

TENANTS FIRST HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE

PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

Approved: July 2009

Next Review: July 2012

OUR POLICY ON MEMBER INVOLVEMENT WITH THE CO-OPERATIVE

Tenants First Housing Co-operative is a fully mutual co-operative. This means that it is fully controlled by the members. Only members can be tenants of the Co-operative and so are referred to as members rather than tenants. Throughout this document therefore, the terms members and tenants have the same meaning.

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Participation Strategy

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1. Introduction

As a fully mutual housing co-operative, member participation and control lie at the heart of Tenants First and are fundamental to the way we do business. The publication of our Participation Strategy gives us the opportunity to set out formally what we do now and will do in the future to ensure that all our members have the opportunity to engage with the co-operative. The production of our strategy is not the end of the process; it will be a working document which will continue to evolve as members, Committee members and staff work together to continuously improve the services that the co-operative provides.

2. Background

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gives tenants new rights to be involved in the management of their homes and also places a duty on landlords to produce participation strategies which set out how this will be done.

Tenants First, and the individual co-operatives which went before it, have of course, always been committed to the principal of member participation and have always strived to give members the opportunity to be involved in the management of their homes both through formal committee structures and also in more informal ways.

3. Aims and objectives

The aim of our Participation Strategy is to maximise member participation in the co-operative by offering a range of methods to allow members to take part at a level which best suits them.

The co-operative's Internal Management Plan demonstrates our commitment to member participation:

Internal Management Plan

Objective 2

As a fully mutual co-operative to maximise the involvement of tenant members;

Internal Management Plan

Objective 3

To promote social inclusion and equality of opportunity for our members and their communities

4. The benefits of participation

The principle of participation is central to the objectives and activities of Tenants First. We firmly believe that the greater member involvement in the Co-operative, the more effective an organisation it will be. We believe that empowered individuals make empowered communities and that being involved in the Co-operative can give members the skills, experience and confidence that can make them very effective community leaders. We believe that as well as good quality, well maintained homes, our members also need strong and effective communities and we are committed to supporting them in achieving this.

5. Equal opportunities

Tenants First wishes to encourage the participation of all its members in the running of the co-operative and recognises, welcomes and values the contributions that all groups can make to this process. We will seek to remove barriers to participation arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability. We will support and encourage all members who participate in the co-operative while maintaining their right to privacy and confidentiality.

It is our aim that all groups have, and take, the opportunity to play a full and active role in the running of the co-operative. We recognise that to achieve this we must develop effective ways to identify groups which are under-represented and, through consultation with them, actively encourage them to become more involved. This work will be part of the on-going development of the strategy.

6. Methods for consulting with members and keeping them informed

The Co-operative aims to provide its members with information they want and find useful and to produce it in a clear, user-friendly way avoiding jargon or technical language whenever possible. We will use a wide range of methods of consulting with members and keeping them informed of our activities including:

- Letters
- Telephone
- E mails
- Interviews and other face to face contact
- Newsletters
- Website
- Committee of Management and Sub Committee meetings

- Annual General Meetings
- Rent and service charge consultation meetings
- Sheltered housing member meetings
- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Repair satisfaction questionnaires
- Major improvement satisfaction questionnaires

We will allow reasonable time scales for all consultation exercises and give clear information as to these time scales.

7. Issues for consultation

Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 the co-operative is required to consult with tenants and tenants groups on:

- Repairs and maintenance
- Housing management issues
- The Participation strategy
- Any change of landlord
- Any rent or service charge increases

The following list of issues for consultation has been drawn up in consultation with tenants. This list is not definitive. It will be reviewed annually and may change over time.

- **Allocations** – how co-operative houses are allocated to waiting and transfer applicants and how mutual exchanges are dealt with
- **Rents & Service Charges** – how rents and service charges are set and annually reviewed
- **Environmental issues** – issues that affect the living environment of members including estate management, refuse disposal, landscaping, car parking
- **Anti-Social Behaviour** – neighbour disputes, harassment
- **Day to Day Repairs** – response times, quality of repairs, contractor performance
- **Planned Maintenance** – property improvements, major and cyclical repairs
- **Customer Satisfaction** – the level of service received by the co-operative's customers including how the co-operative deals with complaints

- **Rent Payment** – methods of paying rent, benefit advice, arrears policy and procedures
- **Design and Layout** – scheme layout and house design
- **Equal Opportunities** – the effectiveness of the co-operative's equal opportunities policy
- **Participation** – the effectiveness of the co-operative's participation strategy
- **Community Development** – projects and initiatives in co-operative areas
- **Tenancy Conditions** – occupancy agreement, tenants handbook
- **Local Issues** – where there are issues, proposals or plans for a local area the co-op will consult with members in that area

8. Feedback from consultation exercises

The Co-operative recognises that it is extremely important to give members feedback on consultation exercises it carries out. We will provide feedback to members in a number of ways including:

- Newsletters
- Individual letters
- On our web site

We will make every effort to demonstrate how the views of members obtained in consultation exercises have been taken into account and have contributed towards the final outcome.

