

# Consultation Toolkit for Housing Services



## Introduction

Involving tenants and other service users in decisions about their homes and communities is now accepted as normal practice within social housing.

The Tenant Participation Strategy outlines key legislative and regulatory requirements to involve and consult our tenants and service users; however our commitment to consultation goes beyond statutory requirements. Our services and policy development should be based on a sound knowledge and understanding of what our tenants need and want.

Good practice in consultation should be carried out by all parts of Housing and is not the sole responsibility of the Tenant Participation Service. This toolkit is designed to ensure that your consultation is meaningful for both the Council and customers taking part, that it reflects good practice and that it can be evidenced.

We have a duty to consult individual tenants as well as tenants and residents' groups about

- proposals for managing housing and the standard of service we provide
- proposals to sell, transfer or demolish our housing
- rent and rent policy, development (specification for capital work, design and layout of new developments, environmental proposals), managing housing (allocations policy, repairs and maintenance service, managing estates, managing properties, tenancy agreements, dealing with anti-social behaviour, developing estate-management area action plans)

We have agreed to give tenants and tenant organisations at least eight weeks to respond to consultation. If we are unable to provide an 8 week period, we must ask for permission from our Strategic Lead. If permission is granted, we will explain why the consultation must be carried out within a shorter timescale.

### Before you start – Is it Consultation?

Consultation with the public raises expectations. Make sure that you know the difference between providing information and consultation.

If you are simply providing information then be careful not to describe what you're doing as consultation. Consultation implies **views and opinions are sought** and that the views given are **going to be considered before** a decision is made.

The more time you take to plan your consultation at the start the better the outcome. The steps below take you through some of the key stages of the planning sheet at the end of toolkit. Use the planning sheet before you start your consultation.

### **Step One: Set out the aims and objectives of your consultation**

Think about and write down the aims and objectives of your consultation.

<b>1.</b>	<b>What is it you are consulting about?</b> Are you measuring satisfaction or prioritising future spending, perhaps you want to set targets for a service or shape the way a service is delivered. Whatever the issue is – write it down. If you're not clear no one else will be.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Who are you targeting?</b> Whose views are you trying to obtain? Who will be affected by your proposals? Make sure you include all the right people and that you don't leave anyone out.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Timescale</b> Housing is committed to providing a minimum of 8 weeks consultation. If you have a deadline for a report you need to work your way back to ensure that you have enough time to meet your deadline and to ensure that the 8 week timescale is met.
<b>4.</b>	<b>What will happen once you have people's views?</b> Set out how views are going to be incorporated into decision making (and be able to evidence this) and make sure you think about letting people know the next steps after you have their views and feedback about final decisions.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE POINT**

Avoid arranging consultations during or shortly following holiday periods, watch out for other local events or consultations which may clash.

### **Step Two: Decide which methods will be used**

There are a wide range of methods (all with advantages and disadvantages) you can use in order to obtain people's views. The methods you choose should depend on the scale and significance of your consultation.

1. Think about who you are aiming to get views from and what methods will best suit them (for example using interactive methods with younger people).
2. Use a number of methods in order to increase people's opportunity to get involved, for example the Housing News, leaflets, posters, public meetings, conferences and seminars, drop in groups, questionnaires and surveys. You can also tap into existing groups such as TRA's, Sheltered Housing Forum etc.

**Don't just rely on consulting tenants and residents associations, individual tenants have legal rights to be consulted too.**

3. Some methods cost more than others, think about the resources available to you.
4. Once you have decided which methods you will use make sure that everyone can get involved. Consider people's individual needs (meeting places which are accessible, information which is available in large print or in other languages). Make sure your methods are inclusive.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE POINT**

Discuss your ideas with existing tenant groups as part of your planning process. They are a good source of information and will be more likely to support your project if you do.

### **Step Three: The Consultation Calendar and promoting your consultation**

The tenant participation section maintains an annual consultation calendar which is shared with tenant organisations and is on the Council's website. As soon as you know you are going to carry out a consultation you should add it to the consultation calendar.

When you are planning your consultation think about how you are going to promote it. Posters at area offices/libraries, information screens at One Stop Shops, inclusion in the Housing News, press release, local radio, Council's website, letters, text messaging and social media.

Four editions (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) of the Housing News are delivered to all our tenants and tenant organisations. Think about this when you are at your planning stage.

### **Step Four: During your consultation**

The following information must be shared as part of your consultation:

1. (where relevant) how your proposal will affect people taking part
2. how and when the final decision will be taken
3. how and within what timescale they can make their views known
4. the contact person dealing with the consultation
5. information on how and where to complain

**Structure your consultation by asking specific questions. This helps people to understand what is being asked of them and will ensure that their responses are focused and meaningful.**

## GOOD PRACTICE POINT

Consultation planning should include opportunities to gather information about equal opportunities. All housing services are required to ensure that they are meeting equal opportunity requirements.

