

# **Forth Housing Association Ltd**

## Tenant Participation Strategy

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Forth Housing Association is run by a voluntary, unpaid Committee of Management who are democratically elected by members of the Association. A Housing Association shareholding member can be a tenant, a local resident or other interested person in the community. Members of the Association are those people who hold a £1 nominal share in the Association and whose names are entered into a Register of Members.
- 1.2 The Association aims to encourage tenants to take up shareholding membership and will promote the opportunities and benefits on a regular basis. The Association will also encourage tenant members to stand for the Committee of Management. It will provide assistance by allowing interested tenants to attend meetings as observers and by “mentoring” prospective / new Committee members by existing Committee Members.
- 1.3 The Association is required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to consult tenants and Registered Tenant Organisations on housing and related matters.
- 1.4 The Association is committed to community, tenant and resident participation:

“Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decisions about housing policies, housing conditions and housing (and related) services. It is a two-way process, which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and service”

### **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 A shared strategic objective of Forth Housing Association is
  - To facilitate tenant participation by ensuring tenants have the opportunity to influence decisions and take part in matters, which affect the quality of their lives
- 2.2 The Tenant Participation Strategy document was developed with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service, during the consultation process with tenants on the implementation of the Scottish Secure Tenancy in July 2002.
- 2.3 The draft Tenant Participation Strategy document was circulated to all tenants in January 2003 for comment. A meeting was held in March 2003 with tenants to discuss the document.
- 2.4 Following tenant consultation and Management Committee consideration, the tenant participation strategy was approved in May 2003 with an agreement to review in March 2004.

### **3.0 Aims and Objectives**

- 3.1 Tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, committee members and housing officers at all levels, working together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.

- 3.2 Tenant participation should be seen as a continuous process where information, ideas and power are shared, common understandings of problems are strived for and a consensus on solutions is worked out.
- 3.3 Good tenant participation requires all parties to contribute to the agenda. All participants require to have all the information needed to consider issues properly. That information requires to be clear, timely and accessible and to take account of equal opportunities concerns.
- 3.4 The processes for decision making should be open, clear and accountable.
- 3.5 Adequate time should be given to tenant representatives to consider issues properly. Tenants should have the opportunity to work out a common view in advance of meeting their landlord's representatives.
- 3.6 Good tenant participation requires the landlord to recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
- 3.7 Good working relationships evolve gradually and should be flexible to adapt to local circumstances.
- 3.8 Tenant participation must meet the requirements of the legislation surrounding equal opportunities. Good practice removes barriers to effective participation arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language difficulties, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

#### **4.0 Tenant Participation Strategy**

- 4.1 The term 'Tenant Participation Strategy' comes from the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Under the Act, Forth Housing Association is required to publish a tenant participation in consultation with their tenants and registered tenant's organisation.
- 4.2 Effective participation involves consulting tenants on:
- Policies in relation to housing management and repairs where proposals are likely to affect tenants
  - Standards of services in relation to housing management, repairs and maintenance
  - Tenant Participation Strategy
  - Any proposal to transfer houses to another landlord
- 4.3 The Association aims to involve all tenants, residents and service users in all aspects of service delivery affecting them – the following list is not exhaustive but sets out some of the most commonly occurring areas of the Association's work where participation will routinely occur:
- Housing Management
  - Repairs and maintenance
  - Allocations and lettings
  - Rents and service charges
  - Performance – standards of services
  - Tenant participation
  - Proposals for changes to policies
  - New development

## **5.0 Communications**

- 5.1 The Association must provide all tenants at the start of the tenancy with information on the right to buy (specifically the Association's position as a charitable Housing Association) and the complaints procedure. The Association must also provide on request to tenants information on the terms of the tenancy, procedures for setting rents and service charges, rules for admission to the housing list and allocation of housing, right to buy provisions and obligations, tenant participation strategy and the Association's decision making arrangements.
- 5.2 The Association will keep tenants informed of key activities through its newsletter. The Association aims to publish the Forth Estate every four months. The publication will notify tenants of any policy reviews or proposals to alter services that will affect them.
- 5.3 The Tenant Satisfaction Survey in 2003 indicated 89% of Forth's tenants thought the Association was good at keeping them informed about its activities and services.

