

Tenant & Customer Participation



Strategy 2022 – 2027



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Introduction

West Lothian Council aims to provide the best possible service to our housing tenants.

We recognise that participation and local accountability, along with the feedback we receive from all our stakeholders, are essential tools for assessing how we operate, deliver change and adapt to ensure services are provided to everyone residing within the communities we serve. The tenant and customer participation and strategy sets out what the council plans to do, in cooperation with council tenants and service users, working together towards a common aim of better housing and housing-related services.

We wish to encourage people to become involved in the activities of West Lothian Tenant Participation in a way that suits them. We recognise that some tenants are involved through their local community or digitally; however, we aim to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say in the delivery and development of our services.

The council encourages and supports tenant participation over the next five years.

West Lothian is recognised as being one of the leading councils in Tenant Participation (TP).

Tenants have worked in partnership with staff to produce this strategy, which we hope will

encourage you to take part. There is a variety of ways in which you can get involved. Please join us and find a way to participate, that suits you. Taking part will give you the opportunity to influence change by being involved in decision making. You will gain a good understanding of the services being delivered.

You will be proud that you have been involved in making changes and improvements for both yourself and others. We can all make a difference by having a strong voice.



**A message from
George Paul, Executive
councillor for Housing
Services and tenants
panel chair.**

I fully support this strategy, which emphasises the strength of the council's commitment to improving and encouraging effective tenant participation throughout West Lothian. Much has been achieved, and tenants make positive differences in our services every year. We hope to continue building on what has already been achieved. We will continue to provide opportunities for tenants to be involved

and influence decisions at the highest possible level concerning the development of housing services.



Rights and Duties

All landlords have a legal duty to involve tenants and service users. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced the first legal framework for tenant participation by giving tenants the right to participate and be consulted. The Act also put new duties on all Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in Scotland.

Your Rights

- To form registered tenant groups and apply for funding;
- Access information about housing policies and related services;
- Be consulted on issues that affect your homes;
- Participate in the decision that affects the services you receive and have enough time to consider draft proposals and put forward views.

Landlord Duties

- Develop a Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy in consultation with tenants and service users, ensuring that it complies with equal opportunity requirements;
- Put the Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy into practice and measure performance against the agreed action plan;
- Provide resources and support to make sure tenant participation is effective;
- Regularly review how well tenant participation is working;
- Set up arrangements for registering tenants groups;
- Consult individual tenants' and residents' groups before making any decision that would change any of the following;
- How do we manage our housing properties.
- The standard of service we provide.
- Any proposals to sell, transfer or demolish our housing.
- Take on board tenants' views before decisions are taken on any housing policy and procedures.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 further strengthened landlord duties around tenant engagement through the establishment of the Scottish Housing Regulator and the Introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is an independent regulator directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament. Its statutory objective is to safeguard and promote the interests of current and future tenants, homeless people and others who use the services provided by social landlords. The Regulator assesses and reports how social landlords perform their housing services through the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC). The Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities.

Each year all Landlords must publish their performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter, and they must demonstrate how tenants have been involved in the assessment process. Tenant Scrutiny is the main driver for tenant involvement in monitoring performance.

Tenant Scrutiny

Tenant Scrutiny is about encouraging tenants and other customers actively involved in the Landlord's self-assessment process. It allows tenants and other customers to independently review how services are being delivered, identify what works well and recommend what could be improved.

Including All Our Customers

West Lothian Council recognises that while our statutory duty is to provide participation opportunities to social rented tenants, we are committed to ensuring participation opportunities are available to all our customers. For this document where the phrase "tenant participation" or "tenants" is used, this will include council tenants, residents, customers and service users where appropriate.

We provide the tools to take part...

This toolkit has been created to help you fully understand the fantastic work you can take part in if you become involved in tenant participation and provides you access to a summary of this strategy.



Please select the tool you would like to access.
Paper copies can be provided upon request.

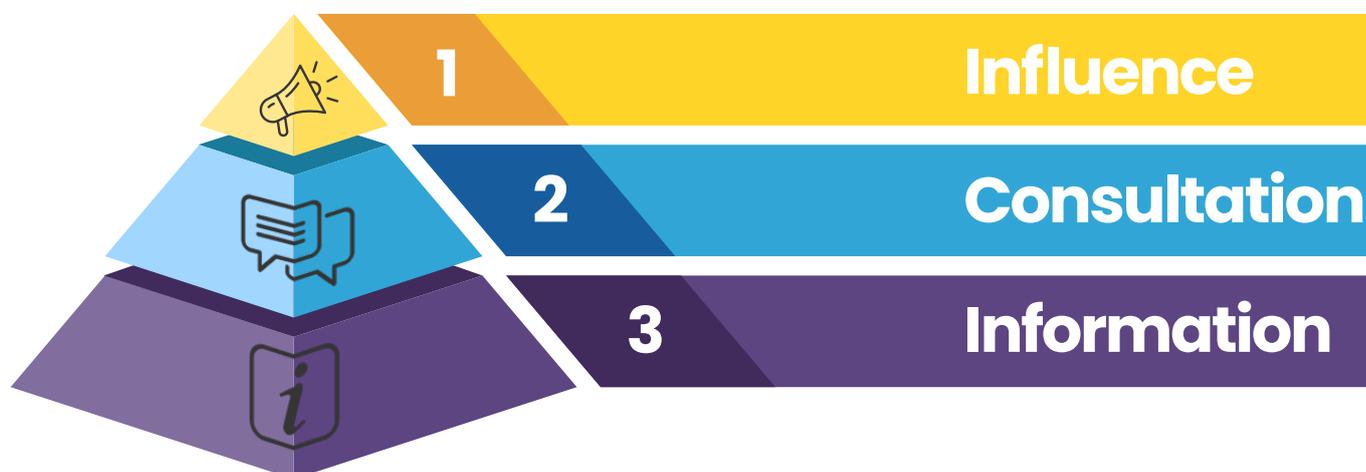
Email TP@westlothian.gov.uk or call **01506 280000**.

