

# tenant participation

2017 - 2018  
Annual Report

3 Dedicated TP staff



£150,000

in a budget Tenants control , the Street Enviromental Programme

2,365

responses to our satisfaction survey have helped us target our efforts



## New TP Strategy Launched

283

tenants are members of our private FaceBook group



3

Tenant Led Inspections



5

award ceremonies



35

publications



## Thank you to everyone who took part

## Introduction

Welcome to the 2017/18 Tenant Participation Annual Report. Over the course of the financial year, Housing, Customer and Building Services have tried to engage with many tenants and service users in various innovative ways.

Over this time, the Customer Participation (CP) Team has seen a significant increase in the number of people engaging with us about the services we deliver. The team regularly supports monthly meetings and organise one off events, such as estate inspections and focus groups; offering customers the opportunity to share their views on services.

2017/18 has been a very productive year with one of the highlights being the launch of the latest Tenant Participation Strategy for 2017-2021. This strategy sets out all the ways in which tenants and service users can take part in activities and events to help improve service delivery for all west Lothian Council tenants and service users.

This past year we have celebrated many milestones and achievements; one of the most significant highlights was celebrating 20 years of Tenant Participation with volunteers, staff, partners and friends; past and present. This gave us an opportunity to thank everyone for their outstanding contribution to Tenant Participation here in West Lothian and further afield.

We were also delighted to receive the Tenants Information Service Tenant Participation Excellence Award, for the council's outstanding contribution and commitment to involving tenants and service users in shaping and improving services.

## Networks and Groups

### 2.1 Networks

#### *West Lothian Tenants Housing Network (WLTHN)*

Early in 2017, a decision was taken by the members of Cairnbrock and Five Sisters Housing Networks to merge into one stronger joint network, covering the whole of West Lothian. The purpose of this was to improve efficiency for both tenants and staff, and to bring together everyone from across the county, to make a stronger voice on matters that are important to tenants and service users.

The AGM took place in May, with the business for the first WLTHN meeting in June. Membership to this network remains consistent with around 10 – 12 members attending each month.

#### *Homeless Housing Network*

This Network was established in 2014 and continues to flourish, bringing together service users on a monthly basis to promote well-being and focus on their journey and experiences with homelessness; supported by Housing Needs Staff and the Customer Participation Team.

Members find the network gives them the opportunity to share their views and opinions on the homelessness service with others who have experienced similar situations, in a sociable and informal setting. The Network allows members to understand the homeless process and why procedures are in place, as well as giving them the opportunity to make suggestions on how the service can be improved.

This year network members have: discussed the impact of universal credit and what it entails, helped with consultation on the councils new Anti-Poverty Strategy, revised information leaflets and discussed the need for foodbanks.

- **Homeless Sub-group**

The Sub Group was established in March 2016 as an offshoot of the Homeless Housing Network Group (HHNG). They meet separately on a monthly basis to delve into specific service areas, helping to develop and improve service standards and truly shape services around the customer's needs.

Over the last 12 months, the group has been able to successfully achieve a number of reviews within the service. Key areas that they have focused on include:

- Review of temporary tenancy packs;
- Creation of customer surveys;
- Creation of informative and plain English service leaflets;
- Involvement in the selection and recruitment of five Tenancy Sustainment Officer posts for the Housing Needs Support Team;
- Development of the existing HHNG service users group.

## 2.2 Tenants and Residents Groups



This group continued to flourish throughout the year, welcoming new members from the local Sheltered Housing complex.

Membership remains high with up to 14 members. The group have concentrated their efforts into tackling local issues to help improve social wellbeing and living conditions for those living and working in the local area. They are supported by their local councillors as well as staff from the local housing office and a member of the CP Team.

Last year the group were instrumental in highlighting a local issue with the council in relation to irregular timings and stopping places of the bus company. The council have taken on board their concerns and are working with them to resolve this situation. They are also working on road calming in their area and as well as dealing with school bus provision for primary school children.



This group meet on alternate months and continue to tackle the plight of litter and antisocial behaviour in conjunction with the local high school. The Head Teacher and House Captains attend each

meeting explaining the ways they promote their 'clean up' campaign to fellow pupils and throughout the local area. The membership of this group remains high, with members from the local sheltered housing complex, other social landlords and residents from the area regularly attending. It is supported by a member of the CP Team and local Housing Staff.

### **Rosemount Court Tenants Group**

With the completion of the new Rosemount Court Sheltered Housing Complex this year, we were delighted to support the start-up of a new tenants group for the residents who moved into this state of the art building. Tenants found the monthly meetings beneficial in resolving any teething troubles with the new build and learning about other services available to them.

A member of the CP Team is supporting this group to become registered by writing a draft constitution and providing training for those who wish to take up office bearer positions. They also hold briefing sessions for all involved around the opportunities of taking part in shaping council services.

### ***Syrian Tenants Group***

Staff from the Housing Needs Team is working with a group of Syrian refugees to establish a Registered Tenants Organisation (RTO). Initial meetings have taken place and a draft constitution drawn up by the Customer Participation Officer who also supports this group. Membership of this group is high with a strong interest from all involved.

### ***Other Groups***

This year saw the loss of one of the groups, The Riggs, Tenant and Residents group. This was an unregistered group who met regularly to discuss issues in their local area, but struggled to increase membership and find any members able to take on the commitment of office bearer roles.

The group was supported by staff from the local office and the CP Team and several initiatives were tried to encourage new members, including a street survey to establish local interest, but this was unfortunately unsuccessful.