## **6.0 Consultation Process**

- 6.1 The Association will hold regular Tenants' and Residents' meetings to develop the exchange of information and ideas between tenants and residents from all areas with Forth's staff.
- 6.2 Tenants meetings will be held at times convenient to the tenants involved. All meetings will be held in venues that are suitable to tenants with mobility problems and will be adequately publicised.
- 6.3 The Association will continue to use a range of flexible options to allow effective tenant consultation and participation. It is up to tenants to decide at what level they wish to be involved.
- 6.4 The association will continue to use the following mechanisms as a means to consult with tenants:
- Newsletters
  - Letters
  - Tenants Handbooks
  - Leaflets
  - Surveys/questionnaires
  - Posters
  - Face to face contact with tenants
  - Satisfaction slips for reactive maintenance
  - Open meetings
  - Exit polls
  - Annual meetings such as the AGM
  - Registers of interested tenants
  - Complaints/comments/suggestions
  - E-mail/telephone
  - Introduction of a website
  - Surgeries

## **7.0 Tenants Feedback**

7.1 The Association will continue to use a flexible approach to provide feedback to tenants following consultation.

- Forth Estate
- Letters
- Face to face with tenants
- E-mail
- Telephone
- Annual report

7.2 The Tenant Satisfaction Survey undertaken by the Association indicated 61% of Forth's tenants would prefer to become involved in Tenant Participation by newsletter or questionnaires.

## **8.0 Evaluating and Monitoring Tenant Participation**

8.1 The Association recognises the difficulty of adopting appropriate measures for effective tenant participation targets and outcomes. The Association is committed to working with tenants and tenant organisations to develop mutually agreed targets and outcomes.

8.2 The Association in fulfilling the objectives of the strategy will comply with all legal and regulatory requirements set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. The Association will also meet the requirements of all relevant related legislation, and conform to the requirements of 'Raising Standards', Communities Scotland Performance Guiding Standards 2003 and any other appropriate Good Practice and Guidance introduced by the Scottish Executive or Communities Scotland.

8.3 The Association provided a copy of the Tenant Participation Strategy document to all tenants in January 2003, for comment and approval. The Association held an Open Meeting for tenants in March 2003 to further discuss the document.

8.4 The Association when reviewing housing related policies applied a number of approaches when consulting with tenants. They included use of the Forth Estate, tenants meetings and postal surveys seeking comments with a pre-paid envelope.

## **9.0 Registration of Tenants Organisation**

9.1 The Association will publicise widely and on a regular basis to tenants the mechanisms for and benefits of becoming registered tenants organisations.

The criteria for registration of tenants' organisations are set out below.

The organisation must have a publicly available constitution, which sets out:

- The organisation's purpose, objectives and area of operation
- How people can become members (members and participation must be open to all tenants / residents in its area of operation)
- How funds will be dealt with
- Arrangements for public meetings and how members will be kept informed and involved
- Arrangements for AGMs
- Commitment to Equal Opportunities

## 9.2 Mechanisms for Registration

The Association will meet with groups seeking to become Registered Tenants Organisations to discuss the above requirements and assist the groups in meeting these criteria. Development support will be provided as required to assist the groups towards becoming registered (for example providing model constitutions, membership policies, advice on equalities, training and independent advice).

A formal application (pro forma – Appendix 1) will be completed by the members of the groups and submitted to the Housing Manager. The application will then be checked to ensure that the maximum registration criteria are met. If the criteria are not met in some way the groups will be advised of this and what they can do to make sure that they do comply – the Association as necessary will provide support.

Provided the registration criteria are met, the application, along with a report on work assisting the group towards registration, will be provided to the Association's Management Committee for approval. After a group becomes registered, provided they continue to meet the criteria, the group will retain registration for a period of 3 years.

The Association will maintain a register of registered tenants' organisations available for public inspection in the Association's offices and will promote registered tenants groups by means of advising all new tenants on signing their tenancy agreements, of RTOs in the area, the handbook, the newsletter, leaflets and regular publicity drives.

## 9.3 Removal from register

Registered tenants organisations can be removed from the register under the following circumstances:

- The tenant's organisation no longer meets the registration criteria
- The group ceases to exist or operate
- There is mutual agreement between the landlord and the organisation

Where the group is de-registered this will occur after a period of 3 months and will be reported to the Association's Committee.

## 9.4 Appeal

Where the RTO is refused registration or has its registration removed it has the right to appeal.

Initially this appeal should be in writing to the Director. If there were no satisfactory outcome the appeal would then be considered by the Committee of Management. The appeal procedure will be completed within 3 months from the date of the initial appeal.

If there is still no satisfactory outcome there is the right to appeal to the Regulation & Inspection Division of Communities Scotland (after the Association's internal appeals procedure has been exhausted).

## 9.5 Non Registered Groups / Informal Participation

The Association recognises the value of tenant participation as an ongoing process, which evolves over time. It is recognised that for a variety of reasons that tenants may not be in a position to become registered tenants organisations, may not wish to register or may not wish to register initially.

In such circumstances the Association will provide appropriate support and assistance to enable the group to move forward to registration if it wants to do so. The Association will also actively promote the benefits of becoming a registered tenants organisation.

The Association will however recognise more informal groups of tenants who come together by providing training and assistance. Providing these groups can demonstrate they are representatives i.e. hold well publicised meetings open to all tenants, then the Association will seek to involve these organisations in a similar way to registered tenants organisations. The aim will be to promote the registration of any such groups over time.

