



# Good Practice in Tenant Participation TPAS Accreditation



## Sharing Good Practice from TPAS Accreditation

TPAS Accreditation is a robust and structured process for assessing how well organisations involve tenants and residents in their service. TPAS Accreditation is aimed at landlords and contractors. CIH Scotland supports TPAS Accreditation and is a member of the independent Accreditation scrutiny panel.

Achieving TPAS Accreditation:

- Evidences that an organisation is serious about involving tenants and residents in tailoring services that reflect customer's needs and aspirations.
- Helps organisations to share their good practice.
- Every TPAS Accredited landlord has their own approach to tenant involvement and goes beyond the basic legal minimum.

This briefing note highlights examples of good practice in tenant participation that have been identified during the TPAS Accreditation process. For more details on good practice in tenant participation, or TPAS Accreditation please contact TPAS.

To help, we've arranged this briefing note into the following themes:

- Benefits to business
- Service improvements
- Performance Monitoring
- Communications
- Participation as part of organisational culture
- Professional Development

## Benefits to business

Engaging with tenants and residents is vital if social housing organisations are to be

managed for improvement. Effective tenant participation benefits all aspects of the business, including customer satisfaction, value for money and



**NORTH AYRSHIRE**  
COUNCIL

staff morale.

North Ayrshire Council, the first Council in Scotland to receive TPAS Accreditation, uses tenant participation to help the council target resources where they are needed the most.

### Business Planning Group: North Ayrshire Council

Tenants are invited to participate with the Council's business planning group for housing. The housing service works to its own business plan which sets out key priorities and investment requirements over the short, medium and long term.

Tenants have welcomed their involvement in this process. They have the opportunity to work alongside housing professionals, finance professionals and elected members. Tenants say this allows them to influence the direction of the housing service in the interests of tenants and their communities.

### Asset Management:

The Scottish Housing Regulator considers that the views and involvement of tenants is critical if housing organisations are to manage their assets effectively.

The SHR defines Asset Management as:

“planning to have houses of the right kind, in the right place that meet the needs and standards required now and in the future...it is about remembering that these assets are also tenants’ homes and that the views and involvement of tenants are essential for effective asset management”

(*Shaping up for improvement, July 2009, SHR*)

### **Cordale Housing Association**



Cordale Housing Association has placed the needs, wants and aspirations of tenants and local people at

the heart of their asset management strategy. Regular contact with tenants and residents via meetings, events and telephone surveys allows the association to target services and investment where it’s needed the most. The Association seeks to provide sustainable housing solutions that will benefit the community in the long term.

The Association also works closely with the Renton Community Development Trust, which supports a diverse range of local community projects providing services and opportunities for people of all ages. The Association believes that providing excellent services and supporting projects which make the village a better place to live, also serves to help safeguard the asset.

The Dunbartonshire based Association can clearly evidence that their customer and community focused approach has led to many positive gains, including:

- **Low demand housing now in high demand;**
- **Reduced rent arrears**
- **Tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit has reduced;**
- **Local job creation;**
- **Educational attainment has increased;**
- **Youth related crime and cost of tackling crime both reduced;**

- **Increased tenant satisfaction overall**

### **Involving tenants in identifying local spending priorities: North Ayrshire Council**

North Ayrshire Council allocates around £2.5 million pounds each year for spending on environmental improvements in local communities. Tenants can identify and request environmental improvements to be carried out in their local areas.

Environmental projects that can bring the most benefit to tenants and their communities receive funding. A total of 633 local environmental projects have been carried out since 2006. It is important to highlight that this is not ‘extra money’, rather it is a way of involving tenants in identifying spending priorities within existing budgets.

## **Service improvements**

### **Customer engagement: West Lothian Council**



**West Lothian Council**

The Council has well developed inclusive approaches to

engaging with its tenants. It offers a range of excellent opportunities for tenants and service users to get involved.

One example was asking young homeless people to write poems about their experiences. The poems highlighted personal and emotional stories, as well as those areas of the service that needed to change. This innovative way of gaining feedback from people who may not engage in traditional tenant participation structures proved successful in empowering young people.

### **Sheltered Housing Network: Aberdeen City Council**

The Sheltered Housing Network was awarded TPAS Accreditation in recognition of their commitment to speaking up for the City’s elderly Council tenants.

The Network has united the City's elderly tenants and brought them round the table with some of the Council's key decision makers. Some of the groups open meetings have had over 80 people in attendance, attracting tenants from across Aberdeen City.

The Sheltered Housing Network was involved in an in depth review of the City Council's 'Extra Care Service' and was also involved in developing a new 'Community Care Strategy' with the Council.

Councillor Aileen Malone, Convenor of the Housing and Environment Committee for Aberdeen City Council said, "*The network has gone from strength to strength. The Council find the Network's feedback really useful and this helps us to provide quality services that people want.*"

### **Housing Service Standards: North Ayrshire Council**

The Council has introduced housing service standards that reflect tenants priorities by working closely with it tenants.

The service standards cover Customer Service standards, Tenant Participation, Anti Social Behaviour, Rents, and Estate Management.

## **Performance Monitoring**

### **Performance Improvement: Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership**



DGHP has introduced a simple, but effective mechanism for measuring the impact of tenant participation.

DGHP monitor and record the outputs and outcomes from all tenant engagement activities, across every aspect of housing management. The system allows the partnership to map their approach, find out which methods are most effective as well as

providing evidence of the tangible results gained from tenant participation.