What is Tenant Participation?

Participation describes all the different ways the tenants can influence and shape housing and related services their Landlord provides.

Tenant Participation is about West Lothian Council communicating, consulting and most importantly taking onboard the views and opinions of tenants and using these to influence decisions that shape services.

Participation opportunities can be grouped using a model often referred to as a Participation Pyramid:



At the top of the pyramid sits influence – here is where customers take part in the decision making processes and influence housing policies and services. This level is a two-way process, with customers and staff working together to improve the standard of housing conditions and services.

In the middle of the pyramid sits consultation – consultation allows our tenants to tell us what they think about our ideas for our services, allowing us to shape these in response to feedback, comments and suggestions.

At the bottom of the pyramid sits information – keeping our tenants informed about our services is very important. Still, it is a one-way process and does not demonstrate effective participation.

We want to ensure that our tenants can participate at a level that suits them. We recognise that access to relevant and current information made available in a range of formats and places for many of our tenants will be enough to support them to enjoy their homes and the other services we provide. However, this strategy also sets out how we will help individuals take a more active role in influencing and shaping our services.

The Benefits of Tenant Participation

The benefits of effective participation for tenants, staff and West Lothian Council have been widely established and documented. Our commitment to participation recognises these benefits, and this strategy reflects how we will go about developing and strengthening these. These benefits include:



Building On Success – Our Achievements & Successes



We were the first landlord in Scotland to introduce Tenant Led Inspections.

We developed the Street Environmental Project (now known as West Lothian Community Choices) and continue to work in partnership with the Capital Programme Working Group.



Development of the Tenant Participation Facebook group, run by tenants and staff for West Lothian Council tenants, currently with 360 members.

Tenants' Panel winner of the Tenant Information Services 'Most Inspiring Scrutiny Group'

Winner of the Tenant Information Service 'Tenant Participation Excellence Award'

One of our Tenant Panel representatives won the Frances Nelson Excellence Award presented by the Tenants Information Service.



Involvement of tenants at local, regional and national levels including working with Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Charter.

Engagement Opportunities

This strategy builds on a strong foundation of engagement activities and reflects our commitment to continued development and improvement. Some of our activities are detailed below. This is not exhaustive but demonstrates the range of engagement opportunities grouped by participation 'type':



Influence

- Tenant Led Inspections
- Tenants Panels
- Tenants Groups
- Scrutiny Panel



Consultation

- Regular Surveys
- Questionnaires
- Annual Rent Setting
- Focus Groups and Discussions



Information

- Tenant News
- Website
- Social Media
- Staff - information and responding to queries

Our Priorities

1

Develop and strengthen the range of opportunities to participate that are available to all West Lothian tenants.

Recognising that not everyone wants to get involved in the same way or to the same extent, we will look to build on our previous successes and continue to make available a wide range of methods to be involved within Tenant Participation; allowing tenants to be involved in a way, and at a level that suits them.

Action	Description
1	Develop a register of interested tenants to include information about their preferred method and level of involvement. This register will regularly be fed into the Tenant Participation Development Working Group (TPDWG).
2	Utilise the services of the Housing, Customer, and Building Services Customer Experience team to obtain feedback from tenants and coordinate all surveys to avoid duplication and survey fatigue.
3	Develop a digital network of tenants using appropriate technology and digital communication tools.
4	Develop a tenant digital engagement guidance to support virtual attendance at events, meetings, and other sessions.
5	Involve tenants in the planning of tenant events.
6	Introduce 'drop-in' sessions. Face-to-Face at locations across West Lothian as well as online.

2

Improve the communication and promotion of participation opportunities available to West Lothian Council tenants

The development of this strategy demonstrated that while we have worked hard to develop a range of participation opportunities, not all tenants know that these exist or how they might get involved with them.

Action	Description
7	Promote all available opportunities via printed and digital mediums.
8	Support tenant involvement in the selection of content for the Newsletter.
9	Develop and strengthen the use of social media to promote events.
10	Develop tenant participation logo and theme for the use of all promotional material and events.
11	Publish a calendar of planned participation events and consultation exercises each year.
12	Work with the HCBS communication champions to develop communication structures and tools so that all staff are well placed to provide information about opportunities to participate.

