

# Tenant Participation performance report 2019/20



10 Tenant & Resident Associations (2 new and 1 disbanded)

2 dedicated TP officers

6 consultations completed

136 followers on Facebook – up from 82 last year

1 Tenant Federation (WDTRO)

Runners up in TPAS Good Practice Awards for Involving Tenants in Rent

1 Scrutiny exercise

£ spent on tenant proposals through Tenant Priority Budget

Scrutiny Panel finalists in CIH Awards for 'Most Inspiring Scrutiny Panel'



Our Tenant Participation Strategy is called 'Involving You' and it sets out how we support and promote tenant involvement in West Dunbartonshire. We have a long history of active tenant involvement and have continued to build on this strong foundation. This report is to outline progress in the last year and highlight the input tenants have had in decisions and service improvements.

### **Key highlights**

#### **Massive increase in tenant involvement in rent setting consultation**

Tenant voices were heard loud and clear this year, with a massive 229 % increase in the number of tenants having their say on rent setting. 845 tenants responded to the public vote for their preferred rent option as part of the consultation.

The consultation started in October with a public meeting to set out Housing Services plans and a discussion on various options. Following feedback from previous years, we started the consultation earlier to avoid the Christmas period. In addition, the Housing News was delayed until after the Election so that it couldn't be used to promote the voting options. Instead, a specific mailing was sent to all tenants with information on each of the 3 options to consider, along with information on the effect each options would have on rent charges. Pre-paid envelopes were provided or voting could be done online, to make it as easy as possible for tenants to have their say.

We would hope that tenants are becoming more aware of their opportunity to get involved and influence this vital decision but it is hard to pinpoint what contributed to this welcome increase.

#### **Tenant Priority Budget**

This is an annual £800,000 budget, set aside for tenant priorities. As part of last year's rent setting, it was agreed with tenants that £400,000 would be used to accelerate the shower installation programme. This still left £400,000 for tenant proposals and 23 proposals were received. There is a set criteria on how this Budget can be used and public meetings were held on 29/8/19 and 6/2/20 to decide which proposals could proceed.

This Budget has helped new people participate in council activity and we will continue to encourage this, while supporting the TRAs to make full use of it for local improvements and to publicise the TRAs. 18 proposals were agreed to proceed, another 2 can only proceed if owners agree, 2 are being taken forward by Housing Operations and another by the Communities team. £58,960 has been spent on completed work and £35,636 for work ongoing – some costs are still outstanding due to the lockdown. £118,332 of work on proposals from last year were also completed.

We promoted the Tenant Priority Budget in the each edition of the Housing News and will continue to do so in coming year. We will also focus on ensuring work is completed as quickly as possible, so that tenants can see the improvements that can be made which, in turn, should help encourage more proposals.

## Communication

We have continued to produce **TP updates** for tenant representatives, elected members and staff to maximise awareness of tenant participation activities and encourage them to increase tenant involvement. Due to staffing pressures during the year only 2 editions were produced but we will get back to quarterly editions in 2020.



is produced quarterly and delivered to all tenants, as well as future tenants in temporary accommodation. Housing staff also receive an electronic version. We try to make the Housing News as interesting as possible for tenants and promote different ways to get involved. In the tenant satisfaction survey carried out in September 2019, 92% said they read the Housing News to keep up to date, so it is an important way to communicate with 10,000 tenants. TRAs are also increasingly using the Housing News to promote their activities and we include as much community news as possible. The chairperson of the WDTR0 also has a regular column and uses it to highlight tenant issues and encourage tenant involvement.

**Spring 2019 edition** – Article on transformation of Alexandria greenspace at the Leven, which Central Alexandria TRA was involved with. Article on Scrutiny Panel updates. Feature on Tullichewan TRA's Christmas mini fayre for community funds. TRA meeting dates and contacts included plus WDTR0's Tenant's voice.

**Summer 2019 edition** – Feature on logo competition run by Overburn & Townend TRA, with winners from local primary school. Scrutiny Panel advert for volunteers. Outcomes from Community Budgeting Fund. Article on Tullichewan's fund raising Easter Fayre. TRA meeting dates and contacts plus WDTR0's Tenant's voice.

