

# West Lothian Council Tenants Annual Report 2018/19



## Housing, Customer and Building Services

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## 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to the 2018/19 Tenant Participation Annual Report. Over the course of the financial year, Housing, Customer and Building Services have tried to engage with many tenants and service users in various innovative ways.

The Tenant Participation (TP) Team has seen a significant increase in the number of people engaging with us about the services we deliver. The team regularly supports monthly meetings, including, scrutiny panels, housing networks and tenant & resident groups. This year the team introduced an evening network meeting to encourage those who couldn't attend day time meetings to come along to learn about housing issues and services. The team were also instrumental in organising events, such as local estate walkabouts and focus groups; offering customers a greater opportunity to share their views on various aspects of our services.

The latest TP Strategy 2017/21 continues to set out all the ways tenants and service users can take part in activities and events to help improve service delivery for all West Lothian Council tenants and service users.



Throughout the year, we have celebrated many milestones and achievements, which included, recognising our Good Neighbours at the Annual award Ceremony and celebrating the success of our Tenant Participation Development Working Group who were awarded the Tenant Information Services (TIS) Award for Best Innovative Practice in June. This award was in recognition of developing new digital initiatives. The TP Team were also recognised for their work in developing new ways to communicate with customers at the Council's own Celebrating Success Awards.

## 2.0 Networks and Tenants Groups

### 2.1 Networks

#### **West Lothian Tenants Housing Network (WLTHN)**

This network, covering the whole of West Lothian, offers tenants, service users and staff an opportunity to come together to make a stronger voice on matters that are important to them.

This constituted group meets monthly and has a formal structure following a schedule of consultation and information sharing briefings throughout the year. Some key topics discussed included, budget setting, the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, Quarterly Performance Information, and Online Digitisation. Membership to this network remains consistent with around 14 – 16 members attending each month.



#### **Evening Tenants Housing Network**

The TP Team are always keen to encourage tenants and services users to share their views about services delivery. We held the first Evening Tenant's Housing Network meeting in November 2018, with a total of 13 tenants attending to hear about Tenant Participation in West Lothian and discuss local issues.

The meeting brought real interest in how services are delivered from those who attended and follow up sessions were held to answer their queries around the allocation of houses and issues around flatted communal buildings. The second meeting was held in March and has resulted in the TP Team adding this as a regular evening event to the TP schedule.



#### **Homeless Housing Network**

This network continues to flourish, bringing together service users on a monthly basis to promote well-being and focus on their journey and experiences with homelessness. This group is supported by Housing Needs Staff and the Tenant Participation Team.

Members find these meetings give them the opportunity to share their views and opinions on the Housing Need Service with others who



have experienced similar situations, in a sociable and informal setting. The Network provides an opportunity for members to understand the homeless process and why procedures are in place, as well as giving them the opportunity to make suggestions on how the service can be improved and obtain information from internal and external services. Over the year, they have received information sessions from The Advice Shop on the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit and Energy Advice. Other services updates included the Food Bank, Conduit Scotland and an introduction to the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP).

### **Homeless Sub-group**

The Sub Group, was established in March 2016 as an offshoot of the Homeless Housing Network Group (HHNG). Several network members meet separately on a monthly basis to review specific aspects of the service, helping to develop and improve service standards and truly shape services around the customer's needs.

Over the last 12 months, the group has been able to successfully achieve a number of reviews within the service. Key areas that they have focused on include:

- Temporary Tenancy Welcome Packs
- Review of Furniture Storage letters relating to Temporary Tenancies
- Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan
- Publication of Homeless Newsletter
- Involvement in the interviewing of permanent and bank staff

## **2.2 Tenants Groups.**

Throughout the course of the year our Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) have suffered with dwindling attendance figures and the dissolution of a group which was supported by the TP Team and local Housing staff.

### **Bathgate East Tenants & Residents Association**

It was with great reluctance that we saw the demise of our longest running tenants group in Bathgate East. This group had originated in the 1980's long before legislation brought the need to register. Throughout their years the group worked tirelessly to improve the community and environment within the catchment area.

### **Boghall Tenants and Residents Association**

This group now meet every second month as members felt there was not the same demand to resolve issues and numbers were dwindling. The TP Team continue to support this group and local housing staff encourage new tenants to participate.

