



Williamsburgh

H O U S I N G A S S O C I A T I O N

• L i m i t e d •

Tenant Participation Policy and Procedures

This policy can be made available in different languages and other formats such as Braille, large print or tape, on request.

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1. Introduction

Williamsburgh Housing Association is a Renfrewshire-based organisation run by a group of local residents committed to encouraging tenant participation. We accept that tenant participation is a continuous process which requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, committee members and staff at all levels. Effective participation should remove any barriers and ensure equality of opportunity regardless of age, disability, gender, location, language differences, race and / or sexual orientation.

We also believe that participation is about tenants taking part in decision-making processes and influencing decisions about:

- housing policies,
- housing conditions, and
- housing (and related) services.

It is a two-way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and services.

We recognise that there are many benefits to be derived from encouraging tenant participation, including:

- Better service delivery and increased value for money.
- Help for committee and staff in decision-making and setting priorities.
- Increased tenant satisfaction.
- Better communication between staff and tenants.

1. Introduction Contd.

- Better links between the community and us, assisting community development.
- Recognition of the citizen's right to be consulted on services affecting them.
- Better decision-making, as a result of a clearer understanding of local needs.
- Increased community capacity, resulting in greater impact and enduring change.

These benefits accrue gradually and will be the result of long-term participation.

We accept the need for a comprehensive Tenant Participation Policy covering all aspects of our service provision, many of which will be equally applicable to owners within factored properties and many of which will have an impact on the wider community.

2. Equal Opportunities

The Association is committed to the principles of equal opportunities and good practice. In this regard, we acknowledge Performance Standards for Social Landlords and Homelessness Functions (November 2006) : GS2.1, which states in respect of equal opportunities that:

“We embrace diversity, promote equal opportunities for all and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all areas of our work”.

Accordingly, we shall ensure that specifically in regard to tenant consultation and participation all tenants are treated equally, irrespective of their sex or marital status, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or other social attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions.

3. Performance Standards, Good Practice and Legal Framework

The Association, in preparing this policy and the related procedures has given consideration to and sought compliance with, the following:

Performance Standards, as defined by The Scottish Housing Regulator – the regulatory body for housing associations. The relevant Guidance and Activity Standards GS2.2, GS3.1, GS3.5 and GS4.1 state:

GS2.2 Tenant participation

We have published and are implementing a sound strategy for encouraging and supporting tenants, residents and service users to participate actively in all areas of our work. We support tenants to take an active interest in managing their homes.

GS3.1 Responsiveness to service users

We place the people who want to use our services at the heart of our work. We treat people with respect and are responsive to their views and priorities.

GS3.5 Openness and confidentiality

We are open about what we do and publish information about our activities. We provide information that people ask for, unless there are justifiable reasons for withholding it.

GS4.1 Independence and accountability

We focus on our purpose and outcomes for tenants and service users. We are independent from other bodies and operate in line with an appropriate constitution. We engage with stakeholders and make accountability real.

3. Performance Standards, Good Practice and Legal Framework Contd.

Good Practice Guidance

- The Scottish Government – Code of Practice for Tenant Participation in Best Value.
- Communities Scotland’s A Good Practice Framework for Tenant Participation in Scotland.
- The Scottish Housing Regulator : Shaping up for Improvement July 2009.
- SFHA’s Raising Standards in Housing.

3.1 Legal Framework

The legislative framework which affects tenant participation includes:

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Section 23, subsection 6,f).

“where the landlord is a local authority landlord or a registered social landlord, the landlord’s tenant participation strategy”.

4. Aims and Objectives

- (a) To ensure that all information given, whether written or oral, is in plain language.
- (b) To ensure that tenants are informed, consulted and encouraged to influence those aspects of our services which affect them.
- (c) To encourage local residents to participate in their Neighbourhood Groups.
- (d) To promote membership of the Association and encourage tenants to become members of the Management Committee, in order to gain access to the decision-making process.
- (e) To undertake regular tenant satisfaction surveys in order to ascertain tenants' views.
- (f) To take cognisance of any feedback received from such surveys and initiate necessary changes to our service provision, where appropriate.
- (g) To provide regular feedback to residents on the information gathered through satisfaction surveys, and service performance.
- (h) To ensure that the particular needs of ethnic minority tenants and tenants with disabilities are met.
- (i) To ensure the availability of appropriate staff during opening hours and to be amenable to meeting with tenants outwith these hours, where necessary.
- (j) To operate a formal complaints procedure.

4. Aims and Objectives Contd.

- (k) To actively assist and promote Neighbourhood Groups. This will include arranging appropriate resourcing, training and support.
- (l) To maintain a 'register of interested parties' which will assist in the consultation process.
- (m) Respect the views of tenants who do not actively wish to participate in the running of the Association and ensure that all tenants receive regular, quality information.
- (n) To maximise the level of feedback from our tenants on the services that we provide.

5. Methods of Involvement

The main areas covered by this policy are as follows:

- (a) Information
- (b) Consultation
- (c) Participation
- (d) Feedback
- (e) Policy Development

(a) Information

We will provide information to tenants using a number of different methods including letters, quarterly newsletters, register of interested parties, neighbourhood groups, annual reports, open days, public meetings, close meetings and, on occasion, the local media.

We will:

- Provide all new tenants with a Residents Handbook which summarises the main areas of our service provision, what to do if you have a complaint or repair, useful / emergency numbers etc.
- Provide all new tenants with staff member contact details and identify their designated housing officer.
- Issue four Newsletters per annum.
- Provide information in languages other than English, where required.