**Autumn 2019 edition** – Articles on Community Orchard in Drumry and Your Community fun day in Castlehill. TP Facebook 100<sup>th</sup> follower featured. Scrutiny Panel shortlisted for CIH Awards in 'Most Inspiring Scrutiny Group' category. TRA meeting dates and contacts included plus WDTR0's Tenant's voice.

**Winter 2019 edition** – Feature on Volunteer Awards and rent setting public meeting. Creation of Alexandria's Neighbourhood Action Group which includes Central Alexandria TRA. Moments of Freedom group shortlisted in Ethnic Minority Impact Awards. Advert for newly formed N&S Drumry TRA. TRA meeting dates and contacts included plus WDTR0's Tenant's voice.

We have a regular reader's quiz to encourage people to read the Housing News and use the contact with the winners as an opportunity to speak to tenants and get their opinion on the Housing News and see if they want to get more involved.

This year we reviewed the **Sheltered Housing Tenant Handbook** and created a working group of volunteers from the Sheltered Housing Forum. As a group we reviewed and updated the information included in the handbook which was then printed and distributed to all existing sheltered tenants in November 2019 and will be given to all new sheltered tenants.



### Online and Facebook

<https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/tenant-participation/> - we continually review the content of our TP webpages and update it with meeting notes from the Joint Rent Group, WDC/WDTRO Liaison meetings, Sheltered Housing Forum, Pre HACC Forum, so that all tenants can get access to this information if they can't get to the meetings.



@WestDunbartonshireCouncilTenantParticipation - we now have 137 followers on Facebook and post at least a couple of times a week with information we hope is relevant to tenants. That's an increase from 82 last year and particularly during the coronavirus lockdown we have gained more followers as we helped share relevant and interesting information.

### Tenant involvement in shaping and improving Housing Services

Our **Joint Rent Group (JRG)** has continued to meet every month. The group includes tenant volunteers, housing and finance staff, as well the Housing Convener. The focus is on jointly assessing the Council's compliance with HRA Guidance, as well as making budget processes more transparent. They have been focusing on improving transparency about HRA budget setting and received a presentation and demonstration of the HRA business plan process. The group are also continuing to look at the Capital Programme, as it is a major spending area. Regular updates on the Capital Programme are given to the Housing & Communities Committee and an easier to understand version of the report has been created thanks to the JRG. The progressive work of the Joint Rent Group was recognised again in the TPAS Good Practice Awards and they were runners up in the 'Involving tenants in Rent' category.



*Billy Neeson, Harry McCormack and Jane Mack receiving runner up award on behalf of Joint Rent Group at TPAS Good Practice Awards, Nov 2019.*

The **Pre-HACC Forum** is another opportunity that tenants have to influence decisions made by the Housing & Community Committee. The Forum takes place two days before the Housing & Communities Committee meets and tenants can meet the Housing Convener and staff who have written the papers that are going to committee. There is regular tenant attendance at the Forum and the Housing Convener reports the tenants' views into the committee discussions. There is limited time between the papers being issued and the Committee meeting so tenants, with support from the Housing Convener, have been asking for reports to be written in easier to understand language. Easier to read versions of the 2 regular finance reports that go to committee have now been created and been positively received by tenants and the Housing Convener.

There have been 6 specific **public consultations** in the last reporting year – review of the Sheltered Housing Service Standards, review of the Annual Charter Performance Report, review of the housing service standards reported in the Housing News, Rent Collection policy and the annual rent setting consultation.

**The sheltered housing service standards** were consulted on through sessions at each of the sheltered complexes, as well as a discussion at the Sheltered Housing Forum. The aim was to make sure the service standards were all relevant and also to make them more measurable, so that performance against them can be published and discussed at the quarterly Sheltered Housing Forum meetings. The agreed service standards were also included in the new sheltered housing handbook, in order that all sheltered tenants are aware of the standards.



The **rent setting consultation** included involvement of the Joint Rent Group, a public meeting and a public vote on different rent options. As stated earlier, the response rate was much higher this year and we will work to ensure this continues by providing transparent and easy to understand information and ensure tenants have real opportunities to influence the decision making around rent setting.

There was an additional cost to doing a specific mailing for the rent setting information, rather than inserting with the winter edition of the Housing News, but this does seem to be value for money if it gets more tenants attention and encourages them to have their say.

