

Orkney Islands Council
Tenant Participation Strategy



**Orkney Islands Council
Tenant Participation Strategy**

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Foreword

Orkney Islands Council recognises the importance of tenant participation and is committed to encouraging and supporting tenants to become involved in making decisions about the services the Council offers.

The Council also recognises the challenges of encouraging tenant participation within a rural and island area. In recognition of this the Council reinforced its commitment to tenant participation with the development and resourcing of a specific tenant participation post in conjunction with Orkney Housing Association Ltd.

The Council is committed to offering tenants opportunities to become involved in the drive for continual improvement of our services.

Tenant participation is a continually evolving process, progressing as new issues and drivers arise. This strategy sets out a framework of supporting tenant participation on which to build.

In monitoring the success of this strategy the Council will work closely with relevant partner agencies, national bodies promoting and supporting tenant participation and its tenants and residents.

This strategy outlines our ongoing commitment to ensuring appropriate processes are developed, used and supported in order to facilitate the active involvement of tenants in our services.

Roderick McLeod
Chair of Social Services and Housing Committee

Introduction

This represents our second Tenant Participation Strategy and covers the period 2011 – 2016. In producing this Tenant Participation Strategy Orkney Islands Council recognises the importance of working in partnership with our tenants, both individually and through residents associations.

The Scottish Government defines tenant participation as being “about tenants taking part in decision making processes and influencing 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.” (National Strategy for Tenant Participation – Partners in Participation, 1999)

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Tenant participation then is very much a two way process and involving & consulting with tenants leads to the provision of better, more effective and more efficient services. Central to tenant participation is the need to understand the very real benefits it can bring to tenants and the importance of ensuring equal opportunities in respect of participation.

In 2008 we commissioned an independent agency, TIGHRA who are experienced in tenant participation to undertake a review of our tenant participation services as experienced by our tenants. The report produced is appended to this strategy. The strategy has been reviewed in line with the findings of that review.

The strategy has very much been produced as the result of ongoing consultation with our tenants and reflects their opinions and priorities.

Orkney Islands Council's Local Housing Strategy interacts with a wide range of related plans and strategies. The Local Housing Strategy plays an integral and important role in the delivery of the Council's priorities particularly around improving access to good quality affordable housing, improving health and well-being, social inclusion and community safety.

The Tenant Participation Strategy effectively underpins the Local Housing Strategy and gives consideration to the themes, aims and objectives of the following plans and strategies:

Orkney 2020;
Housing Support Strategy;
Homelessness Strategy;
Fuel Poverty Strategy;
Advice & Information Strategy;
Community Consultation and Engagement Guide.

Local Authorities are subject to regulation and inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator against a range of performance standards.

These standards emphasise the importance of providing accurate and accessible tenant participation services.

The particular performance standard that deals with tenant participation (GS 2.2) states:

“We have published and are implementing a sound strategy for encouraging and supporting tenants, residents and service users to participate actively in all areas of our work. We support tenants who take an active interest in managing their homes.”

The performance standard is central to our Tenant Participation Strategy and related services.

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National Background

"Partners in Participation"

The National Strategy for Tenant Participation was published by the then Scottish Executive in 1999. Titled "Partners in Participation" it was formulated by a working group consisting of tenants, landlords and housing agencies, and illustrates the Scottish Government's commitment to effective tenant participation in Scotland.

The Strategy sets out key principles for good tenant participation which are:

- Tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, elected and committee / board members, and housing officers at all levels working together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.
- Tenant participation practice should be seen as a continuous process where information, ideas and power are shared, common understandings of problems are striven for and a consensus on solutions is worked out.
- Good tenant participation allows all parties to contribute to the agenda. All participants require to have all the information needed to consider issues properly; that information needs to be clear, timely and accessible and to take account of equal opportunities concerns.
- Processes of decision making should be open, clear, and accountable. Adequate time should be given to tenant representatives to consider the issues properly. Tenants should have the opportunity to work out a common view in advance of meeting the landlord's representatives.
- Good tenant participation requires the landlord to recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
- Good working relationships evolve gradually and are flexible to adapt to local circumstances.
- Tenants' organisations require adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
- Tenant participation in rural areas must be tailored to suit the particular circumstances and needs of tenants in such communities.
- Tenant participation must meet the requirements of the legislation surrounding equal opportunities. Good practice in participation removes barriers to effective participation arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language difficulties, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability.

