

Tenant Participation Strategy 2021-2025

Introduction

1.1 Message from our Chair - Gerry Boyle

The Board Members and staff of West Highland Housing Association are determined to put our tenants at the centre of all aspects of our service delivery. We will offer tenants real opportunities to be involved in creating services which meet their needs and the needs of their families.



We know that listening to the views of tenants is important when designing services which will impact on their lives. This strategy sets out a range of ways that tenants can engage with us either face to face, in writing or increasingly importantly, digitally.

This strategy is being developed in a very different world due to the global pandemic. While it limits the face-to-face engagement, which tenants have told us they like, it also creates opportunities to use technology to engage more widely with our tenants who live in remote locations.

We are therefore committed to working in partnership with our tenants: to help us make informed decisions about policies; housing conditions and housing services. We appreciate the time tenants have devoted to helping us prepare this strategy and thank them for all their hard work.

Aims and Objectives

2.1 Our overarching aim is to support our communities by providing and maintaining quality neighbourhoods and homes for life. Underpinning this we have five key objectives.

1. Providing high quality homes
2. Delivering excellent services
3. Keeping the organisation safe and secure
4. Valuing our people
5. Promoting positive partnerships for our communities

Key actions to achieve these objectives include:

- Pro-actively encouraging tenants to get involved in service delivery design.
- Increasing access to services through technology and innovation.
- Ensuring our services meet the highest standards by achieving the TPAS Gold standard.

2.2 We are therefore committed to a strategy which will ensure:

- Tenants are at the heart of our services and decision making.

- We will offer a range of ways to participate with us which best suits tenants.
- We will increase the range of options tenants have to engage with us to include a mix of traditional and digital methods.
- We will embed tenant participation into our culture and support staff with training

Legal framework for tenant participation in Scotland

3.1 There is a legal requirement that landlords must make sure tenants have the information they need to get involved in decisions. [The Housing Scotland Act 2001](#) gave tenants new rights to take part in decisions which affect them.

These include:

- Our tenant participation strategy.
- Changes to rent and service charges.
- Changes to policy that have an impact on tenants.
- Our standards of service, repairs and maintenance.

3.2 The Scottish Social Housing Charter which was introduced by the Housing Scotland Act 2010 came into force in 2012. This charter sets out performance measures and outcomes standards for social landlords and is there to give tenants and other customers information on what they can expect from social landlords. It also provides a standard against which the Scottish Housing Regulator can compare performance of all social landlords.

3.3 The Scottish Housing Regulator expects that landlords will put tenants at the heart of their organisation so that tenants can scrutinise and help improve performance.

The Charter and the Scottish Housing Regulator require that the Association has arrangements in place to make sure tenants have access to information so that they can scrutinise performance fully and make meaningful contributions which influence decisions about policies and services.

The Charter has two main aspects for tenant participation:

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides. (Charter outcome 2. Communication)
- Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with (Charter outcome 4. Participation)

Landlords must provide an annual return to the Regulator and report to tenants on the outcome of their performance.

Developing the strategy

4.1 So, we need to involve tenants, it's the law. But more importantly, we want to involve tenants. We know that tenants can, and do, help us improve our services. Going forward, we want to engage with you, our tenants, to help us develop, maintain, and improve our services. We can build on what you have told us works well already and we can engage in new ways utilising the new technologies available to us for both communications and service delivery.

4.2 Work began on the review of our tenant participation strategy during 2020. We engaged the expertise of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to carry out a Healthy Engagement Audit of our policy and practice.

In addition to a desk top review of our policy and process three workshops were held which altogether involved the whole staff team and a number of tenants. Participants were given background information on the legal requirement to fully involve tenants and invited to input ideas around what works; what could be improved and what should be included in a new action plan. Workshop topics included service examples like the approach to ground maintenance and the rent consultation.

4.3 The restrictions imposed by the pandemic meant that it was not possible to hold a conference or have people attend workshops in person, but virtual meetings meant that access was improved for tenants who lived across the widely dispersed geographic area. Representation was possible from three remote islands. This contribution was invaluable as tenants identified the barriers to communication and the issues they face in their isolated communities and meant that the discussion was not 'Oban centric'.