Our Priorities

3

Develop a programme of training, support & capacity for involved tenants

While our tenants might be happy to complete a survey or give feedback to staff, we recognise that getting involved in structured activities, such as our Tenant's Panel, can be challenging for some tenants who might be concerned that they don't have the confidence to take part.

Digital Capacity Building

The pandemic has changed how people interact with each other. Tenant Participation quickly recognised

the increased value of digital communication tools to keep people connected during times of social distancing. However, while we recognise that digital connectivity can be instrumental in overcoming some of the barriers residents face, the growing use of digital technology mustn't create more barriers by preventing those without the technology, connectivity, or digital confidence from accessing participation opportunities. The tenant participation meetings will be held either digitally or face to face.

Action	Description
13	Work with the Tenant members to identify training priorities and create a skill building menu.
14	Identify specific training and support needs of ALL tenants wishing to be involved.
15	Signpost tenant groups and individuals to available resources/schemes that support digital devices and equipment access.
16	Identify available digital training and support for tenants and staff.
17	Identify Best Practices and innovation used elsewhere via continued peer networking and attendance at seminars and events.

4

Increase the number of tenants who participate to ensure our services are genuinely tenant-led.

Our participation activities have grown in their variety and effectiveness over recent years. As we continue to build on these successes, we hope to increase the number of tenants who get involved and look to influence our services.

Action	Description
18	Deliver several tenant participation enrolment campaigns throughout the year.
19	Promote the benefits of getting involved at all levels and highlight the training and support that can be made available.
20	Review and develop appropriate incentives to increase tenant participation.
21	Work to tackle identified barriers of involvement to increase traditionally hard-to-reach groups.
22	Provide training and support to tenants, and identify external programmes that they might be able to access to support their wider interests/needs.

Our Priorities

5

Develop and grow the specific participation of young people.

We are keen to develop and grow the participation of young people. We have developed several actions aimed at increasing the opportunities that we provide young people not only to influence and shape our services but so that they might gain valuable training and skills.

Action	Description
23	Work with the Tenant members to identify training priorities and create a skill building menu.
24	Undertake an audit of the training and support needs of Young People to facilitate involvement.
25	The review of participation incentives (action 22) should include tailored incentives to increase the involvement of Young People.
26	Create, develop and implement a Young Persons Focus Group which will feed into Tenants Panel.

6

Move towards a culture of participation across West Lothian Council.

To be effective, participation should be at the heart of everything we do as an organisation, with all staff and Senior Management being clear about why, when, and how Tenant participation should be supported.

Action	Description
27	Introduce a mandatory e-learning module for Housing, Customer, and Building Services Staff with annual refresher training.
28	Promote the benefits of getting involved at all levels and highlight the training and support that can be made Work with our communication champions for each service area to ensure effective communication and coordination of planned events.
29	Work with housing operational staff to assist in the promotion of Tenant Participation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Tenant Participation Developing Working Group (TPDWG) will oversee the delivery of the action plan.

The group will meet every 4 weeks and will be responsible for assigning tasks, monitoring progress, identifying problems as they arise, and making adjustments where required.

An annual report of progress including any proposed changes in response to the evaluation process will be prepared and shared with the Senior Management Team, tenants and staff.

Working with our Customers

The Customer Experience team will partner with the Tenant Participation team to achieve the actions within this strategy.

Working in partnership will provide a positive customer experience that reflects good customer service interactions. We want to ensure that customers and tenants are at the heart of what we do. To truly know what type of experience our customers and tenants have, we need to measure the experience. We will do this by:

- Capturing customer satisfaction levels through various forms of engagement.
- Using consistent methods to measure satisfaction.
- Encourage open and honest discussion.
- Assessing the ease of effort to access services.

The tenant's panel will monitor the progress of the Customer Experience team through quarterly reports.

Equal Opportunities

- We value involvement that reflects the whole of our tenant population.
- We are committed to treating people respectfully, fairly and equally, tackling discrimination and harassment and ensuring our services are accessible irrespective of race, religious belief, disability, gender, sex, age or sexual orientation.
- We will ensure all groups and individuals have equal access and opportunity to engage in activities.
- We require all individuals involved with tenant participation to act to promote equality and welcome participation from all of our community.
- We aim to ensure that our involvement opportunities are accessible, that our written material is clear and easy to understand, available in other languages and formats and that we do not present any other barriers of involvement.
- We will provide information for tenants in other languages and formats such as audio or large print where tenants need it.
- We will provide information in ways that are easy to understand for tenants with limited or no reading skills where tenants need it.
- We will ensure that all of our groups recognise the importance of equal opportunities and seek to involve all those who are eligible to join them.

Taking part

We would love to hear
your feedback on our
strategy.

Please click [HERE](#) to
complete our survey



This strategy is available on request as a paper copy, including in large print and easy read, in braille, and BSL DVD.

Please contact the customer service centre on **01506 280000** to make this request or alternatively email TP@westlothian.gov.uk

