

REPORT TO COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 28 MARCH 2019

TENANT PARTICIPATION – A NEW APPROACH

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Consider the Council's statutory and regulatory obligations in respect of Tenant Participation and the required development of a new approach to engagement.
- 1.2 Agree to receive regular reports on progress towards the development of a new Tenant Participation Strategy, timescales to be approved on conclusion of Scottish Government sponsored Next Steps Programme.

2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 Section 53(1) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a duty on local authorities and Registered Social Landlords to develop a tenant participation strategy. Aberdeenshire Council must therefore demonstrate how it intends to communicate with and involve tenants and residents in the decision making process. The Strategy must also include an assessment of the resources required to deliver objectives set.
- 2.2 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 places a further obligation on the Council to report annually to the Scottish Housing Regulator on a range of measures collectively known as the Scottish Social Housing Charter, these include returns specific to tenant participation. Charter Outcome 3 states that Social Landlords must manage their business so that 'tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with'.
- 2.3 The requirement to engage and involve tenants and residents in the decision making process has been further reinforced through enactment of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 and the development of Annual Assurance Statements by the Scottish Housing Regulator, to be introduced in 2019.
- 2.4 Final guidance on the Annual Assurance Statement was published on the 28th February 2019 forming part of the Scottish Housing Regulator's new Regulatory Framework and Statutory Guidance to take effect from 1st April 2019. The Assurance Statement will require sign off and submission by the relevant committee, in this case Communities Committee, on an annual basis. The Assurance Statement provides assurance that the organisation is compliant with all regulatory requirements, standards of governance and financial management. A committee paper will be provided to a future meeting of Communities Committee.

- 2.5 Participative mechanisms have therefore evolved over time from a rudimentary involvement model to one promoting meaningful scrutiny of Housing services ultimately leading to a level of empowerment.
- 2.6 The Housing Service elected to fully review the current approach to tenant participation in conjunction with the Tenant Participation Promotion Team (TPPT), a Registered Tenant Organisation and a major focus for Housing in terms of tenant participation.
- 2.7 TPPT have been instrumental in developing proposals aimed at fulfilling a new Scrutiny role, with the assistance of both Housing and the Change Team. In addition, Officers have researched current best practice, discussed various approaches to tenant participation with partner organisations and have completed a fact finding visit to Perth & Kinross Council.
- 2.8 Work undertaken to date has led to the development of a number of key themes to assist with the development of a new Strategy:
- Development of a clear link between tenants, Communities Committee and Council Officers to ensure an enhanced level of scrutiny of services delivered including HRA finance monitoring
 - Ensuring a strong community focus, engaging with Community Councils, Community Planning Officers and others to ensure that tenants have a stronger voice in the delivery of local services
 - Widening the remit around tenant participation to allow participation by all residents of the mixed tenure estate, where appropriate, in order to build community interest and sustainability
 - Utilisation of technology in order to ensure that the Housing service can communicate and engage with a wider tenant and resident base.
- 2.9 In recognising the challenges faced by social landlords in developing Tenant Participation Strategies, the Scottish Government elected to support a programme to assist Landlords in pursuance of their statutory obligations. The Housing Service was successful in its bid to participate in the 'Next Steps Programme' and will be working with the Tenant Information Service (TIS) throughout February and March 2019.
- 2.10 The Next Steps Programme is designed to build on existing strengths with a view to addressing any barriers or weaknesses, culminating in the creation of an Action Plan that will ultimately lead to the delivery of a modernised Tenant Participation Strategy.
- 2.11 A series of workshops were held throughout February 2019 ensuring involvement of a wide range of Housing Officers, elected Members and tenants. A finalised Action Plan will be delivered April 2019 with timescales for the production of a draft Tenant Strategy for consultation agreed thereafter.
- 2.12 Participation in the Next Steps programme has allowed differing views on delivery of a new approach to tenant participation to be heard. Views gathered will inform the development of an action plan that will deliver improved levels of engagement, higher levels of satisfaction with the opportunities to participate and meaningful scrutiny of services delivered. The strategy ultimately delivered will outline the Council's vision for enhanced levels of engagement within local communities.

- 2.13 A further report will be submitted to the 5th September 2019 meeting of Communities Committee outlining progress and proposing a model, strategy and implementation timescales. It is proposed to have TPPT outline their new model at the same meeting to allow for both areas to be scrutinised and developed.
- 2.14 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report. Both are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section D 7.1 of the list of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as this relates to a decision on policy and resource matters.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment has not been carried out as the recommendations do not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 4.2 There are no specific staffing and financial implications arising from this report.
- 4.3 This report is intended to provide an overview of the development of a new Tenant Participation Strategy and should not impact on risks at a corporate or strategic level
- 4.4 The recommendations in this report do not have an impact on the Town Centre First Principle.

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