### **Tenants Groups in Homeless Units**

Housing Need staff continue to encourage tenants residing in the three Emergency Accommodation Units to participate in monthly meetings. These meetings allow tenants to come together to discuss issues pertinent to the unit and surrounding area. The meetings continue to be well attended and offer a social aspect with members enjoying 'a bite to eat and an opportunity to catch up.' These meetings are very successful and are held in Newlands, Blackburn Homeless Unit and Broxburn Family Centre.

### **Al Nour Community Group**

The Al Nour Community Group was established in August 2018 at the request of the Syrian refugees who have settled in West Lothian under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. All of the 13 Syrian families within West Lothian are encouraged and supported to attend meetings, and there are currently 18 named committee members, six of whom are office bearers.

Refugees of any origin are welcome to become involved with the group as are any others individuals with a wish to support refugees in West Lothian. The aims of the group were agreed as being:

- to promote the interests of Syrian Refugees in West Lothian;
- to support inclusion into local communities and improve awareness of the Scottish culture and way of life;
- to cultivate effective partnerships with Housing, Customer and Building Services, other services within West Lothian Council and also other external partner organisations, operate on an equal opportunities basis;
- provide a safe and secure environment for the refugees to meet, socialise and develop their community and extended network connections;
- encourage the refugees to integrate into the community and become more independent and enable members to become more confident in communicating in English.

### **New Build Groups**

With many new build sites being completed throughout the county the TP Team have been working with staff in local housing offices to encourage tenants to come together and establish new informal tenants groups. This has been fairly successful in two areas with new build homes with a group in the east (Kirkhill in Broxburn) and one in the west (Fauldhouse) of West Lothian. The groups are very early in the development stages with most of the meeting addressing snagging issues within the properties. It is hoped that officers will encourage these groups on other sites and they will continue to grow throughout the county.

### **Rosemount Court**

The TP Team also helped with the setting up of a new group within the Rosemount Court complex in Bathgate. Tenants were keen to establish a group to ensure there is a flow of communication between residents and staff. The group meet regularly to plan activities and outings and a member of the TP Team can ask to attend any meeting in order to keep them informed and carry out any consultation required.



## 3.0 Other Groups

### **Tenants Panel**

A schedule of meetings is developed annually so that tenant members and senior managers can discuss and analyse information relating to Housing, Customer and Building Services. They continue to meet monthly to fulfil their role of scrutinising service delivery, by looking at financial elements of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget, performance information and all other areas relating to the delivery of services for tenants.

### **Tenant Participation Development Working Group**

This group drives the direction that tenant participation moves in West Lothian and provides the initial focus point for proposals of areas to be scrutinised before general discussion is sought. Experienced tenants continue to push for new ideas to be developed allowing better rapport between customers and the council.

The TPDWG develop an annual work plan to drive the ongoing development of Tenant Participation in West Lothian; ensuring the aims set out in the TP Strategy are met. The work plan is monitored and reviewed regularly by the working groups, setting out their own actions to ensure they remain focussed and drive service development forward.

The group has developed a schedule for Tenant Led Inspections which includes a complete review of the Tenant Led Inspection Toolkit prior to any inspections being carried out in the coming year.

### **Capital Programme Working Group.**

Members of this group meet monthly with the Housing Capital Programme managers to review the Capital Programme projects and budgets. Group members regularly monitor the progress of the Assisted Decoration Scheme and manage an allocated budget for the Street Environmental Improvement Projects (SEIP). They review applications and make site visits before determining which projects meet the set criteria before approving the work. The group receive a monthly update on all projects and can visit again upon completion.

Budget scrutiny is important for this team to ensure that tenants continue to receive good value for money.

The group constantly look for ways to develop and improve and are expanding their remit by introducing the scrutiny of the repairs service and by reviewing the criteria for Street Environmental Improvements Projects.

### **Services for the Community Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP)**

The PDSP meet regularly throughout the year, with members from WLTHN attending on behalf of the network, and feeding back to them the outcome of issues raised and discussed.

The tenant representatives can participate fully in the meetings and have the opportunity to take the views and opinions of the networks to the meetings, on issues such as rent increase, Housing Revenue and Capital Budgets, including new build projects.