4.4 Through this process we have been helped to shape an action plan which will set out how we intend to build on the valuable insight provided by our tenants to effective communication and involvement in the development of our services.

Why get involved - the difference tenants make

5.1 **Why should I get involved?** - we want tenants to help us drive forward improvements in our services and performance – we can't do it without you.

What difference will it make? –Tenants have improved our services, we have listened and acted, For example, response to our rent consultation have influenced decisions about rent increases each year.

Listening to tenants we have:

- decreased our new build programme to concentrate on maintenance.
- focused our new build programme on small rural schemes and opportunities for low-cost home ownership.
- focused on helping people maximise their income.
- re-focused our maintenance programme on priorities for tenants.
- increased our work on estate management, including improving the environment, by doing one-off clearances.

In our most recent survey, 2019/20, 93.1% of tenants surveyed were satisfied with opportunities to participate. We want to increase the level of satisfaction beyond this figure.

5.2

We want to:

- hear tenants' views on the issues that are important to them in their communities.
- how best to provide information and training; how to make our staff easily accessible to tenants and
- how to make best use of technology to make consultation and participation as inclusive as possible.

We want to hear what tenants have to say and we will listen and then provide feedback.

We are signed up to the delivery of responsive services which represent good value for tenants and they need to be developed in partnership with tenants. West Highland is fully committed to achieving an effective working relationship with our tenants.

Links to other strategies

6.1

West Highland has a whole range of policies covering all aspects of service delivery. They can be accessed on the West Highland [website](#). For example, tenants can shape and influence how services are developed on letting standards; estate management; equalities; rent setting and priorities for spending.

Currently, our digital and people strategies are being developed. There has been recent investment in an on-line portal 'My Home' and as this develops it will provide tenants with greater access to information on their tenancy and provide self-service opportunities.

Over the period of this tenant participation strategy, we would welcome the opportunity to work with our tenants to develop these new ways of communicating and delivering services.

How to get involved

- 7.1 We already have a register of tenants who have said they would like to be involved with us in a variety of ways. If you would like to be involved in any way, please email mail@westhighlandha.co.uk

There are formal methods of communication which are outlined below. However, equally important, are the informal opportunities which are less structured; help to build networks; and communication and trust between us and our tenants.

We will try to ensure that events are timed and organized in such a way that the majority of tenants who would like to be involved have an opportunity to attend.

- 7.2 Formal methods of involvement include:

Be a member of WHHA – for £1 you can join WHHA. Being a member means you can attend and have a vote at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Only members are able to be elected onto the Board, you could become a Board member.

Tenant Board Member – Our staff are responsible for the day to day running of the Association, the Board is responsible for decision making and planning around future plans, finances etc. The Board has 12 members open to tenant and interested individuals living in our communities. The Board meets a maximum of 8 times a year. The meetings are during the day and last no longer than 2 hours. Board members can attend the meetings in the Associations offices either in person or virtually. Board members are not paid but expenses connected to Board responsibilities are paid such as travel expenses
To find out more about becoming a member of WHHA or a Board member linda@westhighlandha.co.uk

Tenants and Residents Groups. We actively encourage and support setting up tenants and residents groups for which we will provide training, support and funding to help you get set up, for more information contact iona@westhighlandha.co.uk

Satisfaction surveys – Every 3 years we ask you a range of questions to help us shape our services and ensure you are still happy with your home and services. Some of the questions are asked by every landlord in Scotland, this means you can compare us to another 5 landlords – [Scottish Housing Regulator - compare my landlord](#)

Complaints and compliments – We welcome feedback both positive and negative. The whole staff team is involved quarterly in the review of complaints and lessons to be learned are highlighted to improve performance.

