

# Tenant Participation Performance Report 2022/23



## Introduction

Our Tenant Participation Strategy 2021-24 'Involving You' sets out how we support and promote tenant involvement in West Dunbartonshire. This report is to outline progress made in the last year and to highlight the input tenants have had in decisions made and to service improvements.

There was a welcome return to face to face meetings though we have been offering hybrid meetings to take advantage of both options, as the virtual option often helps people manage to attend meetings. The WDC/WDTRO Liaison meetings are hybrid while the Joint Rent Group has continued on Zoom as there is a smaller membership and virtual meetings can be as effective. The WDTRO are also using hybrid meetings to assist members attend their monthly committee meetings.

The commitment of tenants and tenant groups continues to be strong and without them our TP Strategy wouldn't work and we need their involvement to ensure that we improve services for tenants. A key driver for getting people involved is that they can see that they make a difference which makes it so important that we review their impact and ensure that it can be evidenced.

## Key highlights

### 1. Continued good response from tenants in rent setting consultation



The annual rent setting consultation was launched later than usual at a meeting of the Joint Rent Group on 08/12/22. Information on 2 rent options were sent out in a specific mailing to all tenants with information detailing the rationale behind the options, what each option meant and how to vote. A range of ways to vote was available to make it as easy as possible for tenants to have their say - free-post voting card, online, phone call, by text or email. A copy of the presentation, as well as information on the 2 options, was also posted on the Council's website so that it was freely and widely available.

The survey was promoted regularly through the Council's webpages and social media, as well as on our Tenant Participation Facebook page. Email and text reminders were also sent via our housing system QL, to tenants with contact details. WDC intranet was used to reach staff who are also tenants. Housing Officers and Homeless Support Officers were also sent a briefing and asked to encourage their tenants to vote.

A total of 1173 tenants voted for their preferred option in the survey, which equates to a response rate of 12.3%. This is a healthy increase from the 1089 who voted in the last rent setting consultation especially considering the shorter consultation period.

The results were close with Option 1 (a 4% increase) getting 621 of the votes (52.9%) and Option 2 (a 5% increase) getting 552 of the votes (47.1%). The preferred option of 4% was put forward as the proposed rent increase for Council approval, however, a Councillor Motion was agreed and the 5% rent increase implemented.

## 2. TPAS Gold Accreditation



The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) is a national organisation that specialises in participation and runs an accreditation scheme to assess tenant participation across social landlords. Our accreditation is valid for 3 years and in Dec 2022 we submitted our self-assessment and evidence against the criteria set by TPAS. Focus group discussions with staff and tenants are then used to assess how participation works in practice and an independent Panel assesses all the evidence. We were delighted to be awarded a Gold accreditation again and TPAS commended our easy to read Strategy and the structures within West Dunbartonshire that ensure tenants do play an active role in decision making and improving services.

## 3. Tenant Priority Budget

This is an annual £800,000 budget, set aside for tenant priorities. There are set criteria on how this Budget can be used and it is tenants who decide what proposals are value for money and should go ahead which is done through public meetings.

£54,590.91 was spent in 2022/23 on 16 projects including improvements like 4 planters at Failley Road, security lighting for the greenhouse and communal garden at Mill Road sheltered housing, patio and additional planters for Willox Park sheltered housing and the repainting of the CATRA office at 5 Alexander Street.

This remains an under-utilised budget and the underspend does go back into the HRA. There is often a delay from the proposal being received, work being costed, getting public agreement to proposals and finally the work being completed which means it's not a quick fix and that can be off putting. We are working closely with Building Services to speed up the process and for resources to be prioritised for the work. We will continue to promote the Tenant Priority Budget as it's a great opportunity for tenants to see improvements being carried out in their area and can be particularly useful for tenant priorities identified on local walkabouts that can't be covered by other budgets.

## 4. Partnership working

Tenant Participation staff started working with a new group from Neighbourhood Networks. The aim of the meetings is to look at WDC housing services and consider ways that they can be improved for those who have additional support needs. The group will consider which areas they will look at but are interested in assessing how easy it is to use the repairs service, if the tenant handbook needs to be made more accessible and how easy it is to find information about WDC housing services.

Dalmuir TRA successfully ran a community café in Overtoun Court for a number of years but had to close it after it became untenable. However, discussions are ongoing with Alternatives, a community based drug recovery programme with the view to them providing a community cafe as well as the TRA using the space for their meetings. Alternatives already run a Sweet Success café in Dumbarton and will be good to see Overtoun Court being used more often.