9. Opportunities for Participation

The ultimate goal for our strategy is to have more members playing an active role in the management of the Co-operative and to facilitate community engagement. We recognise that traditional methods of participation, such as membership of committees, requires considerable commitment of time and energy and that many members are unable or unwilling to make such a commitment. They may, however, welcome the opportunity to comment on the co-operative's policies and services, attend conferences, take part in small surveys or be part of a Focus Group looking at a particular project or issue. The strategy aims to develop a range of different ways to allow members to be involved at a level they are comfortable with.

The co-operative will offer the following opportunities for participation.

Committee of Management (COM)

The COM is responsible for the overall management and control of the co-operative with a strong emphasis on strategic planning.

Sub Committees

These are responsible for operational issues in all areas of the Co-operative's activities. They have considerable input into the review of policies and as such have a real influence in how co-operative policies develop.

Residents Associations

The Co-operative is committed to supporting members to set up Residents Associations in their local areas. We will also encourage Associations to register with us. More information on this can be found in appendix 1 to this strategy. The Co-operative will also consult with Residents Associations which have not registered, provided they can demonstrate that they are open to all Co-operative members living in the area and can fairly represent their views.

Tenant Panel

The Tenant Panel provides a pool of individual members who wish to be consulted on the activities, policies and services provided by the co-operative. We aim for the Panel to be representative of Co-operative members in terms of age, sex, disability and ethnic origin and for every co-operative area to be represented.

Focus Groups

We may use Focus Groups where the Co-operative is reviewing very significant policies or services or for particular projects where a more detailed and long term input from members would be valuable. A Focus Group will have a specific remit and will be wound up when the end result is achieved.

Other Opportunities for Participation

From time to time there may be other opportunities for members to participate in aspects of the Co-operative's business. There will be opportunities to contribute on a one off basis, such as commenting on a particular policy or attending conferences, as well as on more long term projects for example the newsletter editorial group.

10. Working with registered tenant organisations (RTOs)

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires landlords to maintain registers of tenant groups which have met certain criteria laid down by Scottish Ministers. The co-operative has a duty under the Act to consult with those members of RTOs who are co-operative members.

We will encourage any Residents Associations formed by our members to be registered and we will give them any advice, assistance and support they need to meet the required criteria. We will also encourage and support the registration of any Residents Associations which include people from other housing tenures as well as Co-operative members.

The Co-operative will maintain a public register of registered tenant organisations. The register will contain:

- The name of each organisation
- The area it covers
- A contact address for the organisation
- Any other useful or relevant information

The register will be available to view at either of our offices or on our web site.

We will work and support new and existing Residents Associations as far as possible with a range of resources:

- Staff time
- Training for members
- Administrative support
- Costs of meeting venues, refreshments etc
- Other financial support as required
- Advice and support in applying for external funding

Information on the criteria and procedure for becoming a registered tenant organisation and also on our appeals process can be found at Appendix 1 of the strategy.

11. Resources

The co-operative recognises that resources will be needed to put the strategy into practice and ensure that it is effective in giving all members the opportunity to become involved in the co-operative. However, the Co-operatives resources are limited, in particular regarding staff time, and the Co-operative's principal role will be to facilitate and enable groups to develop with the ultimate aim of their becoming self sufficient. Resources may be available to meet:

- Costs of the implementation and ongoing development of the strategy
- Costs of consultation exercises
- Costs of supporting Residents Associations
- Costs of supporting individual members

A wide range of resources may be available including:

- Staff time
- Expenses for travel, childcare and other carer costs
- Typing, copying, postage, and other administrative support
- Special needs for individual members eg production of material in other formats, signers for meetings
- Costs for hiring venues for meetings, conferences etc
- Costs of refreshments at meetings, conferences etc
- Training for members and staff
- Publicity
- Attendance at conferences

The co-operative recognises that it is important to look at all sources of funding and support for member participation and be innovative in how it resources the implementation of the strategy. We provide the following resources to achieve the aims of the strategy:

Staff

Although there will be particular staff members who have a particular responsibility for member participation, the Co-operative is committed to ensuring that member participation is part of the mainstream of its work and expects that all members of staff will have some involvement in implementing the strategy.