**A Review of the Annual Charter Performance Report and the housing service standards reported in the Housing News was also carried out.** A working group was set up with 8 volunteers responding to an advert in the Summer Housing News and a specific invite sent to members of the Scrutiny Panel, WDTR, TRA's, Sheltered Housing Forum and those on our Interested Tenant Register. This group reviewed our current Charter report, looked at other landlord examples and amended our report so that it was clearer and gives tenants a more realistic review of Housing performance. The group also wanted more focus on where performance wasn't meeting targets, with information on what was being done to improve this. All the group's suggestions were incorporated into the 2018/19 report. The group also reviewed which Service Standards get reported quarterly as an insert with the Housing News and wanted them to tie in with what is reported in the annual Charter report to help build up tenant understanding and for them to get regular updates, as well as the annual report.

There was a consultation carried out on our **Rent Collection policy** and the online survey was advertised in the Spring 2020 edition and through the Council's social media. Only 4 responses were received but all comments were taken on board and additional explanations added to the final draft policy.

We publicise an **annual consultation calendar** but have also developed a Feedback and Outcome section for previous consultation so that there is a record of the outcomes to emphasise the impact tenant's views have.

**WDC/WDTRO Liaison meetings** continue every 2 months and are a good example of effective partnership working, as the WDTR0 and staff can add to the agenda and the WDTR0 chairperson and Housing Convener take turns chairing the meetings. Minutes are shared with all TRAs and posted on TP council webpages.

Holding the council to account is an important function of tenant participation and it ensures that we can improve services for all tenants. The WDTR0 have raised a number of concerns over the last year which have resulted in improvements that all tenants can benefit from e.g:

- Raised tenant concerns about difficulties getting through to Repairs on the phone direct with relevant managers and resulted in actions being taken to improve situation and through recruitment increased call handling capacity.
- Dog fouling issues raised and ASB team investigated and resolved situation.
- Initial delays with window installations when a new window contractor started – issue raised and ensured that a programme to catch up was put in place and contact made with tenants waiting in the backlog.
- Following a number of multi-storey lifts being out of order for a period of time, Housing responded to WDTR0 concerns and reviewed all lift call outs and are creating a comprehensive plan for their upkeep and renewal. Also reviewing communication when lifts are off to improve that.
- WDTR0 concerns over fuel poverty ongoing and have kept pressure on Council to ensure that District Heating systems are prioritised and incorporated into housing plans.
- Problems with replacing landing windows in multi-storey flats raised and plans made to ensure an alternative supplier is sought and can produce the necessary frames that comply with fire regulations.

### Scrutiny Panel progress



The Scrutiny Panel have now completed 4 scrutiny exercises and therefore have 4 action plans to also monitor. They used time after completing their 4th exercise to catch up on previous action plans to ensure they had been carried out. The Panel have also been corresponding with Managers to ensure that they are sent updates when actions are completed, rather than them having to chase up information, as this is frustrating for the Panel. Information has been more forthcoming and 3 Scrutiny action plans have now been fully completed. The Panel started their 5th Scrutiny exercise in November 2019 and are looking at the Council's performance in completing medical adaptations. Their scrutiny is ongoing, though interrupted by the COVID pandemic, however, once

they can complete their report and recommendations it will go to the Housing Improvement Board to be agreed and implemented.

