
- Armchair monitor
- Tenants Groups
- Website
- Newsletter
- Letters

6.4   Participation

We will encourage participation through the following:

- Promoting membership to the Association and appointment to our Management Committee.
- Information & support to tenants/residents groups.
- Grant funding and support for new tenants & residents groups.
- Arrange tenant participation training for staff, Committee Members and tenants as required.
- Provide assistance and training to tenants who wish to establish a tenants group.
- Encourage attendance at our Tenants View Forum through publicity in the Tenants Newsletter and on the website.

7.0   Tenant Participation Strategy

7.1   A detailed strategy for tenant participation and community engagement will be incorporated annually into the Internal Management Plan (IMP).

8.0   Resources

8.1   Resources and Support

To support and encourage the development of tenant participation all tenants will have access to the following resources:

- Administrative and organisational support to tenants and residents groups.
- Meeting room available in our offices.
- Tenants and residents group grants.
- Free use of photocopier.
- Use of our Newsletter and Website to promote organisation /events and available minutes.
- Opportunities to attend other tenant and tenants/residents groups events.
- Advice and assistance on setting up and running a tenants/residents group including accessing funding.
- Training events and information including joint training with housing staff.

- Support of our staff including attendance at meetings, where appropriate.
- Access to independent advice and assistance.
- Guidance and support to all groups to assist them to become Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs). Although we are more than willing to work with tenants at whatever level of participation tenants wish. However, we recognise that not all groups may wish to become RTOs, our resources and support are available to all tenants who wish to work with us to improve services.

To support and encourage the development of tenant participation within we will:

- Include tenant participation within staff job descriptions, where appropriate.
- Provide staff and management committee training, where appropriate.
- Include tenant participation feedback within staff meetings.
- Encourage communication between staff members to bring tenant issues to the attention of Managers.
- Provide a positive working environment for staff to encourage Tenant Participation.
- Report performance in Tenant Participation to the Management Committee in a quarterly Committee Report. This will include feedback and follow up on surveys, reviewing minutes from tenants and residents meetings to monitor progress, the numbers of events held/the numbers attending and Complaints Monitoring.

8.2   Tenant Participation Funding

We will set an annual dedicated budget for tenant participation and will consider:
- Hosting Tenants Conferences.
- Providing publicity material to raise the profile of tenant participation.
- Hosting consultation events such as surgeries, focus groups and policy review groups.
- Providing grant support to tenants/residents groups.
- Booking meeting accommodation.
- Prizes for any events/competitions.
- Undertaking training needs assessment and training for tenants.
- Tenants Newsletter.
- Joint Tenants Satisfaction Surveys.

9.0 Data Protection

We recognise the importance of data protection legislation, including the General Data Protection Regulation, in protecting the rights of individuals in relation to personal information that we may handle, use and disclose about them, whether on computer or in paper format. We also recognise the importance of access to information legislation, including freedom of information laws, in ensuring that our business is conducted in an open, transparent and accountable manner. We will ensure that our practices in the handling, use and disclosure of personal information and providing timely access to information as part of the tenant participation processes and procedures outlined in this policy comply fully with data protection and access to information legislation. More information is available from our Data Protection Officer.

10.0 Monitoring and Review

10.1 This policy will be reviewed at least every 3 years by the Management Committee and staff are responsible for ensuring that it meets legal and good practice requirements.