

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Officer, Housing and Employability

Housing and Communities Committee: 3 February 2021

Subject: “Involving You”, West Dunbartonshire Council’s Tenant Participation Strategy 2021- 2024

1. Purpose

1.1 This purpose of this report is to highlight to the Housing and Communities Committee the Council’s statutory obligations in relation to tenant participation and to seek approval for our new Tenant Participation Strategy for the period 2021-2024.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Housing and Communities Committee:

- (i) note the progress and achievements made in relation to the implementation of the previous Tenant Participation Strategy 2017–2020, including the key role played by tenant representatives;
- (ii) approve the draft West Dunbartonshire Tenant Participation Strategy 2021-2024 and associated action plan, developed in conjunction with tenants; and
- (iii) Invite the Chief Officer, Housing & Employability to ensure the effective implementation of the Strategy and associated action plan and to provide annual update report to the Housing and Communities Committee.

3. Background

3.1 The Council has a statutory obligation under the Housing (Scotland) Acts 2001 and 2010, to produce and adequately resource a Tenant Participation Strategy. We also need to be able to evidence our commitment to involving tenants in shaping and improving housing services.

3.2 In addition to being a legislative requirement, involving tenants and other service users in decisions about their homes and communities is now accepted as best practice for all social housing providers. The Tenant Participation Strategy supports this Council’s commitment to deliver positive outcomes for our tenants and wider communities.

3.3 Involving You – West Dunbartonshire Council’s Tenant Participation Strategy 2021-2024 replaces our previous strategy covering the period 2017-2020 and builds on the positive developments of previous strategies successfully implemented since 2001.

- 3.4** Annual progress reports have been provided to Committee, with progress also reported to the West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation (WDTRO – the umbrella organisation for tenant groups in WD) and an annual TP Performance report produced to demonstrate the impact tenant participation can have.
- 3.5** West Dunbartonshire Council continues to be an exemplar organisation in supporting tenant participation activities and can evidence a strong commitment to involving tenants in shaping and improving housing services.
- 3.6** Some of the key achievements and improvements in tenant participation delivered over the period of our previous strategy includes:
- Awarded Gold Accreditation for Tenant Participation by The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) an improvement from our Silver award in 2016;
 - The establishment of the West Dunbartonshire Scrutiny Panel, who play an important role in our performance monitoring framework. The Panel is made up of tenants and factored owners who independently scrutinise performance across the Housing Services to help improve services and ensure there is a person centred focus to improving our performance. The Panel have recently completed their 5th scrutiny exercise and produced a report and recommendations on improving the Medical Adaptation process;
 - The work of the Scrutiny Panel was recognised by the Chartered Institute for Housing in 2019 when they were finalists in the CIH Awards for ‘ Most Inspiring Scrutiny Panel’;
 - Our Joint Rent Group (JRG) is made up of tenant volunteers, Housing and Finance staff as well as the Housing Convenor to jointly scrutinise the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and make sure it complies with the Scottish Government’s HRA Guidance. The group continues to meet regularly and have contributed significantly to improving transparency around how the Housing Revenue Account is spent;
 - The work of the JRG has also helped improve the transparency of our rent setting consultation and increased tenant participation in rent setting with 845 tenants taking part last year, up from 263 the previous year. The work of the JRG has been commended in TPAS’s Good Practice Awards when they won the ‘Involving Tenants in Rents’ category in 2018 and were runners up in 2019;
 - The TP Facebook page has helped raise our profile on social media and has a continuous increase in followers with regular engagement. Particularly during the lockdown this has been a crucial way of keeping in touch with many tenants and been used to help spread valuable community information about support and services; and
 - TP Updates are distributed to Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs), tenants on the Interested Tenants Register, Sheltered Housing Forum members, Scrutiny Panel members as well as housing staff and

elected members to share information and raise awareness of tenant participation activities.

4. Main Issues

4.1 Involving You – West Dunbartonshire Council’s Tenant Participation Strategy 2021-2024 (attached as Appendix 1) sets out:

- West Dunbartonshire Council’s approach to involving our tenants in the development and aims of the Strategy;
- How tenants can be involved in tenant participation in West Dunbartonshire;
- The resources available and the support required for effective tenant participation; and
- How the Strategy will be delivered, monitored and reported.