If you are designing a questionnaire or holding a meeting think about ways to gather equalities information about who is taking part in your consultation (The Council's Equal Opportunities form is at the end of this toolkit).

### Step Five: You said – we did

Providing feedback to participants is a vital part of carrying out your consultation.

People are more likely to get involved in future consultation if they get feedback about what we did with their views (whether we agreed with it or not\*) and the outcome of the consultation. It makes people feel valued and assures them that their time was not wasted.

It's not acceptable to carry out consultation and not provide feedback – make sure that you build it into your consultation plan.

There are a range of methods you could use in order to provide feedback to people who gave up their time and took part in your consultation, for example reports, newsletters, or meetings. You must also report the outcome of your consultation more widely. Other people who may be affected by your consultation are entitled to information about the outcome. You can use the Council's website, the Housing News or press releases – this also tells others who didn't take part that getting involved has an impact and is worthwhile.

\*NB: Consultation means that views are considered as part of the decision making process. There will be times when views and ideas expressed by respondents can't be delivered, this might be because of resources or legislation for example. Feedback should explain why.

### Step 5: Evidencing your consultation

At the end of each year the Council is required to evidence the number of consultations carried out and their impact. This includes recording information about the methods used, the number of individual tenants and tenant organisations who got involved, whether or not feedback was provided and the outcome of the consultation.

Planning your consultation and using the consultation recording sheet enclosed in this toolkit will help ensure that you have this information to hand.

### **GOOD PRACTICE POINT**

The consultation recording sheet at the end of this toolkit should be completed and submitted as a background paper with Council Committee Reports where consultation is a key part of the decision making process.

### **Other sources of help and information**

Share your consultation plan with the tenant participation team and the WDTRO. They are happy to advise you about meeting statutory requirements, good practice and maximising your consultation. Other sources of help include:

- Tenant Participation Strategy 2017-20 'Involving You'
- Tenant Communication Strategy
- West Dunbartonshire Council Consultation Toolkit (August 2012)

# Housing Services Consultation Planning Sheet



1. Issue (where can people have influence)
The aim of the consultation is to review the style, content and format of our Annual Charter Performance Report and also review and update the Service Standards we have in place across housing services.
2. Target (who's being consulted?)
We will aim to target tenants, future tenants and homeless people.
3. Broad timescale
Consultation is planned to begin with it being publicized in Summer edition of Housing News due to be published in 21 June 2019 and carry on over July and August. The consultation will inform the publication of our Annual Charter Performance report due to be published in October 2019 and also the revised Service Standards which will be put in place also from October 2019.
4. How people's views be used and next steps
People's views will dictate the style, content and format of our Annual Charter Report and also update the Service Standards that are in place across housing services and which are reported regularly to tenants and other service users (via website and insert with Housing News).
5. Summary of methods to be used during consultation
Consider including a survey asking for views of existing report / performance insert – existing survey included as part of the current report sent to the 8 volunteers who have agreed to take part in the consultation.  Establish a working group of volunteers, expected to meet 3-5 times – working group of 8 tenant volunteers has been established following promotion of the consultation outlined below.
6. Promoting the consultation
Publicize the consultation via Housing News – article in summer edition of Housing

News and also mentioned in performance insert provided with summer edition

Send letters to Scrutiny Panel members, WDTR0, TRA members, Sheltered Housing Forum members, and Interested Tenant Register.

Highlight at WDTR0 liaison meetings, Joint Rent Group meetings and Scrutiny Panel meetings.

Promote via WDC website and social media.

Explore options to use QL to further promote consultation (e.g. via MyAccount) – not employed as QL not implemented.

### Information you should provide to participants as part of your consultation:

7. How will the proposal affect tenants (and other customers)?
The outcome of the consultation will change the information provided to tenants and other service users about how housing services are performing, which will in turn inform their perception of housing services and views on where improvements actions should be focused.
8. How and when will the final decision be taken?
It is expected that recommendation made by the working group will be adopted. A paper will be provided to the Housing Improvement Board summarizing the consultation and seeking approval for the recommendations to be implemented.
9. How and within what timescale can participants make their views known?
Each element of the consultation process will outline a timescale for views to be submitted
10. Who is the contact person dealing with the consultation?
Stefan Kristmanns, Housing Development Co-ordinator Jane Mack, Tenant Participation Officer
11. How and where can people complain?
Information around how to complain can be accessed via the WDC website.

12. When and how will feedback be provided
An article will be included in the Housing News highlighting the new format, content and style of the Annual Performance Report and the new Service Standards and how these were influenced by the consultation process.

#### Agenda for meeting 1 – 7<sup>th</sup> August 2019

1. Share and discuss existing report
  - Copy of 2017/18 sent out to working group members prior to meetings
  - Talk through existing report in detail, answering queries and taking notes of comments throughout process
2. Provide examples of reports produced by other landlords, existing Housing News performance inserts, SHR Landlord Reports and performance updates against existing Service Standards posted on WDC website.