### Focus Groups

Focus groups were held throughout the year, with council tenants being invited to attend one of a series of meetings arranged in the east and west of the county. This gave a wider group of tenants the opportunity to share their views on satisfaction levels and for us to understand areas of dissatisfaction and how we can remedy this. In total, eight people took part in four sessions, with their opinions and experiences being used to influence decisions to improve services.

Several of these tenants have continued to participate in the monthly Housing Networks and training events.

### Quality Improvement Teams

Following discussions at the focus groups, an issue regarding the maintenance and cleaning of communal areas within flatted properties was identified. This resulted in the Performance and Change team holding a QIT with relevant officers looking at ways of improving the Enhanced Estates Management Service to address the issues raised.

## 4.0 Tenant Led Inspections-

This year two inspections were carried out successfully, looking into the processes and procedures surrounding our New Build Properties and Housing Needs Service.

- **New Build Properties.**

Staff from the Strategy and Development team presented an action plan to inspectors in April 2018. The action plan sets out the ways the service would meet the 39 recommendations made by inspectors in their report with timescales. An interim feedback session was held in August to update the inspectors on progress of actions with the final feedback being scheduled for April 2019.

- **Housing Needs Service.**

Tenant Inspectors carried out a review of the Housing Needs Service in August/ September 2018. Their report made 20 recommendations for improvement and was presented to senior management by the inspectors. The Action Plan has been agreed and will be carried out over a 12 month period.



## 5.0 Publications

The Editorial Panel meet regularly to review and monitor all publications produced by HCBS. The aim is to ensure all written material is easily understood, free from jargon and is grammatically correct before being made available on the website or in print format. All publications reviewed by the Editorial Panel carry the Tenant Approved stamp.



### Tenants News

This newsletter is produced by the TP Team and is issued to every council home in West Lothian three times a year. It is one of the council's main ways of keeping tenants informed of service activity and developments. The content of each edition of Tenants News is drafted and agreed with the Tenants Editorial Panel.

The autumn edition includes our Annual Landlord Report, which the Service has a statutory requirement to publish yearly to keep tenants informed on how the service is performing.

We are looking at more economical ways of promoting and distributing our newsletter to all council tenants including e-newsletters and social media alerts to help ensure value for money and provide readers with a choice in how they receive it. Postage for the latest edition was substantially reduced after the Panel decided on a new method of packaging.

### Leaflets and Letters

This year, panel members were kept very busy reviewing a variety of new and updated publications, such as,

- central heating guides
- new build satisfaction survey
- water hygiene leaflet
- Repairs Review
- a suite of capital programme letters.

The Panel has reviewed over 50 individual pieces of literature as well as three editions of Tenants News.

### Tenants Handbook

Work has been ongoing over the course of the year to review and update the Tenants Handbook in partnership with the TP Development Working Group. The content of each section of the Handbook will be reviewed by the Editorial Panel as an ongoing initiative. This is available online at [www.westlothian.gov.uk/tenantshandbook](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/tenantshandbook) and tenants can also request individual pages from their local CIS Office/Library.

## 6.0 Tenants Training

Training events are arranged when tenants show an interest in learning more about a particular service. Following on from several focus groups regarding tenant satisfaction, tenants asked for more information on the allocation of council houses. A tenants training event was held in December with allocation officers on hand to explain the allocation criteria and options for applicants.

Changes to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 brought questions from various forums and once again we felt it best to hold an information session to make tenants aware of these changes that could affect them and answer any questions they may have. This training session was held in March 2019.

Tenant Led Inspection training is carried out annually. This offers tenants and service users an opportunity to find out about the inspection process and the methods they can use to review a particular service. The training includes our 'chocolate challenge' which gives a step by step guide to carrying out an inspection in a fun and practical way.



## 7.0 Digital Inclusion & Social Media

### Tenants Facebook Group

The TP Facebook group maintains a steady membership of just under 300 members at the end of the financial year. It offers an easily accessible method of engagement for tenants and service users, as well as providing tenants with the flexibility of engaging with the Service online. It is hoped that by being involved in this way, interest will be generated to take part in other tenant participation activities.



This Facebook group allows the Service access to a broader range of tenants who wish to engage on a variety of housing issues. It was agreed that members of the Housing Network would use this medium for future consultation and work will be carried out to develop a programme of topics/issues that can be used throughout the coming year.