4.2 The aims of the Strategy are to:

1. Improve the culture and practice of involving tenants across housing and homelessness services;
2. Improve our feedback to tenants so that we can evidence where our tenants and other service users have influenced or shaped the housing service;
3. Continue to promote and provide a wide range of options for tenants to get involved with us. Even post–COVID pandemic this will include more interactive online networks and virtual meetings to help people be involved from home;
4. Continue to encourage involvement of under- represented groups such as young people, homeless people, people with disabilities and minority ethnic groups;
5. Make sure that tenants are aware of the options available to them to shape housing and homelessness services;
6. Promote the difference tenants can make and the positive benefits of participation to them personally as well to their community;
7. Continue to develop tenants’ involvement in monitoring and improving performance through our Scrutiny Panel as well as individual tenants holding us to account;
8. Ensure that the resources we put in place and practices we carry out are adequate to support and develop tenant involvement; and
9. Ensure that we communicate effectively with tenants and provide good quality, accessible information that tenants want.

4.3 'Involving You' is underpinned by the following strategic vision:-

"West Dunbartonshire's Housing Services' vision for tenant participation is one of sharing information with our tenants, future tenants and other service users in a variety of ways; providing opportunities for them to express their views in a way that suits them; listening and acting to tenants' views to improve the housing services we provide and allowing our tenants to scrutinise our performance.'

4.4 The Strategy also addresses the Council's tenant participation and tenant scrutiny requirements under the Scottish Social Housing Charter, monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator. In terms of the Scottish Social Housing Charter a separate section outlining how we measure and report performance to tenants and how we use tenant scrutiny activities to inform service development and improve performance is included within the strategy document.

5. People Implications

5.1 There are no people implications from this report. There are 2 dedicated staff members funded from the HRA, focused on the development and delivery of tenant participation within the Housing Development and Homelessness Team. In addition, supporting tenant participation is part of the remit of all Housing and Homelessness staff. The Strategy will therefore be delivered by input from staff across all of Housing and Homelessness Services.

6. Financial and Procurement implications

6.1 Actions required to take the Strategy forward in 2021/24 will be aligned to current budgetary provision. The tenant participation budget for 2021/22 has been provisionally set at £87,436 which includes an additional funding specifically to develop digital engagement in light of the impacts of the pandemic. Any additional funding for future years will be identified for consideration through the budgetary process for 2022/23 and beyond.

6.2 There are no procurement implications.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to develop, publish and implement a Tenant Participation Strategy. Our "Involving You" strategy reflects the priorities and aspirations of tenants and tenant representatives, therefore there is a risk that its key aims are not be achieved, then this would produce an adverse reaction from tenants, tenant representatives and from the Scottish Housing Regulator.

7.2 Our Tenant Participation Strategy builds on the achievements made in developing good working relationships with tenants over the years, improving transparency and a joint working approach to involving tenants. The continued delivery of a new Tenant Participation Strategy is therefore essential in demonstrating the Council's on-going commitment to continuous improvement across Housing Services and putting tenants at the centre of our activities.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment

8.1 An Equality, Health and Human Rights Impact Assessment has been carried out on the draft TP Strategy and found no substantive negative impacts.

9. Consultation

9.1 An independent review of our 2017-2020 TP Strategy was carried out by TPAS and they commended the style and use of clear language of the Strategy and made a number of suggestions to bring it up to date and these have been incorporated into the new Strategy. The use of the 'involving you' name and logo has been retained to emphasise the purpose of the Strategy.

9.2 A survey was developed to gather views on developments since the last Strategy and to measure its effectiveness in terms of:

- culture and practice;
- how we feedback to tenants;
- how we could increase tenant involvement; and
- how satisfied with current tenant participation opportunities.

9.3 The survey showed that the majority of respondents (73.9%) overwhelmingly though we had improved the culture and practice of involving tenants which is slightly up from the 2016 survey when it was 72%. In relation to whether we promote involving tenants as an important part of how we deliver housing services there was a reduction in respondents who thought we did – 64.4% as apposed to 79.3% in 2016 and so this is a key area to be addressed and will need full commitment from all of Housing Services to address effectively.

9.4 Two virtual discussion groups were also arranged after the survey closed to further explore issues identified in the survey. These discussions gave great insight into what tenants want from participation and making a difference was seen as key to getting people involved and keeping them involved. The recommendations from these discussion groups are also included in the action plan in section 13 of the strategy.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 The Tenant Participation Strategy is the overarching document setting out the strategic direction for engagement with tenants and future tenants. Having considered all the Council's strategic priorities, this report and the provision of high quality Council housing for rent contributes greatly to all five strategic priorities.

Peter Barry
Chief Officer, Housing and Employability
Date: 20 January 2021

Person to Contact: John Kerr – Housing Development and Homelessness Manager, Housing and Employability, telephone: 07793717981, email: john.kerr@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Appendices: 1. Draft West Dunbartonshire Council Tenant Participation Strategy 2021-2024

Background Papers Tenant Participation Strategy 2017-2020 Involving You: www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/tenantparticipation

Wards Affected: All