5. Methods of Involvement Contd.

(a) Information Contd.

- Engage the services of interpreters, where required.
- Provide information on tape or Braille for visually impaired tenants and service users.
- Advise tenants of our performance in key areas e.g. allocations, arrears etc, through our newsletters, annual report, reception media and attendance at local neighbourhood groups.

We will regularly seek the views of our tenants regarding the best means of providing information to them and will endeavour to ensure that there are adequate resources for the provision of such information.

(b) Consultation

We acknowledge our legal obligation to consult on changes, which will have a substantial effect on tenants. In addition, we will also consult tenants about the quality of existing service provision, in order to seek ways of improving such services. Tenants will be consulted prior to deciding upon any substantial changes to matters, such as:

- Allocations, transfers and exchanges
- Tenant Participation
- Homelessness
- Rent setting and collection

5. Methods of Involvement Contd.

(b) Consultation Contd.

- Annual rent and service charge review
- Day to day maintenance
- Planned maintenance
- Rent arrears
- Dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour
- Estate management issues
- Capital investment programmes
- Housing Benefit (if part of the housing service)
- Amendments to tenancy agreements

Methods of Consultation

We will ensure that consultation is effective and meaningful by providing full information to those tenants and service users being consulted. Adequate time will be allowed for tenants to read this information and to form an opinion.

The methods of consultation used, will vary according to the issues concerned. Specific issues affecting a group of tenants or particular properties will be dealt with by a letter to the tenants of the properties involved detailing:

5. Methods of Involvement Contd.

Methods of Consultation Contd.

- the proposed change,
- the reason behind this,
- asking for comments and,
- giving a timescale for response.

Where the situation is more complex, we will raise it through our neighbourhood groups, hold public meetings, close meetings or visit tenants at home. On more general issues we will use newsletters and, if necessary, hold close or public meetings. We will also utilise our website, and our reception TV wherever possible.

Feedback on the quality of existing service delivery will primarily be obtained by using surveys and questionnaires. We will also make use of neighbourhood groups to obtain feedback on service delivery. A comprehensive tenant satisfaction survey is conducted every three years to determine customer opinion on the full range of services provided.

New tenants will be asked for their views on the allocations process and information provided to them at their tenancy sign up.

Following closure of complaints received and categorised as either priority A or B, feedback will be requested from the resident who made the complaint about how their complaint was handled.

5. Methods of Involvement Contd.

Methods of Consultation Contd.

Visitors to our office will be asked to complete a customer services questionnaire for us to ascertain the effectiveness of our front line service.

New tenants are surveyed 6 months after taking occupancy of each new scheme, to ascertain their views on the quality and design of their homes.

The Maintenance Section issues quality satisfaction questionnaires to all tenants reporting repairs, seeking their feedback on the workmanship achieved and the promptness, tidiness and politeness of the contractor. This questionnaire also seeks tenants' views on our performance in dealing with their repair.

(c) Participation

We encourage tenants to take out shareholding membership in order to enable them to vote at Annual General Meetings and stand for election to the Management Committee. A membership form will be included with the information contained in the Residents Handbook and we will advertise for members, in our newsletters, on a regular basis.

Development staff will promote membership during initial visits to Housing Action / Regeneration Area residents to complete the resident survey form. We will pro-actively promote and give support and encouragement to those tenants wishing to form a group in whatever form that may take e.g. Neighbourhood Group, Tenants Association etc. Members of staff will be available to attend such group meetings and will help determine and, thereafter, arrange appropriate training for the group members.

5. Methods of Involvement Contd.

(c) Participation Contd.

This will assist tenants in their personal development and, in some cases, encourage members to seek appointment to the Management Committee.

Groups which exist solely to provide community or social activities will also be encouraged e.g. Neighbourhood Watch. We encourage joint management of any future community projects associated with our wider role.

In addition, we recognise that it is essential to encourage the participation of tenants through membership of their neighbourhood group and / or Management Committee, in order to give them a voice and to gain a tenants' perspective on the matters discussed. Housing Officers will undertake to encourage membership of both during the signing up of a new tenancy and during any future contact. They will also encourage tenants to add their name to the register of interested parties (residents who wish to be consulted by mail only).

Tenants will also be invited to participate on an individual basis on many issues. This will be done by either direct contact, or through our mailings and newsletters.

5. Methods of Involvement Contd.

(d) Feedback

All opinions expressed by tenants either individually or as part of a group are considered by us. The results of all consultation exercises are reported to the relevant Committee for their consideration prior to any decision being taken.

Regular feedback on both consultation exercises and service performance will be provided at our neighbourhood group meetings, in our quarterly newsletters, via the TV in our reception area and on our website.

(e) Policy Development

A series of policies guides our work. These policies are agreed by the Management Committee and take into account the law and good practice guidelines. They are regularly reviewed to make sure they are fair and effective.

In order to ensure that tenants have a part in the review process, we will seek tenants' opinions using a range of methods such as quarterly newsletters, surveys, consultation with those tenants on the register of interested parties and the neighbourhood groups.

6. Monitoring and Review

Williamsburgh Housing Association is committed to ensuring that this policy works. In order to achieve this, we will monitor our performance against targets set in our Tenant Participation Strategy on an annual basis. We will provide feedback on our performance to tenants, and provide quarterly reports to our relevant Committees.

This policy will be reviewed by the Housing Management Sub Committee every three years, following consultation with tenants and other service users.