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The principles are fully endorsed by Orkney Islands Council and its tenant representatives and these principles underpin the strategy.

Codes of Practice

A number of codes of practice have been published by the Scottish Government on aspects of tenant participation. Whilst regard has been given to all of these codes in producing this strategy, two hold particular relevance to Orkney.

Tenant participation in best value sets out how tenants may be involved in the process of reviewing the service, setting standards, targets and indicators and monitoring the service, within the overall context of seeking continuous improvement.

Tenant Participation in rural areas highlights ways of encouraging participation in areas where communities are dispersed. It also identifies the difficulties that tenants in rural areas may experience in accessing information and encourages a flexible approach to the dissemination of information. It also identifies the resources (including training) that will enable tenant groups in rural areas to function effectively.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

The National Strategy on Tenant Participation stated that “to underpin these principles, a statutory right to participation will be introduced matched by duties on landlords”. This was enacted in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Local Authorities are required to:

- Provide a range of information to their tenants;
- Have in place a tenant participation strategy;
- Have a registration scheme for tenant organisations to register with them and keep a publicly available register of these registered tenant organisations (RTOs);
- Consult with tenants and registered tenant organisations on a range of housing and related services.

Section 54 of the Act introduced provisions to enable both individual tenants and registered tenant groups to be consulted by their landlord on issues affecting them. Landlords have to take account of the views of tenants and RTOs within a reasonable timescale.

The Local Context

It is important that our Tenant Participation Strategy links with other strategic plans in Orkney:

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Orkney 2020; Our Vision – Community Plan

This plan was produced in partnership with other local agencies, with community wide consultation, to see how the partners can deliver better services.

The plan has 6 key principles which underpin tenant participation:

Survival – Maintaining the viability of fragile communities as places where people can live and work. To survive in the 21st Century, communities ‘at the edge’ will need to maintain their population, through provision of quality, affordable housing; safeguarding lifeline services and find new ways to participate in a global economy.

Sustainability – Achieving a balance between the environment, the economy and the community. For development to be sustainable, it must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations.

Promoting Equalities – Providing opportunities for everyone to participate in the life of the community, whether in work, learning or society generally. To achieve this requires the removal of barriers to inclusion such as poverty and inequality of access to services.

Working together – improve co-ordination between different public, private and voluntary organisations. Resulting in better services through sharing good practice and improving efficiency

Working with Communities - Each community in Orkney should be able to participate in determining its own future. People need to see a common vision for their future, recognise a project as being of interest and concern to them, and have the time and energy to get involved.

Working to Deliver Better Services – We try to deliver local services which meet as many local needs as possible, and ensure they are available to everyone. This can be challenging considering Orkney’s reliance on its transport links however we can support social enterprise and community interest companies locally to assist with the delivery of these services.

Local Housing Strategy

This document is currently being produced and will be the major strategic document for housing in Orkney. Many of the priorities for action contained in the Local Housing Strategy affect the people of Orkney whether they are renting or buying their homes. The Tenant Participation Strategy is an important part of the strategic planning process which underpins policy development and service improvement for the Housing Service. As a result of the inter-linkage between the two strategies, its aims have not been reproduced here.

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Why Have a Tenant Participation Strategy?

When working well, tenant participation delivers clear benefits for tenants, staff and landlords alike.

The benefits of tenant participation for everyone include:

- Better service delivery and improved value for money;
- Opportunities to develop new knowledge and skills;
- Better communication between staff and tenants;
- Better links between community and landlords;
- Informed and knowledgeable tenants who have skills and confidence to contribute to decisions in a valuable sense;
- Staff and tenants being more aware of each other's perspectives and organisational and financial limitations;
- Breaking down misunderstandings, helping to remove any mistrust between landlord and tenants, and building mutual respect and understanding;
- Increased tenant satisfaction with their home and neighbourhood;
- Increased job satisfaction for staff.

