

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by the Strategic Lead, Housing and Employability****Housing and Communities Committee: 2 September 2020**

Subject: “Involving You” West Dunbartonshire Council’s Tenant Participation Strategy 2017/2020 annual progress report.**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** This report provides members of the Housing and Communities Committee with the final annual progress report on the implementation “Involving You” our Tenant Participation Strategy for the period 2017-2020.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Housing and Communities Committee:

- (i) Note the progress and achievements made in implementing the third year of “Involving You”, including the key role played by tenant representatives;
- (ii) Note that consultation has begun on a new Tenant Participation Strategy which is planned to be developed over the coming months and a report provided to the Housing and Communities Committee in February 2021 for approval; and
- (iii) Approve the extension of the current strategy to cover the period up until February 2021 when a new strategy will be presented to the Housing and Communities Committee covering the period 2021-24.

3. Background

- 3.1** The Council has a statutory obligation under the Housing (Scotland) Act 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** Our current Tenant Participation Strategy called “Involving You” covering the period 2017 to 2020 was approved by the Housing and Communities Committee in February 2017. This strategy built on the positive developments of previous strategies successfully implemented since 2001.
- 3.3** 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.

- 3.4** West Dunbartonshire Council continues to be an exemplar organisation in supporting tenant participation activities and has been nationally recognised in numerous awards including Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland (TPAS Scotland) Good Practice Awards for Communicating Performance Information to Tenants (2016 and 2017) and Involving Tenants in Rents (2018 and 2019). Our Scrutiny Panel were also finalists in the Chartered Institute of Housing Awards for ‘Most Inspiring Scrutiny Panel’.
- 3.5** In March 2019, the Council was also awarded Gold Accreditation for its Tenant Participation service by TPAS Scotland. This involved a robust scrutiny of our tenant participation provision, including an examination of our practices and in-depth interviews with both tenants and staff. The service scored an overall grade of 6 which equates to ‘an excellent provision of tenant participation with outstanding sector leading strengths in the majority of standards’.

4. Main issues

4.1 “Involving You” has the following 8 key strategic aims:

- Improve the culture and practise of involving tenants across housing services;
- Improve feedback to tenants to show where they have influenced or shaped the housing service;
- Promote and provide a wide range of options for tenants to get involved;
- Encourage involvement of under-represented groups;
- Ensure that tenants are aware of the options available to shape housing services;
- Improve involvement in monitoring performance through our Scrutiny Panel and encourage tenant scrutiny activities;
- Ensure that resources we put in place and practices we carry out are adequate to support and develop tenant involvement; and
- Make sure that we communicate effectively with tenants and provide good quality, accessible information that tenants want.

4.2 Progress in terms of implementing the actions aimed at achieving these key aims is summarised below and Appendix 1 sets out the full detail of the action plan:

Tenant Participation Strategy 2017/20						Total
Progress at end of Year 3	39	2	0	0	0	41

Action Status	
	Completed
	Not Started; In Progress; Assigned
	Unassigned; Check Progress
	Overdue; Neglected
	Cancelled

- 4.3** The action plan has been fully implemented with the exception of 2 actions. Due to a reduction in resources due to a staff vacancy the timescales for these actions were extended. Unfortunately the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed these actions being completed within the original timescales.

Improve the culture and practise of involving tenants across housing services

- 4.4** Improving the culture and practice of tenant participation across housing services is a key action to ensure that changes are embedded across all housing service areas. Our Gold Accreditation from TPAS externally validated our Tenant Participation culture and practice improvements following our Silver award in 2015. The focus remains on ensuring these standards are maintained and further developed.

Improve feedback to tenants to show where they have influenced or shaped the housing service

- 4.5** Our Consultation Toolkit continues to be used to facilitate effective feedback to tenants when reviewing policies or practices and all staff are encouraged to use it. In 2019/20 it was used in the review of the Annual Charter Performance Report and Rent Setting process and consultation summaries were provided as part of the background papers provided to the Housing and Communities Committee.
- 4.6** Housing News is used to publicise outcomes from consultations to help encourage more tenants get involved and demonstrate that they can influence decisions and policies. Direct feedback to those giving contact details was also given to all tenants attending the public meeting or completing the rent option survey.
- 4.7** Tenants and Residents Associations are also supported to demonstrate their achievements at a local level, as well as using the Housing News to promote their activities.
- 4.8** The WDTR0 chairperson has a regular column in the Housing News which they use to feedback on their own activities and encourage more tenant involvement.
- 4.9** We produced and distributed an annual Tenant Participation Performance report to highlight the achievements and influence that tenants have had in the proceeding year.

Promote and provide a wide range of options for tenants to get involved

- 4.10** We continue to promote a wide range of options to encourage tenants to get involved in a way that suits them. We use the Housing News to advertise tenant group meetings and activities, as well as specific articles on the Joint Rent Group and Scrutiny Panel activities. The WDTR0 also have a regular column, called the "Tenants Voice" which they use to promote their activities and encourage involvement.

Encourage involvement of under-represented groups

- 4.11** We are a member of the West Dunbartonshire Equality Forum and ensure we learn from and develop these engagements. We are developing a project to offer a forum or potentially a joint forum for care leavers as well as young care givers and this will involve under 25 year old tenants and potential tenants. This is a key area that will be pursued in the coming months. We are also developing a consultative exercise with the tenants of Dennystoun Forge, The Council's only Gypsy/Travellers site to determine how they wish to spend a prescribed budget to make improvements to the site.