7.3 Informal methods of engagement include:

- **Armchair critic** – get involved from the comfort of your own chair! Take part in around 4 surveys a year, online or by post.
- **Brew blether and burger** – an informal chance to pop in to have a chat to staff and other tenants and have a bite to eat. We will be out an about around our area, look in our newsletter and website calendar for dates, places, and times.
- **Estate walk and talk** - you can join staff walking about your area to raise any local concerns. We will let you know what actions we will take after the walk about.
- **Going local** – we will have a stand at local shows and events where you can pop along and say hello.
- **Tenant tick** – if you are interested in our newsletters and other information we produce - this is for you. A small group will comment and edit our publications to give them a tenant tick – approved by tenants
- **Virtual meetings**- Join us for service planning sessions via virtual meetings

What issues will we consult tenants on?

8.1 We will use a variety of consultation and participation approaches. For example, our tenant portal provides tenants with a straightforward form of engagement if they are digitally linked up.

We will also use conventional methods such as leaflets and posters, questionnaires, text messaging, social media and the website. When restrictions ease, we may hold public meetings, open days, home visits, workshops and conferences.

The method of consultation will depend on the relevance and scope of the particular topic. We will ask tenants how they want to be consulted and take account of preferences.

How we will keep tenants informed

9.1 For tenants to be meaningfully involved in shaping our services we understand that they need to have access to the right information at the right time so that they can take part in the decision-making process.

We have a variety of ways of providing information:

- Twice yearly Newsletters
- Our website
- Information leaflets
- Annual report
- Report on the Charter
- Complaints performance

Individually we will communicate by:

- Personal letters
- Text
- Email
- Face to face etc.
- My Home accounts
- Facebook messenger
- freephone

Giving feedback to tenants

- 10.1 The newsletter is the main way we feedback to the wider tenant community. We will also give updates on our website to let tenants know the outcome of our tenant engagement events like Brew and Blether.

The consultation calendar on the website will let tenants know when consultations are happening and when they can expect to hear the outcome of a consultation.

We are also committed to acknowledging and providing personal responses to tenants who submit responses to our consultations. For example, this year we had 91 tenants respond to our rent consultation and we are replying to everyone who provided contact details and raised issues in their response.

Working with Registered Tenants Organisations

- 11.1 West Highland are keen to work with our registered tenant organisations. We can also help tenants to set up a group. Registered groups have a legal right to be informed, consulted, involved in decision making and can access other funding.

There are rules about how to become a constituted group and staff at West Highland can support tenants who wish to establish a group. Details about how to develop a constitution and how to become a Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO) are detailed at Appendix1.

Resources

- 12.1 Tenant Participation is a core part of our front-line staff's job role. Housing Assistants supported by the Housing Officer will work with tenants to agree the consultation calendar; organize the events and provide feedback to tenants.

Where tenants need help to meet digitally, staff can provide support to encourage tenants to join virtual meetings.

We will provide travel expenses for tenants who attend events in person.

We will engage with tenants to identify priorities for tenants groups. We will jointly agree what grant funding should be made available to tenants groups.

Equal Opportunities

- 13.1 West Highland is committed to equality of opportunity in all aspects of its work. Equality, diversity, inclusion and fairness are core to our business and our values are based on respect.

We acknowledge the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the protected characteristics identified within the legislation:

Age

Disability

Gender reassignment

Marriage and civil partnership

Race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin)

Religion and belief (and no belief)

Sex

Sexual orientation

- 13.2 We will evidence our consideration of equality and human rights issues properly when making decisions and to comply with this duty we will collect data relating to each of the protected characteristics.
The Scottish Housing Regulator will assess our compliance with these requirements from April 2021.
- 13.3 We will make the strategy available in other formats/languages on request. Please contact Freephone 0300323 1170 for more information.

Monitoring and Review

- 14.1 This strategy and the associated action plan are working documents. We will establish a staff/tenant working group to monitor the implementation of the strategy and action plan.
Senior managers will also monitor progress and reports will be provided to the Management Board twice a year.
- 14.2 Regular updates will be a feature in the two newsletters, and we will enhance the section on the website to ensure that tenants and customers can easily find information on all tenant engagement activity.
- 14.3 Reports will be made available on the My Home tenant portal for those tenants who have chosen to access information digitally.
- 14.4 The overall strategy will be reviewed annually and updated to ensure objectives remain relevant and targets are on track to be met.