#### Agenda for meeting 2 – 28<sup>th</sup> August 2019

1. Obtain working group views on the following:  
Content
  - Performance Indicators included – compare to Landlord Report, PI's used as Service Standards, wider Charter Indicators and local indicators. Get agreement on what the most important indicators to tenants are, which will be used in the report and also should these then also be the reviewed Service Standards
  - Discuss and agree what information should be provided for each PI, i.e. annual value, trend, target met. Especially important for updating Service Standards quarterly as needs to address issue of individual quarters versus year to date data
  - Agree the peer group which should be used for comparing performance with other landlords
  - Discuss and agree a view around the length of the report, especially the Charter Outcomes covered (all? or are there some where tenants have little interest?), the extent of the narrative provided and the inclusion of agreed improvement actions

#### Agenda for meeting 3 – 17<sup>th</sup> September 2019



1. Sign-off on the changes made to report based on meetings 1 and 2.
2. Final comments, changes.
3. Proof read.

## Housing Services Consultation Recording Sheet

Person responsible: Stefan Kristmanns

Consultation Start date: 21<sup>st</sup> June 2019

End date: 17<sup>th</sup> September 2019

1.	Title of consultation / participation exercise	Review of Charter Performance Report and Service Standards
2.	Aims and objectives	The aim of the consultation is to review the style, content and format of our Annual Charter Performance Report and also review and update the Service Standards we have in place across housing services
3.	Invited to get involved: (e.g. all tenants, tenant from the interested tenants register, RTOs, staff)	All tenants via Housing News Members of WDTR0 Members of Scrutiny Panel
4.	Methods used to promote/invite stakeholders to get involved? (e.g. letters, posters, website)	Housing News Website Directly at WDTR0 liaison meetings and Scrutiny Panel meetings
5.	Who took part (Actual number of individuals and or number of tenant organisations represented)	8 tenants / tenant reps
6.	Method(s) used to obtain views? (e.g. focus/working group, newsletter, survey) Why ?	Series of three working group meetings
7.	What good practice or minimum standards can you evidence as part of your consultation?	Good practice – detailed record of impact of tenant feedback

8. Outcome of consultation?

Section	Feedback	Action
All	"Development" is good but wording could be changed	Changed to "What we are doing"
All	Focus of report should be on Charter Indicators as these facilitate benchmarking	Local indicators removed and Charter Indicators added as requested
All	Should be an action to address and symbols that are red	
All	Change the word "Rank" in the tables	"Rank" replaced with the word "Comparison"
Foreword	Too many words	Reduced narrative
Foreword	Contained jargon	Jargon replaced
Foreword	Last paragraph should be at beginning	Moved to being the first paragraph
Foreword	Would look more interesting with some logo or photo	Included a picture
Contents	Would look more interesting with some logo or photo	Included a logo
Introduction	Too many words	Reduced narrative
Introduction	Include tenant involvement	Moved to this page
Introduction	Include a guide to symbols	Moved to this page
Introduction	Make the peer group clear	Sentence added clarifying this
Introduction	Photo out of date	Replaced with new photo of tenant working group
Key achievements	This is covered in the Foreword	Page removed

	Quality of housing	No indicator relating to EESSH	Indicator added
	Quality of housing	No mention of demolition programme	
	Repairs and maintenance	Need to include actions being taken relating to appointments and customer satisfaction	
	ASB and Estate Man	Indicators don't say much	Agreed to add Refusals indicator
	Access to housing	Add how many housing applications were processed	Figure has been added
	Access to housing	Add how many medicals were processed	Figure has been added
	Tenancy sustainment		Updated indicators as per discussion
	Homeless people		Updated indicators as per discussion
	Value for Money	Indicator relating to rent collection deemed confusing	Indicator removed
	Rents and service charges	Includes jargon	Jargon removed
	WD Scrutiny Panel	Title should be changed to "Tenant Involvement" and content to match	Page and content updated to promote different ways tenants can get involved
<p>Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbols to be used</li> <li>• Jargon free narrative</li> </ul> <p>Format</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colour scheme used</li> </ul>			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sequence of report? After discussion agreed that order should be by Charter Outcome</li> <li>• Should this be an online report with summary provided with Housing News? after discussion about costs this was agreed to be best option</li> <li>• Should the format be A4 as at present? After discussion agreed that this was best option</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
9.	<p>How did the consultation influence decision making?</p> <p>Consultation directly influenced the content of the Annual Charter Performance Report and aligned this to the Service Standards reported regularly to tenants</p>
10.	<p>Are you able to demonstrate this? YES <input type="checkbox"/></p>
11.	<p>How was feedback about the consultation and final decision given?</p> <p>At final meeting where report was shared and impact / influence discussed</p>
12.	<p>Was the eight week timescale observed? YES <input type="checkbox"/></p>
13.	<p>Was equal opportunities information collected? NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>
14.	<p>Did you check with participants that they were happy with the opportunities given to make their views known and that they felt that they were listened to and acted upon?</p> <p>Yes</p>