Ensure that tenants are aware of the options available to shape housing services

- 4.12** To ensure tenants are aware of the options available to shape housing services and budgets, we continue to promote these widely through Housing News, our TP Updates and online.
- 4.13** Our annual rent setting consultation process continues to develop transparency around the HRA which tenants and the Scottish Housing Regulator are looking for. The consultation around the rent setting for 2020/21 was very successful and there was a significant increase in tenants getting involved and having their say. A total of 845 tenants voted which was a 229% increase from the 245 the previous year.
- 4.14** Our Joint Rent Group usually meets monthly with tenant volunteers and key housing and finance staff jointly working on ensuring the Council's compliance with HRA Guidance, as well as making budget processes more transparent for tenants and customers. Tenant friendly versions of quarterly committee finance reports have been developed to help tenants effectively challenge and hold us to account.
- 4.15** These meetings stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic; however they have recently been reintroduced using a digital platform.

Improve involvement in monitoring performance through our Scrutiny Panel and encourage tenant scrutiny activities

- 4.16** In line with the Scottish Social Housing Charter we continue to develop tenant involvement in monitoring and scrutinising our performance. We provide quarterly performance information as an insert with the Housing News. Our Scrutiny Panel is now meeting regularly after ceasing activities due to the Covid-19 pandemic and is in the process of completing their fifth scrutiny exercise looking at the Council's performance in completing medical adaptations. Once completed their report will be presented to the Housing Improvement Board for agreement and commitment to adopt their recommendations.
- 4.17** Tenant involvement in scrutinising Housing Services is promoted through articles in the Housing News and new members are encouraged. The Scrutiny Panel's reports are also shared with the WDTR0 as well as being publicised in the Housing News and on the TP webpages.

Ensure that resources we put in place and practices we carry out are adequate to support and develop tenant involvement

- 4.18** We continue to review the resources required to improve tenant participation and tenant scrutiny. During 2019/20 we have continued to support TRAs, the WDTR0, Joint Rent Group, Sheltered Housing Forum, pre-HACC Forum and Scrutiny Panel to help them function effectively and within the allocated budget. A staff vacancy has been filled to bring dedicated TP staff resources back up to their full allocation.
- 4.19** We have also encouraged tenants to take advantage of many training opportunities which have included:
- funding five tenants to go to the TPAS tenant conference;
 - provided HRA training to new members of the Joint Rent Group;
 - and providing in-house treasurer and secretary training for new office bearers.

Make sure that we communicate effectively with tenants and provide good quality, accessible information that tenants want

- 4.20** We continue to ensure that we communicate effectively and provide good quality accessible information that tenants want, primarily through our quarterly newsletter Housing News which is delivered to all tenants. As part of the bi-annual tenant satisfaction survey, tenants expressed support for the Housing News and 92% said they read it to keep up to date with housing developments.
- 4.21** Our Sheltered Housing Tenant Handbook was reviewed in 2019 with a group of sheltered tenants. The tenants' input helped update and improve the information provided and free photography was provided by a local digital camera club, Dumbarton Cine Club.
- 4.22** We also continually review the content of our TP webpages and use of social media, ensuring they are kept up to date and relevant to tenants. During the Covid-19 lockdown, our social media engagement limited to Facebook has been an important way to keep in touch with tenants and to help circulate support and useful information.

Tenant Participation Strategy for 2021-24

- 4.23** Work has begun to plan the consultation needed to develop a new Tenant Participation Strategy for the period 2021-24. The strategy is due to be presented to the Housing & Community Committee in February 2021. TPAS have already completed a desktop review of the current strategy and a survey launched to establish overall views on how Tenant Participation currently operates has been circulated to TRA members, staff and Councillors as well as being promoted on the TP Facebook page.
- 4.24** While the development of the new Tenant Participation Strategy has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic we have in partnership with tenants representatives refreshed the timetable for the delivery of the new strategy.

The new strategy will be presented to the Housing and Communities Committee in February 2021. It had previously been intended that the new strategy would have been presented to Committee in November 2020 however as a result of the pandemic and our statutory requirement to consult fully this could not be possible

- 4.25** The Council has a statutory obligation to have a Tenant Participation Strategy in place and as the current strategy theoretically expires at the end of 2020 there would be a small window that we would not have an active Tenant Participation Strategy. Therefore, it is considered appropriate to extend the current Tenant Participation Strategy ‘Involving You’ until the new strategy is approved in February 2020. We have already highlighted our intention with our tenant representatives and the Scottish Housing Regulator who are both supportive of our proposal.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no people implications from this progress report.

6. Financial and Procurement implications

- 6.1** Actions required to take the Strategy forward in 2020/21 will be delivered from within current budgetary provision.

- 6.2** There are no procurement implications contained within the report.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** The Council has a statutory responsibility to develop and implement a Tenant Participation Strategy. Our ‘Involving You’ Strategy reflects the priorities and aspiration of tenants and there is a risk that if its key aims are not met 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 was carried out as part of the development of “Involving You” and found no substantive negative impacts. This does not require to be updated in respect of this progress report.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** As a progress report, there is no requirement to consult on the progress of the strategy. We do however give regular Tenant Participation updates at the

quarterly WDC/WDTRO Liaison meetings and the minutes of these meetings are circulated to our Tenant & Resident Associations, WDTRO members, as well as being publicly available on the Council's webpage.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 The implementation of the Tenant Participation Strategy will continue to support all of the Council's key strategic priorities.

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Date: 5 August 2020

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Appendices:

1. Tenant Participation Strategy 2017-2020 action plan annual progress report.
2. Tenant Participation Performance Report 2019-20

Background Papers: Tenant Participation Strategy 2017-2020 Involving You

Wards Affected: All