Financial and Administrative Support

The co-operative will assess the financial resources required to implement the strategy annually and will make provision in its budgets to support the achievement of the targets for member participation for the year ahead. As well as staff and administrative costs, some budget provision will be made for training, member expenses, meetings and conferences, stationary, printing, postage and supporting Residents Associations.

Publicity

The co-operative will provide opportunities for Residents Associations, community groups and individual members to publicise their activities in newsletters and on our web site.

External Sources

The co-operative will investigate opportunities to obtain other resources from outside the co-operative, both locally and nationally. These might include large and small grants and non financial support. We will provide reasonable staff time and other resources to help member groups access such funding and support.

12. Training

Tenants First is committed to ensuring that members and staff have the necessary skills to ensure that our strategy is effective and successful. Training sessions on member participation and on our strategy will be included in training programmes for staff and committee members.

We will work with members to help them identify training they require or would benefit from and will provide that training or identify and source other bodies to do so.

13. Monitoring and Reporting

An annual report will be prepared and presented to the Customer Relations sub-committee at the end of the year, for discussion. The report will record and analyse the levels of member participation achieved, and set targets for the forthcoming year.

14. Reviewing the Strategy

This policy will be reviewed by the Customer Relations Sub committee and the Committee of Management. It will be reviewed every three years unless an amendment is required by legislation or guidance which means that a change in Policy is required sooner.

15. Legal Framework

Housing Scotland Act 2001

16. References

Scottish Housing Regulator:

- Performance Standard GS2.2 Tenant Participation

Scottish Federation of Housing Associations:

- Raising Standards in Housing – Tenant Participation

17. Related Policies and Documents

Committee Membership Policy
Committee Training and Development Policy
Customer Care Policy
Customer Feedback Strategy
Wider Role Strategy

Appendix 1 - Registration of Tenant Organisations

1. Introduction

Tenants First Housing Co-operative (the co-operative) is committed to maximising opportunities for its members to participate in the co-operative and is working with members to develop a range of opportunities for participation, including the creation of Residents Associations. The co-operative will actively support members who wish to set up Residents Associations and will work with them to enable them meet the criteria to become Registered Tenant Organisations.

2. Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

The co-operative has a duty under the Act to consult with Registered Tenant Organisations and individual members on any of the following proposals and to have regard to representations by members or groups within a reasonable timescale. The proposals on which a landlord must consult its members are set out in the Act. These are:

- Its policy in relation to housing management, repairs or maintenance where the proposal, if implemented, is likely to significantly affect the member;
- The standard of service in relation to housing management, repairs and maintenance which it intends to provide;
- Its Tenant Participation Strategy
- Any proposed transfer of stock which would result in a change of landlord

Other issues on which the co-operative will undertake to consult with members and Registered Tenant Organisations will be set out in the Participation Strategy.

In accordance with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 the co-operative has laid down criteria which Residents Associations must fulfil to become Registered Tenant Organisations.

3. Criteria for Registration of Tenant Organisations

3.1 Constitution

The applicant must have a written constitution available for inspection by the public that sets out:

- its objectives and area of operation;
- its membership criteria and procedure for application for membership;
- its procedure for election of its committee and office bearers;
- how its business is conducted, including delegation of powers;
- how its decisions are reached;
- how its funds are managed;
- its procedures for meetings of members, including the annual general meeting;
- its procedure for amending its constitution; and
- its commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities and tenants' housing and related interests in relation to the Co-operative.

3.2 Committee

The applicant must have a committee, the members of which are elected at an annual general meeting of the applicant. Members of the committee must be required to stand down after a period specified in the applicant's constitution.

The committee must consist of at least three members who may co-opt other members on to the committee during the course of a year.

The committee procedures set out in the constitution of the applicant must require that the decisions of the committee are reached democratically.

3.3 Area of Operation

The applicant must operate within a defined geographical area in which the Co-operative owns and manages properties. The area of operation must be set down in detail in the applicant's constitution.

3.4 Membership

Membership of the applicant body and participation in its activities must be open to all those members of the Co-operative who are tenants:

- under a Scottish secure tenancy or a short Scottish secure tenancy; and
- of a house situated within the applicant body's defined area of operation

If the applicant body is to be open to other Scottish Secure Tenants who are not members of the co-operative then membership and participation in activities must be open to all Scottish Secure Tenants within its defined area of operation.

The applicant body may be open to other residents in the area, for example owner occupiers or tenants with other kinds of tenancy agreement.

3.5 Accounting

An applicant must maintain proper and timely accounting records. Its constitution must require that an annual financial statement is prepared showing income and expenditure and a statement of assets and liabilities. The statement should be independently validated by a body agreed by the Co-operative and be presented at the annual general meeting.