Tenant Participation Impact Assessments are carried out before and after service reviews and policy consultations. The computer based system is designed around themes and can also be used to help plan consultation. This is particularly useful when mainstreaming tenant participation, as the system poses prompts, questions and key steps that ensure tenant engagement is conducted to the standards set out in the Partnership's tenant participation strategy.

### **Mystery Shopping**

**Many TPAS Accredited organisations use mystery shopping as a tool for testing the quality of customer service provided to tenants.**

Mystery shopping and tenant led inspections are an excellent way to involve tenants directly in testing the performance of the service.

## **Communications**

Excellent communications are vital for successful tenant participation in order to encourage and inspire participation. Tenants and residents need to believe that organisations are willing to listen, and willing to learn from their customers.

All TPAS Accredited organisations have particular strengths in communications.

### **Tenant Approved: Cordale Housing Association and North Ayrshire Council**

Cordale Housing Association has earned a reputation as an organisation that continues to use innovative approaches to tenant involvement. The Association has used live theatre, entertainment and comedy, as well as more traditional methods of engaging and communicating with tenants. It uses live performance as a way of maximising participation in local events, but also as a vehicle for empowering local young people, by creating opportunities to be part of a live show.



**Tenant Approved**, or the ‘Tenants Tick’ as it has come to be known, is a logo printed on publications to show that tenants have approved a document as being written in

plain language and jargon free. This way of getting people involved and demonstrating to customers that you aim to provide them with relevant information is highly effective.

Both Cordale Housing Association and North Ayrshire Council have introduced this hallmark for their publications.

### “Count Me In”: Grampian Housing Association

This is a customer panel run by Grampian Housing



Association, which has over 140 customers signed up to the panel and actively participating across Aberdeenshire and surrounding area. The Association operates across a large geographical area and finds the panel an effective way of involving tenants about changes to services.

### Area Forums: Albyn Housing Society

Albyn has invested resources to ensure customers throughout the



community have the opportunity to get involved and make their views known. Tenant conferences, regular postal consultation, support for tenant organisations and area forums, ensure customers are able to choose the type and level of involvement that suits them best.

In particular, Albyn’s ‘Area Forums’ have tenants and staff working together to set targets, measure performance and ensure

continuous improvement of all landlord services.

## Participation is part of the culture

Tenant participation does not happen by chance. There have to be opportunities to participate and the landlord must be willing to listen **and** prepared to change the way it does things.

A landlord seeking to develop an organisational culture that values tenant participation needs to show that the governing body and the staff team all believe in the shared vision for tenant participation.

### Strong leadership: Argyll Community Housing Association

Direction and commitment to tenant participation



is apparent at all levels in Argyll Community Housing Association. The Chief Executive has long championed the need to engage with individual tenants and tenants groups.

‘Door Stepping’ tenants has become part and parcel of the Chief Executive’s work. This approach has demonstrated to tenants that the organisation is open to new ideas and genuinely interested in the views of tenants. It also reinforces the value that the whole organisation places on tenant participation.

### Organisational structure: Link HA

Link Housing Association has developed an organisational structure that creates space for housing professionals to become more involved in developing tenant participation. At Link, all generic enquiries are dealt with by the Customer Service Centre, freeing up housing officers time to stimulating tenant participation.



## Organisation wide commitment: North Ayrshire Council and West Lothian Council

The success of these two council's approach to tenant involvement is down to a combination of the following factors:

- direction and belief in tenant participation from the top;
- a skilled and empowered staff team that know their role in tenant participation and see it as part of their job;
- tenant participation staff to support staff and tenants to get involved in tenant participation;
- a strong, active and willing body of tenant volunteers, and;
- a carefully planned strategy for tenant involvement.

## Tenant involvement in the selection of Contractors: North Ayrshire Council

Tenants in North Ayrshire are involved in the selection process of contractors. Tenants assist with setting the questions in the Pre Qualification Questionnaire as well as taking part in the short listing and interviews. Training is provided to tenants in advance of the selection process. Tenants tell us that this process has the effect of reminding contractors of their accountability, as well as sending a clear message that tenants should be recognised as customers.

## Professional Development

A commitment to personal and professional development for staff and volunteers is a common factor in all TPAS Accredited organisations. Investment in learning that will equip staff with new skills and knowledge will undoubtedly assist them when they engage with customers. It is vital that staff involved in encouraging tenant participation are kept up to date with key changes in housing policy, organisational

changes as well as best practice in tenant participation itself.

Traditional training methods, e-learning and study visits should always be open for consideration to ensure staff of housing organisations are applying best practice for the benefit of their organisation.

## Live and Learn with Faifley': Faifley HA

Training for tenants and tenants groups is also essential if people are to have meaningful participation. Faifley Housing Association are currently working towards Accreditation and have recently completed their 'Live and Learn with Faifley' project. Working in partnership with TPAS, it organised in depth training on all aspects of social housing for local people. The training led to a qualification in Housing Administration. The Association hopes to gain some knowledgeable new committee members as a direct result.

## TPAS Accredited Organisations:

Aberdeen Sheltered Housing Network  
Albyn Housing Society  
Argyll Community Housing Association  
Cordale Housing Association  
Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership  
Grampian Housing Association  
Link Housing Association  
Lovell  
North Ayrshire Council  
West Lothian Council

## TPAS Accreditation is approved by the Chartered Institute of Housing



*Working towards TPAS Accreditation can help improve your approach to involving tenants. To find out more contact TPAS.*

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