## 5. Communication

Communication is really important for effective participation and is a vital way to help build trust. 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- [Tenant Participation Updates | West Dunbartonshire Council](#)



The Housing News is produced quarterly and delivered to all tenants, as well as future tenants living in temporary accommodation. Housing staff and Councillors 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. TRAs are also encouraged to use 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.

In the tenant satisfaction survey carried out in Oct-Nov 2022, of the 600 respondents, 85% said that they read the Housing News to obtain information about Housing Services, so it remains a vital way for us to get tenants involved in what's happening and keep them updated.

### **Online and Facebook**

We continually review the content of our TP webpages [Tenant participation | West Dunbartonshire Council](#) and update it with meeting notes from the Joint Rent Group, WDC/WDTR0 Liaison meetings and Pre HACC Forum so that tenants can get access to this information at a time that suits them.



@WestDunbartonshireCouncilTenantParticipation - we now have 268 followers on Facebook and post at least 2/3 times a week with information we hope is relevant to tenants. Our FB page continues to attract new readers (up from 230 last year) and is a valuable mechanism for sharing information and encouraging engagement. TRA's also make good use of Facebook and Tullichewan TRA in particular use it very successfully and have 496 followers. Newer TRA's are also using Facebook to help promote their activities and meetings.

## **6. 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. They have been improving transparency about the HRA budget setting and assessing where tenants could be more involved in these key financial decisions. They have been focusing on void performance and created a template to monitor void performance as well as the void budget and rent loss. They also receive regular updates on the Capital Programme.

The **Pre-HACC Forum** is another opportunity that tenants have to influence decisions made by the Housing and Community Committee. The Forum takes place two days before the Housing and Communities Committee meets and tenants can meet the Housing Convener and staff who have written the papers that are going to committee - the Housing Convener then feeds tenants' views into the committee discussions. Paper copies of the committee reports, which can be lengthy and more difficult to read on small devices, are delivered to attendees to assist discussions and there has been regular tenant attendance throughout the year.

**WDC/WDTR0 Liaison meetings** take place every 2 months and continues to be 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. Housing performance is discussed as well as progress on new development plans and new build progress. Minutes are then 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 has resulted in improvements that all tenants can benefit from, these included:

- Continuing to monitor Repairs call handling performance to ensure that the reduction in waiting times continued and tenants were able to get through to Repairs more easily.
- Repairs performance monitored throughout the year and following concern about the number of jobs cancelled due to no access, Repairs have improved their communication with tenants and text confirmations and reminders get sent out. Articles were included in the Housing News to remind tenants to update Repairs with contact numbers as reminders only work if have correct mobile or email address.
- To reduce the fire risk from over loaded sockets, USB sockets were introduced as part of the re-let standard, when kitchens are renewed or when a tenant requests them.
- Following incidents when lifts were out of order, a process where text alerts can be sent to affected tenants was created to keep tenants updated on progress and confirmation when lifts back working. Process been used successfully and out of hours arrangements are being developed.
- In response to a number of vandalism incidents at the high flats, the Neighbourhood Team increased foot patrols at the flats and the CCTV team also focused on the cameras in the flats so that incidents could be responded to quickly. Caretaking staff also ensure when reporting damage caused by vandalism, that this is recorded so that the level of vandalism can be monitored.

## 7. Scrutiny Panel progress.



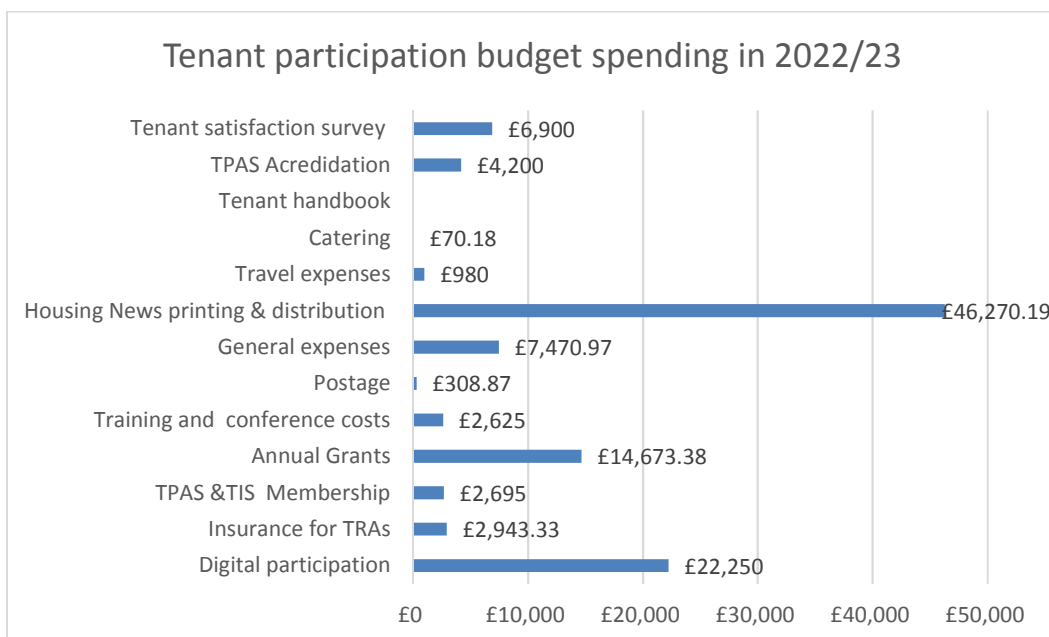
The Scrutiny Panel recruited a new member last year and the full Panel enjoyed being back to having in person meetings. They completed a scrutiny exercise on new tenant visits which included a survey of new tenants and their report and recommendations were accepted by the Housing Improvement Board on 29/5/23. Their survey gave them good insight into the experiences of new tenants and helped them make recommendations that included better monitoring to ensure all new tenants get a visit, additional support question added to staff checklist to ensure it got asked and follow-up contact made to ensure that outstanding repairs were completed. The staff checklist and monitoring of visits have already been implemented and the Panel will be kept updated on progress.