### Text Messaging



Text messaging has been used by HCBS to great effect over the last few months; most effectively as a reminder tool for tenants in relation to the Repairs Service, Tenants Satisfaction Survey, Rent Consultation Survey and Paying Rent. The functionality allows us to engage with individuals or groups, such as a local community; allowing us to promote specific topics, such as tenants' events, completion of surveys or paying your rent campaigns.

Text messaging is effective because the message given is short and to the point, whilst providing the tenant with the opportunity to respond immediately by clicking on the link provided. This either takes the user to an email facility or to an online survey, which involves very little effort, is quick and provides tenants with a really simple way to respond and share their views.

### Tenant Self Service Portal

The Tenants Self Service Portal continues to be developed offering customers more options to access services such as paying rent, requesting a repair and accessing their rent account.

An online housing application form is being developed at present which will be accessible through the portal. Tenants will be invited to test the online form and make suggestions for improvement before it goes live sometime in the Summer 2019.

## 8.0 Local Community Engagement

Over the course of the year, the Service Development Officer has visited all local housing offices to promote the work of the Tenant Participation Team as set out in the TP Strategy and discuss local issues that could be supported by the team. Several Street Environmental Improvement Projects have been identified and staff are aware of all the ways tenants and service users can get involved in the shaping and review of services.



### Local Events

#### Customer Care Strategy Launch

The TP Team were asked to participate in the launch of the Councils Customer Service Strategy. Three evening events were held in January where the Customer Service Manager highlighted the development work within this new strategy with the intention of opening the channels of communication between our customers and services.

#### Community Walkabouts

The Housing Manager in Armadale organised a walkabout in May inviting tenants from the area and councillors to carry out an estate inspection mainly focussing on garden and communal area issues.

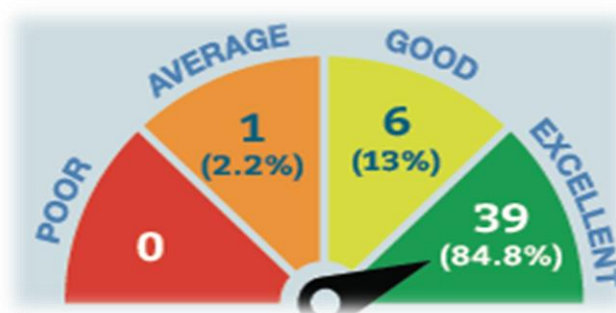
#### Waste Awareness Event

Following complaints from local tenants and residents, a pop up event was held in Whitburn to promote the correct usage of communal bins including recycling in flatted areas.

## 9.0 Sharing Good Practice and Benchmarking

Tenants and staff are keen to develop new ideas and initiatives and seek out good practice whenever possible. They do this by attending national events such as TIS, TPAS and CIH Annual Conferences and staff attend the Scottish Housing Network (SHN) twice yearly.

In March, the TP Team hosted a fact finding event with Queen's Cross Housing Association. Seven members of their Task Force and the TP Officer spent the day finding out about the various levels of scrutiny carried out in West Lothian. The event was very successful and it is hoped there will be a visit to Glasgow later in the year.





## 10.0 Awards and Recognition



### **Danny Mullen Good Neighbour Award**

Each year we ask tenants to nominate a neighbour they feel deserved recognition for their thoughtfulness and consideration towards others.

All nominations received came from neighbours who wanted to say 'thank you' for the help, support and friendship they receive from their good neighbours.

The Tenants Panel members found it difficult to choose an overall winner and decided that recognition should be given to everyone nominated. All our Good Neighbours were invited to attend a special ceremony at the Civic Centre in Livingston to be presented with a framed Good Neighbour Certificate and a bouquet of flowers from Executive Councillor for Services to the Community, George Paul.



### **Tenant Information Services (TIS) Award**

This year, was another successful year for HCBS, with congratulations going to our Tenant Participation Development Working Group and the Tenant Participation Team for their successful achievement in being awarded the Tenant Information Service, Best Innovative Practice Award. The winning of this award provides recognition for partnership working in introducing new digital ways of engaging, consulting and gathering tenants' views throughout the year.



### **West Lothian Council, Celebrating Success**

In November, at the council's annual award ceremony, the TP Team were awarded the New & Innovative Services for the Community 2018. This award was in recognition of the work they have been doing around digitalisation and online communication throughout the year. The team were surprised and delighted to accept this award.