The benefits of tenant participation and improvements in service delivery will improve over time as effective information, communication and participation structures strengthen.

A Tenant Participation Strategy provides the structures and the strategic commitment to support and further develop tenant participation and in turn allows the very real benefits to come about.

How the Tenant Participation Strategy has been developed

As part of the process of developing this strategy the Council has worked with tenant groups in Orkney. In some areas where a tenants / residents group has not been formed, work was also undertaken with individual tenants who had expressed an interest in participation.

The process of consultation has involved:

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- An independent review of our existing arrangements for participation and its effectiveness. This included a survey sent to all tenants.
- A review of best practice.
- Consultation with representatives from our two residents' associations being Kirkwall East Tenants & Residents Association and Grieveship Residents Association as to how the strategy might be developed in the light of comments received over the last 12 months.
- A participative event was organised for officers from a range of Services and agencies to actively contribute to the development of the strategy.
- Consultation with agencies which represented minority groups to consider participation and to ensure inclusion of all groups within society.
- Use of focus groups
- Consultation with Staff
- Consultation with interested tenants
- Training provided by TIGHRA and TPAS
- Dissemination of Information included in Housing News
- Briefing sessions to Tenant and Residents Groups and individual tenants in areas where no groups exist.

The tenant participation strategy is intended to be a fluid document which all stakeholders continuously review and one which continues to develop and grow. The strategy is a framework enabling all those involved in both the delivery of the housing service and its associated services, together with those who are recipients of housing services to work towards continuous improvement in the housing service.

A customer satisfaction survey is being developed which will feed into this process. In addition related information is used from complaints, compliments and appeals etc.

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Ensuring Tenants Are Able To Actively Contribute to Decisions

Orkney Islands Council will continue to support and encourage tenant participation in the following ways (this list is not exhaustive):

- Raising awareness of tenant participation generally including its benefits, highlighting where tenants' groups exist and how to get involved or how to set up a group.
- Continued development of the Register of Interested Tenants (RIT). The RIT will be widely publicised and will be open to all tenants who have specific interests in aspects of housing management, or maintenance and are happy to be consulted on very specific matters by questionnaire/email/focus groups.
- Use of focus groups, joint estate management visits, local area based meetings etc.
- Housing Services will continue to develop and enhance a customer service culture where all staff are aware of and are receptive to the value of tenant participation, through staff training and awareness sessions. Many tenants participate in a low key, informal way and this will continue to be encouraged and promoted by all staff. Consideration will be given to ensuring ways in which, while ensuring customer confidentiality, the voice of tenants continues to make a difference in improving quality of service.
- Tenant participation is very much integral to this process rather than being a stand alone function.
- Housing News will continue to be produced and will remain the main vehicle to inform and encourage tenants. Tenants will be encouraged to be involved in an editorial capacity.
- Our website will contain detailed and up to date information.
- Tenants views are collected through a range of methods including customer satisfaction processes, specific surveys, complaints, comments, compliments and appeals. This process will continue to be monitored in relation to efficiency and the information obtained will be used actively.
- We will continue to aim for improvement and we aim to expand our processes, as a result of tenant views, to include collection of views by on-line processes.

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Proposed Structures and Methods for Participation

This strategy outlines a range of mechanisms to enable effective participation to take place. This range of options will offer choice to tenants and the opportunity to participate at a time, level and method which suits them best. The variety of methods ensures that local circumstances can be taken into account and there can be flexibility within the process.

Consultation and participation needs to be enabled to include both local authority wide consultation and participation at local level, effective means of participation will include:

- Consultation with local residents and tenants associations.
- 'Road Shows' at local area level
- Individual letters
- Website
- The provision of working parties to consult on specific issues.
- Focus groups
- Briefing sessions
- Estate walkabouts
- Written consultative drafts of policies and procedures.
- Local consultation including open meetings.
- Council representative attendance at tenants meetings
- Regular surveys and questionnaires on specific topics
- Customer satisfaction surveys including repairs, improvements, adaptations, new tenancies, exiting tenants, homeless tenants, homeless exit questionnaire, advice and information exit questionnaire and sheltered housing satisfaction.
- Continued regular newsletters
- Registration of tenants organisations
- Encouragement for the development and support of new tenant groups

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- Encouragement of village voice scheme
- Encouragement of 'virtual' means of involvement whether through 'conference me', 'skype' etc to allow those in remote areas to be involved
- Development of a forum or panel of representative tenants
- Active involvement of individual tenants where no tenant group has been created
- Seeking views through comments, compliments, complaints, appeals etc.