## 8. Tenant Participation Budget - £101,245 spent in 2022/23

We have a TP budget of £101,245 and spent £110,226.92 in 2022/23. Our Budget enables us to financially support 12 TRAs, the WDTR0, Sheltered Housing Forum, Pre-HACC Forum and Scrutiny Panel to help them function effectively and as independently as possible. The overspend was mainly due to an increase in TRA activities as they got back to being fully operational so their running costs increased and they were also affected by the massive increase in energy costs. Risk Street TRA also took on a community flat and although they and Hanne were very fugal and creative in accessing furniture and office equipment there were initial one-off purchases needed. Travel costs also increased as more in person meetings restarted. Public liability insurance is also paid for each active TRA.

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. This also includes the costs for the rent setting communication and the performance inserts that go with the Housing News. Our Budget had been increased this year to assist with digital developments to the self-serve tenant portal which should make reporting repairs, checking rent accounts and generally communicating with Housing Services better for all tenants.

A breakdown of our spending is shown below:



## 9. Training

Ensuring housing staff have a good knowledge of what tenant participation is so that they can encourage tenants to get involved is essential and an online training tool was created for staff to access as an ilearn course and also for new members of staff.

An Elected Members Seminar was delivered focussing on TRA's and how they fit into the wider TP structures in WDC, to help Councillors better understand their role.

We also took full advantage of a number of free virtual events this year and funded 3 tenants to attend the TPAS conference, as well Scrutiny Panel members attending scrutiny learning sessions.

## 10. Volunteering hours - measuring the time given is also a recognition of the energy, effort and skills that comes with it.

We really value and appreciate the time that tenants give coming to meetings and started to count volunteering hours a few years ago so that we could measure it. Measuring the time given is also a recognition of the energy, effort and skills that comes with it.

There was an increase in meeting attendance and 267 volunteering hours were given, up from 190 hours last year, and this doesn't count the time at walkabouts or at local TRA meetings.

The WDTR0 Liaison, Joint Rent Group and Pre-HACC Forum all had a small decrease in attendance but the overall total attendance increased as the Sheltered Housing Forum meetings restarted.



## 11. The year ahead

Recruiting new members for groups has always been difficult but more so now even with Covid restrictions lifted. This is not just happening in West Dunbartonshire but we hear it from across the country. TRAs are trying to be as visible as possible in their local areas and more social and community events are being organised to help promote their activities. Increasing local numbers will also hopefully attract new members to the WDTR0 to help strengthen their numbers.

More local walkabouts have been taking place and we will continue to promote them as they are ideal ways for staff and tenants to assess individual streets or areas, make improvements happen and help build trusting relationships.

The new tenant self-serve portal where tenants can check their rent account and report repairs has scope to be developed further and help provide tenants with access to information about consultations and any other important information and this will be progressed this year.

Another digital option that we will focus development on will be Mighty Networks which is a digital hub that can be a more interactive and accessible option to increase tenant participation. It has been used initially by the Scrutiny Panel and been well received so has good potential.

We need to ensure that any tenant involvement with Housing Services is a positive experience for people and we will continue to support tenants get involved and help make participation be effective.

Hanne Thijs has moved onto a new job but her post is being recruited so we will be back to full strength in a matter of months.

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

### **Please give us your feedback.**

We want to continue to improve how we provide feedback so please review this annual report format and let us know what you liked, what you didn't and what you want to see included in the future – thank you.



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