3.6 Consultation and Representation

An applicant must be able to demonstrate to the Co-operative its commitment to representing the interests of its members. It is recognised that an applicant body may comprise of a mix of Co-operative members and other residents within its defined area of operation. In this event it must be able to show that, when consulted by the Co-operative, it has a mechanism in place to obtain the views of those of its members who are members of the Co-operative.

3.7 Submission of Application Material for Registration

The organisation must submit the following application material for registration to the co-operative:

- the written constitution;
- names and contact addresses of committee members (identifying office bearers and any co-optees);
- a map or list of streets and description of the area of operation; and
- a statement setting out how the organisation plans to engage with its members and how it will represent their views.

4. Procedure for Registration of Tenant Organisations

The Co-operative will support members who wish to set up Residents Associations in their areas. We will encourage Residents Associations to become Registered Tenant Organisations as this will ensure that they have a formal role in the Participation process. The Co-operative's Participation Strategy will set out how Registered Tenant Organisations will be consulted and involved in the development of the Co-operative's policies, strategies and delivery of services.

An information pack will be made available to any Co-operative members who are interested in setting up a Residents Association. This will include information on:

- How to get started
- How to organise public meetings
- Committees and Office Bearers
- How to run successful meetings

- Constitutions
- Equal Opportunities
- Criteria for the registration of Tenant Organisations
- Support which the Co-operative can offer Residents Associations
- Training for Resident Association committees
- Where to get more help and support

Co-operative staff will work with members who are interested in setting up a Residents Association to find other people in the area who are interested in being involved and in forming a Steering Group to discuss how to proceed.

A member of staff of the Co-operative will attend the first planning meeting of the Steering Group and will offer assistance in organising a public meeting, which he/she will attend. Attendance by Co-operative staff at later meetings will be a matter for agreement between the Association and the Co-operative and will depend on available staff resources.

If a Residents Association wishes to become a Registered Tenant Organisation, Co-operative staff will work with the Steering Group to ensure they meet the required criteria and will assist them in preparing the material they will need to submit with their application. For more information on the criteria for registration see section **3** above.

An application for registration will be acknowledged within 5 working days of it being received by the Co-operative. It will be heard by The Co-operative's Customer Relations Sub Committee, which has responsibility for Member Participation. The application will be considered by the Sub Committee at the first suitable opportunity.

The Residents Association will be advised in writing of the result of the application within 5 working days of the decision being made by the Sub Committee.

If the Residents Association has met the required criteria and the application has been approved by the Sub Committee, it will be formally entered into the Co-operative's Register of Member Organisations.

If the application has not been successful the Association may appeal against the Co-operative's decision in writing. For further information on appeals see section **6** below.

5. Removal from Register

A Registered Tenant Organisation can be removed from the Register in any of the following circumstances:

- it no longer meets the registration criteria; or
- it ceases to exist or does not operate; or

- there is mutual agreement between the co-operative and the Organisation.

If the Co-operative believes that a Registered Tenant Organisation no longer meets the registration criteria or that it has ceased to exist or operate, a full investigation will be carried out. All evidence relating to this will be recorded and presented to the Customer Relations Sub Committee to allow them to make a decision on whether the Organisation should be removed from the Register.

Removal from the Register will only take place after a period of 28 days notice by either party.

6. Appeals

A Member Organisation may appeal against the co-operative's decision to :

- not register the Organisation; or
- remove the Organisation from the Register; or
- not remove the Organisation from the Register.

Appeals will be dealt with through the Co-operative's Appeals Procedure. Appeals should be submitted in writing to the Chairperson of the Customer Relations Sub Committee. On receipt of a written appeal the Co-operative will reply in writing within 5 working days. This letter will advise the Organisation the date on which the appeal will be heard by the Customer Relations Sub Committee and will invite representatives of the Organisation to attend the meeting if they so wish. The application will be considered by the Sub Committee at the first suitable opportunity.

The Organisation will be advised of the outcome of the appeal within 5 working days of it being heard by the Customer Relations Sub Committee.

If the Organisation is unhappy with the outcome of an appeal to the Customer Relations Sub Committee, a further appeal can be made to the Co-operative's Committee of Management. Any such appeal will be considered by the Committee of Management at the first suitable opportunity. The Organisation will be advised of the outcome of the appeal within 5 working days of it being heard by the Committee of Management.

If the Organisation is still not satisfied, a further appeal will be considered by the Housing Regulator on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Information on this process will be made available to the Organisation by the Co-operative.

7. Availability of Register of Tenant Organisations

In accordance with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Co-operative will maintain a Register of Member Organisations which have met the required criteria. The Register will show the name of each Member Organisation, its area of operation and a contact address. The Register will be available for public inspection on request at the Co-operative's offices and will be published on the Co-operative's website.