## 10.0 **Resources**

10.1 The Association recognises the importance of resourcing tenant participation adequately. It further recognises that by law it is required to carry out “an assessment of the resources required to implement the (tenant participation) strategy”.

The Association is committed to providing resources and facilities for tenant participation in the following ways:

- Producing newsletters and information leaflets
- Access to premises for meetings
- Administrative support – i.e. assistance with typing, photocopying etc
- Support to help build capacity and provide training (for tenants & staff)
- Providing annual / one off grants to tenants organisations to hold events
- Provide help with child care / carers / travel and loss of earnings to ensure equal opportunities
- Access to independent external advice
- Tenant satisfaction surveys

The Association currently has an annual budget of £1360.00 for tenant participation. The budget will be closely monitored, reviewed and brought to the attention of the Management Committee on a quarterly basis.

10.2 The overall responsibility for tenant participation within the Association lies with the Management Committee and is delegated to the Director and Housing Manager. Tenant participation is an integral part of all the Association's functions and as such every member of staff has an important role to play in developing tenant participation within the scope of their individual remit and job specifications.

In particular the following responsibilities for particular posts are as follows:

### Director

Overall responsibility for ensuring the tenant participation policy and strategy is implemented, monitored and reviewed. Attending meetings as appropriate. Ensuring adequate resources are available to implement the strategy. Ensuring progress is regularly reported to committee.

### Housing Manager

Ensuring the overall operation of the tenant participation strategy. Attending meetings as appropriate. Arranging meetings as outlined in the strategy. Development communication. Working in partnership with other staff to ensure the implementation of the strategy is facilitated.

### Technical Services Officer

Ensuring that information and consultation takes place within the framework outlined in the strategy in relation to all maintenance functions. Attending meetings and working in partnership with other departments.

### Depute Director

Ensuring that information and consultation takes place within the framework outlined in the strategy in relation to relevant finance functions e.g. rent setting and budgets. Attending meetings and working in partnership with other departments.

### Development Manager

Ensuring that information and consultation takes place within the framework outlined in the strategy in relation to department functions. Attend meetings and working in partnership with other departments.

## **11.0 Timescales**

- 11.1 The Association recognises that it is crucial to the tenant participation process that time is built into processes to allow meaningful information to be provided, analysed by tenants, a common view reached and representations to be made to the Association.
- 11.2 The Association will make information available in “plain English” and in alternative formats required to enable tenants to access and understand the information e.g. on tape, in Braille or in ethnic minority languages.
- 11.3 The Association will before the start of any review process, provide details to its tenants of the forthcoming review how the Association will be undertaking the review process, the timescales and the mechanisms for tenant participation.
- 11.4 The Association will set minimum timescales for issuing information, receiving and considering representations. The Association will ensure that feedback is provided on how matters raised have been considered, how views have been incorporated and where it has not been possible to do so.

**Example: timescales for policy review**

- Paper outlining draft principles – existing policy and recommended changes issued to tenants, tenants groups and registered tenants organisations.
- Consideration of taking policy to focus groups for wider consultation if major review e.g. allocations, repairs, rents etc
- 2 weeks allowed for tenants to read, familiarise themselves with and discuss the issues
- Week 3 meetings and discussions held
- Week 4 representations received and considered
- Weeks 5 and 6 feedback and any necessary changes incorporated
- Policy taken back to Management Committee
- Feedback to Tenants Groups and tenants in Forth Estate

**12.0 Training**

- 12.1 The Association is committed to providing resources for individual tenants or groups of tenants involved in tenant's issues to encourage their involvement in tenant participation. The Association, or other bodies specialising in training, empowering and assisting in the development of tenants groups, will provide this training commitment.
- 12.2 In addition to identifying training needs, the Association recognises that Forth employees will require training and assistance to fully engage in this strategy.

**13.0 Equal Opportunities**

The Association believes that effective participation should remove any barriers and ensure equality of opportunity regardless of; age, nationality, disability, gender, location, language differences, religious belief, HIV infection or AIDS, race, marital status, sex or sexual orientation. The Association will take positive action to ensure that those traditionally excluded are assisted to participate in the Association's activities.

**14.0 Complaints**

Any complaints arising from the operation of this policy will be dealt with under the Association's Complaints Procedure.

**15.0 Policy Review**

- 15.1 This Policy/Procedure will be reviewed five years from the date of approval.

Management Committee Approval 5/03

Reviewed 03/04

Reviewed 05/05

## Appendix 1

### Pro forma for Application to become registered as a Registered Tenants Organisation (RTO)

Organisation's Name:

Contact address:

Organisation's area of operation and purpose:

Membership (providing brief details of how tenants / residents can become members)

What will be the arrangements for providing information and taking account of members' views

How will funds be managed?

How will the organisation ensure equal opportunities requirements are met?

Please send the completed application form to:

Housing Manager  
Forth Housing Association  
2 Viewfield Place  
Stirling FK8 1NQ