The Council recognises that in order to maximise involvement in tenant participation in a remote and rural area like Orkney, greater efficiencies can be obtained by working jointly with other agencies and within other structures.

Therefore, and where appropriate, we will work with community councils and within other rural engagement strategies in order to seek a holistic approach to engagement and consultation.

Informing our tenants

The council recognises the central role good information plays in enabling effective tenant participation. The provision of clear, accurate and up to date information is crucial to enable tenants to make their views known and to effectively and fully participate.

We currently provide our tenants with newsletters covering specific issues and use the local media to inform tenants of new developments, meetings and changes in policy. We provide a detailed tenants handbook, leaflets on a range of topics and detailed information on our website. The minutes of Council meetings are posted on the Council's website. We respond to requests for information and advice from individual tenants and residents groups. We have a full Advice & Information Strategy which outlines our approaches to information provision.

Our Tenant Participation Strategy links closely with the Community Consultation and Engagement Guide.

On request Orkney Islands Council will also provide information to tenants at any time on:

- Tenancy conditions and agreements;
- Policy and Procedures in relation to setting of rents and service charges;
- Policy and Procedures in relation to lettings, allocation priority, transfers, exchanges and repairs and maintenance;

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- Right to Buy provisions (where they apply) and the obligations the tenant is likely to incur in exercising his/her right to buy, including obligation to maintain the property and any common areas;
- A copy of the Tenant Participation Strategy;
- Any policy relating to service delivery;
- Complaints procedures.

Our website contains detailed information including copies of strategies and policies. It can be accessed at www.orkney.gov.uk Our information is available on request in a range of different formats and languages.

Key issues for Tenant Participation & Consultation

Orkney Islands Council will undertake to consult with tenants on all areas of housing service and policy, which affect them, in particular this will include:

- Housing Service Standards
- Any proposed changes to housing management and policies, including our lettings policy and our anti-social behaviour policy.
- Housing Management
- Tenancy conditions and agreements
- Customer Care
- Any proposed changes to housing repairs service
- Any plans to transfer stock or proposed change of landlord
- Capital improvement programme
- Local Housing Strategy
- Tenant Participation Strategy
- Rent changes and service charges (if any).

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Feedback

Feedback is vital to ensure people can see what their involvement has achieved. This is one of the most important areas of the tenant participation process.

Feedback will be given following all consultation processes and this will include how tenants' opinions have shaped policy or service delivery. Where this hasn't happened, reasons will be provided.

When Orkney Islands Council has consulted with tenants on a particular issue, feedback on the outcome will be provided to tenants:

- Through Housing News
- Directly to tenants involved in the consultation, if the consultation was localised in a specific area
- Through RTO, resident or public meetings where appropriate
- Through the Council's website.
- By individual letters;
- Through leaflets;
- Through open days;
- By text message or e-mail;
- Through follow up meetings or focus groups.

Orkney Islands Council will provide feedback information on:

- what the collective response was;
- how the responses were taken into account;
- how long the review process will take;
- what decision has been taken;
- and will give clear details about who to contact for more information.

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Registered Tenants' Organisations

Established under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 Registered Tenants' Organisations are independent organisations set up primarily to represent tenants and housing related interests. Their aim is to give tenants' organisations, who meet the criteria set out in Appendix 3, a recognised role in the tenant participation process.

We have set up a registration process which ensures that all groups meeting the criteria for registration are consulted with. In addition we will undertake to consult with non registered tenant groups and individual tenants through the variety of methods set out above. Guidance and support will be provided to maximise the number of groups qualifying for registration. This will include financial resources, training, provision of information packs, and access to independent advice and information.

Orkney Islands Council is mindful that many tenants may wish to participate in some way will not necessarily wish to be part of a Registered Tenants' Organisation. Orkney Islands Council will consult with tenants through a wide range of mechanisms, in addition to consulting with registered tenants' organisations.