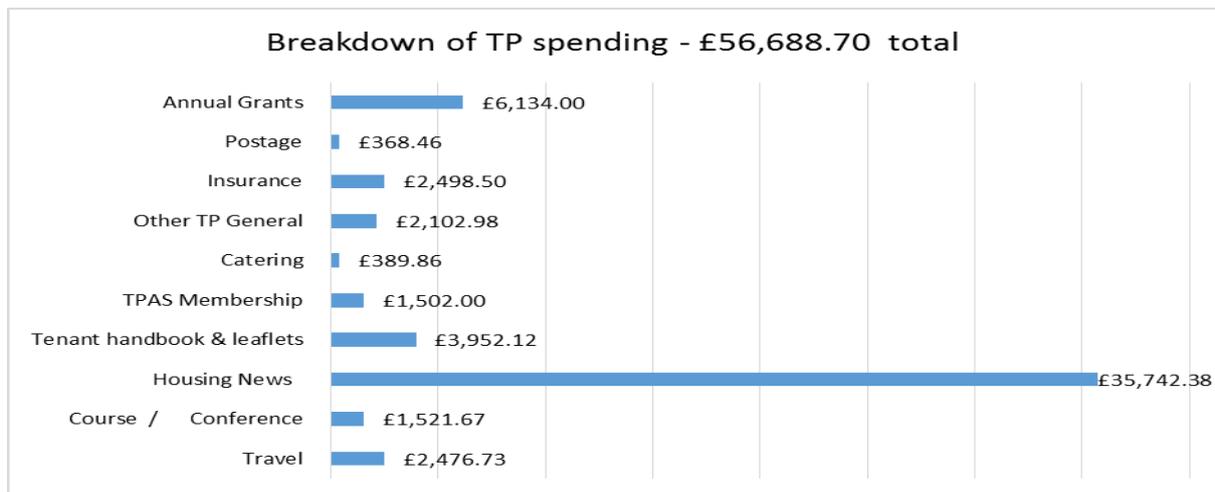
### Tenant Participation Budget - £71,216 for 2019/20

We spent £56,688.70 of our Budget, which was less than anticipated mainly due to less TP Grants being needed. However, we have been allowed to keep our full budget allowance to ensure that we can continue to develop tenant participation. During 2019/20 we have financially supported 10 TRAs, the WDTR0, Sheltered Housing Forum, Pre-HACC Forum and Scrutiny Panel to help them function effectively.

The cost of producing the Housing News also comes out of our Tenant Participation Budget and this takes up the majority of our communication costs. 4 TRAs have community flats that they operate from and the running costs for these are included in the costs for supporting TRA's, along with annual and top up grants to cover their administration costs to support their functioning. Public liability insurance is also paid for each active TRA.

Transport costs to and from meetings are also covered to ensure no-one is put off attending meetings by costs and that no tenant volunteer is out of pocket.

Sadly, Overburn & Townend TRA disbanded in October 2019 but a new TRA has been set up covering North & South Drumry, as well as a Tenants Association at Willox Park Sheltered Housing so there is still a demand for tenant groups and we will continue to support them for as long as needed.



### Training

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 in St Andrews;
- provided in-house chairperson training for new office bearers;
- provided in-house secretary training for new office bearers
- provided Stepping Up to Scrutiny Panel training for 2 new Scrutiny Panel members

## Volunteering hours



*Georgia, Billy and Frances – members of the WDTRO and Joint Rent Group*

We really value and appreciate the time that tenants give coming to meetings and getting involved and started to count volunteering hours a few years ago, so that we could measure the time that tenants give. 450 hours have been given to meetings with Housing Services through the WDC/WDTRO Liaison meetings, Joint Rent Group, Pre-HACC Forum, Scrutiny Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum and consultations. This is up from last year's 429 hours. The Scrutiny Panel, Sheltered Forum and Joint Rent Group all missed scheduled meetings in March due to the Covid 19 lockdown so these figures would have been even higher and show a good record of continuing tenant interest and participation.

Year	Scrutiny Panel	WDTRO Liaison	Pre-HACC	Other Consultations	Joint rent group	Sheltered Forum	Total
2018/19	69.5	82	58	63	72.5	84	429
2019/20	63	84	69	94	82	58	450

## Year ahead

This year has been hampered by a staff shortage but we now have a **new Housing Development Officer, Hanne Thijs** who will work to support and develop our existing TRAs, as well as encouraging new ways for tenants to get involved. This will greatly improve the quality and volume of participation work we can do, so we are looking forward to an even more productive year ahead.

**Our annual tenant event** was used as part of the launch of the Rent Setting Consultation but we are open to suggestions if that is what tenants want again this year or if we should have a separate event – let us know what you think and if there is specific things you would like us to include.

**Our Tenant Participation Strategy** is also due to be reviewed and tenants views will be essential to ensure we have a strategy that encourages meaningful tenant participation and we have the structures available to support them.

***Thank you to all our tenant volunteers and to housing staff who make tenant participation work***

## Please give us your feedback.

We want to continue to improve how we feedback to tenants and so will evolve this annual report over the coming years. Please let us know what you liked, what you didn't and what you want to see included in future. **Short questionnaire ?**



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