Resourcing Tenant Participation

The Council currently resources tenant participation by funding the part-time employment of a Resident Participation Co-Ordinator. This post is shared with Orkney Housing Association Ltd. In addition the following costs apply:

- Training (for tenants, staff and elected members);
- Hiring meeting rooms;
- Cost of tea/coffee etc;
- Cost of crèche facilities;
- Out of pocket expenses;
- Consultation costs;
- Travel expenses for tenants attending meetings;
- Printing and posting newsletters and other information;
- Grants to help new and established tenant organisations;
- Access to IT and support networks;

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- Staff time;
- Attendance at conferences/seminars.

The Council will endeavour to provide a start up grant and ongoing funding to recognised tenants / residents groups. A separate budget exists for the purposes of resourcing our Tenant Participation Services. Funding arrangements sit within the Council's Financial Regulations and the overall budget available for Tenant Participation. Separate policies and procedures exist in respect of funding available for tenants / residents groups.

The Council recognises that to ensure the successful implementation of its strategy sufficient resources need to be made available. The Council will review its budget annually and the level of funding required to effectively implement the Tenant Participation Strategy.

Equal Opportunities

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 reinforced and promoted equal opportunities in housing. The Act requires landlords to approach tenant participation in a manner that encourages equal opportunities.

Specific responsibilities placed on Local Authorities in respect of equal opportunities and tenant participation include:

- ensuring barriers to participation such as language, accessibility, timing, costs for tenants and childcare have been considered;
- considering the needs of equalities groups and proactively involving traditionally excluded groups in the participation process;
- ensuring registered tenant organisations promote equal opportunities and are open and accessible to all tenants through the criteria for registration (this should be included in RTOs constitution).

The council has an Equal Opportunities Policy and also an Accessibility Policy, the aims of both are central to the Tenant Participation Strategy. The council believes that participation can only be effective if it ensures that there is equality of opportunity regardless of age, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation race, colour, language and location. In addition the Council is committed to ensuring that its services are offered in an accessible manner and all relevant adjustments are made to ensure people are not discouraged from participating on the basis of accessibility.

We will take positive action to ensure any barriers that exist to prevent tenants from participating are tackled, and use a range of ways to consult and enable participation, which reflect the diversity of needs of our tenants.

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We will seek to ensure that there is equal access to the consultation and participation process and that tenant and resident groups have an approach that is inclusive and reflects the diversity in their communities, including minority groups and people with particular or support needs.

We will offer training in equal opportunities and anti discriminatory practice to tenant and resident groups.

Tenant and resident groups that operate in a discriminatory or offensive manner may be subject to any of the following actions:

- withdrawal of funding;
- withdrawal of support in kind;
- if registered, removal from the register of tenants organisations.

Aims & Objectives

Orkney Islands Council wishes to produce a strategy which is at the centre of meaningful tenant involvement and which meets the needs of all our tenants and stakeholders.

Aims

Whilst recognising that most strategies would usually be expected to have one or two principal aims, Orkney Islands Council felt that all of the following 'aims' had sufficient merit in themselves to be included as a key aim of the strategy.

- Give tenants real opportunities to become involved in the decision making process of Housing Services.
- Offer a range of options for becoming involved through long term and short term methods and both collectively – through Residents Associations – and on an individual basis and the regeneration of village voice etc.
- Ensure tenants are adequately resourced and supported in order to fully engage in the participation process.
- Continuously develop ways of improving communication and information dissemination to meet the needs of all of our tenants.
- Create tenant participation and consultation which is subject to continuous improvement and review.

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Objectives

Following on from the aims listed above, our objectives are:

1. To support the growth of existing and new tenant groups in Orkney.

To achieve the aim of the Tenant Participation Strategy it is essential that tenant groups are well resourced and supported, within the framework of the registration process. Actions to achieve this objective will seek to provide established tenant organisations with resources whilst officers will continue to encourage and support the development of existing and new groups.

2. To develop and promote effective participation by all tenants in the process of policy formulation and service review.

There is a need to consult tenants more on policies and service provision etc. Specifically the Council will seek to involve tenants at earlier points in the review process, to enable tenants to identify the priorities for review. We will also seek to develop a structured consultation framework that sets out the minimum standards for consultation processes.

3. To enhance and improve the range and detail of information available to tenants and tenant groups across Orkney.

In order to empower tenants to participate and to play an effective role in commenting on policies, performance etc information is essential. The Council will therefore look to ensure that appropriate resources are available to support the provision of information to tenants and will seek to expand the current level of information to tenants. This aim will link closely with our Advice & Information Strategy.

4. To develop training opportunities for Elected Members, staff and tenants across a range of housing activities.

Training opportunities are vital to enable tenants to participate. The Council will continue to co-ordinate, enable or provide training across a range of housing activities. Joint training for staff and tenants will also be pursued where possible.

5. To ensure that tenant participation activities in Orkney reflect the principles of equal opportunity and are accessible.

Good practice in tenant participation removes barriers to effective participation arising from sex or marital status, racial grounds, on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions. The Council in partnership with tenants will identify our barriers and systematically address these. Information is available in a range of different formats and languages on request.

6. To monitor and review progress in achieving the aim and objectives of the strategy jointly with tenants.

We recognise that the production of the Tenant Participation Strategy is not an end in itself. The Council will monitor and review progress on a regular

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basis and will seek to update the strategy annually, to reflect the progress achieved.

The outcomes will be made public and publicised in various ways including through Housing News, local media and the website. We are committed to regularly reviewing the strategy and monitoring its implementation. We recognise that it is essential to measure how well we are doing and what changes may be required to ensure we continue to improve the participation process and its effectiveness. We will do this in partnership with tenants and tenants/ residents groups.

Monitoring, Evaluation & Review

The Tenant Participation Strategy will be subject to continual review and is intended to facilitate an evolving process. Tenant participation is not static and we will be prepared to evaluate and change structures as levels of participation evolve and develop.

Monitoring is important to find out if agreed objectives have been met, to recognise which activities are working well and those which are not so effective and to adapt tenant participation structures to meet changing circumstances and priorities.

An Action Plan has been developed and will be monitored by officers and tenants representatives on an annual basis. Accordingly a report will be presented to our Social Services and Housing Committee.

Housing Services has a structure of Service Delivery Plans which underpin each service. Tenants' views are actively used in respect of this on an annual basis. This information will be cross-referenced to inform the Tenant Participation Strategy.

A range of information will be collected to enable, staff, tenants and residents to assess how successful the strategy is in meeting it's aims and objectives. We will consider and review:

- Annual progress against the action plan

Resources & Support

- Amount of staff time allocated to tenant participation
- Cost of tenant participation
- Level of grant funding provided
- Spend relative to hire of rooms and related costs including support to attend meetings

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- Level of staff and tenant training

Evaluating the outcomes

- Numbers of events held and levels of attendance
- Number, variety and frequency of consultations/involvement held
 - Topics of consultations
 - How were the results of tenant involvement in consultation process reflected in the outcome
 - Level of progress of residents groups (from minutes)
 - Level of tenant satisfaction with services from customer satisfaction surveys
 - How participation took place (i.e. methods used)
 - Number of registered and non-registered groups as a proportion of housing stock and how this has changed over time
 - Representation of group membership and tenant involvement for instance by equalities group
 - What feedback was received from tenants and RTO's
 - Service Standards
 - Percentage of tenant / residents organisations meeting registration criteria and registered
 - Feedback

The information will be shared with tenants and residents through Housing News, local media, Housing Services etc.

What next?

We will consult widely on this draft strategy with our tenants, staff elected members and other stakeholders. In addition the draft strategy will be widely publicised and feedback invited. The results of this feedback will be incorporated into the final version.

The final Tenant Participation Strategy will then be fully implemented and subject to monitoring and review to ensure that it remains a working document

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which best meets the needs of our tenants and enables effective participation and consultation to take place.

The Action Plan

Following on from this strategy is an accompanying action plan, detailing how Orkney Islands Council intends to achieved the aims and objectives laid down in this strategy.

Appendices

Appendix 1: TIGHRA Report

Appendix 2: Action Plan

Appendix 3: RTO Process