*The CP Team continue to monitor interest through other surveys and feedback they receive in the hope that new groups can be encouraged and supported to develop.*

## **2.3 Other groups**

### ***Tenants Panel***

A schedule of meetings is developed annually so tenants and senior managers can discuss and analyse information relating to Housing, Customer and Building Services. They continue to meet monthly to fulfil their role of scrutinising service delivery, by looking at financial elements of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget, performance information and all other areas relating to the delivery of services for tenants.

### ***Tenant Participation Development Working Group***

This group works with the CP Team to monitor the implementation of the TP Strategy and to continue the development of tenant participation in West Lothian. This partnership working between tenants and staff shows true commitment and passion to ensure new ideas are researched and developed, allowing better understanding and rapport between customers and services.

A special development meeting was held in March 2018, with other tenants invited to attend and put forward their views on developing TP in the coming year. An Action Plan was drafted and will help direct the future work to ensure West Lothian remains at the forefront of TP.

### ***Services for the Community Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP)***

The PDSP meet regularly throughout the year, with members from WLTHN attending on behalf of the network, and feeding back to them the outcome of issues raised and discussed.

The tenant representatives can participate fully in the meetings and have the opportunity to take the views and opinions of the network to the meetings, on issues such as rent increase, Housing Revenue and Capital Budgets, including new build projects.

### **Focus Groups**

The use of one off focus groups continued throughout the year, with council tenants being invited to attend one of a series of focus groups arranged in the east and west of the county to share their views on rent payment methods and to discuss and understand the options offered.

In total, 12 people took part in four sessions, with their opinions and experiences being used to influence decisions to improve this service.

### **Armadale Regeneration Tenants and Residents Group**

Due to the extensive regeneration, upgrade and new build work being carried out in the Bathville area of Armadale, a tenants and residents group was set up to keep tenants and residents updated on issues and matters relating to the work being carried out.

Due to major remedial work being required to these properties, it was necessary for tenants to be decanted to other homes, meaning that there was no longer a need to hold monthly meetings as the properties were empty.

The local housing office will look at creating a new group in the future when these homes have been re-let.

### **Tenant Led Inspections (TLI)**

This year two inspections were carried out successfully, looking into the processes and procedures surrounding our Safer Neighbourhood Team and our New Build Properties:-

**Safer Neighbourhood Team** - this Tenant Led Inspection commenced in February 2017. A team of five inspectors reviewed existing policies, scrutinised performance and interviewed staff from the service and local housing offices as well as their partners. The report was presented to senior managers and an action plan drawn up. The team have set a date to meet with the lead officers to review findings early in May 2018 with a revisit scheduled to be carried out soon after.

**New Build Properties** - this inspection started in September 2017 with four inspectors taking part, one of whom was new to the process. The inspectors carried out a desk top review, visited several new build sites to look at layouts and the quality of finishes and carried out interviews with staff to understand their roles in the process.

Their final report was presented to the Head of Service and Senior Managers in February 2018, along with 39 recommendations for improvements. The Housing, Strategy and Development team were given 28 days to draw up an action plan based on the recommendations and they are due to meet with the TLI Team on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> April to discuss how they plan to action these.

The Inspectors will revisit this later in 2018 to review the actions taken.

**Asbestos in Void Properties** - was re-visited by the inspection team in September 2017. The team found that 7 of the 9 recommendations made had been completed and the remaining two were built into the work process and continue to be carried out.

The Inspectors were satisfied with this update and agreed to sign off the inspection in full.

## Training

- **TLI Training**

Six tenants attended Tenant Led Inspection (TLI) training to provide them with all the tools and skills required to carry out an effective inspection, which led to two new tenants signing up to participate in future TLIs (others were unable to participate due to personal reasons, such as the amount of time/days required).

- **Office Bearer Training**

The newly formed group in Rosemount Court received this training to help them understand the roles and responsibilities required within registered tenant's organisations as they are working towards becoming a registered group with the Council.

- **Staff Training**

Staff too, benefited from training from the Service Development Manager, who carried out two rounds of visits to each Housing Office throughout the year. They were informed on the work of the Performance and Change Team in relation to service improvements and also on the new initiatives being carried out by the CP Team.

In August two members of the CP Team carried out an exercise with staff to look at the various methods available to encourage customer involvement and identify local initiatives. Staff are keen to engage with tenants to address local issues such as, garden tidying, communal bins and waste management; the CP Team are working with local offices to develop initiatives in each ward area.

## 3.0 Publications

### Tenants News

Three editions of Tenants News were produced this year, spring, summer and winter. The newsletter is one of the council's main ways of communicating with and keeping tenants informed of service activity and development.

Each Tenants News edition is produced by the CP Team and its contents are drafted and reviewed with the Editorial Panel before being printed and issued to every council home in West Lothian.



The autumn edition included our annual Landlord Report, which the Service has a statutory requirement to publish to keep tenants informed on how the service is performing. The Landlord report can be viewed at [https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/17667/Landlord-Report-2017/pdf/landlord\\_report.pdf](https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/17667/Landlord-Report-2017/pdf/landlord_report.pdf)

- **Special Edition**

This year tenants received an additional special edition of Tenants News which set out the council's plans for a new five year rent strategy. The four page newsletter gave tenants the opportunity to compare rent levels across Scotland, explained how rent money is spent and invested in future stock.

A short survey was also included, providing tenants with an opportunity to vote on their preferred option, prior to the matter being taken to the Services for the Community PDSP for discussion. The survey was also available to complete online. Results of this consultation can be found in section 7.

### **Tenant Participation Strategy**

The new Tenant Participation Strategy was launched in January 2018. This concluded months of work from tenants and staff who met regularly to develop this new strategy. While the key elements of the Strategy remain similar to our previous strategy, there is increasing emphasis on our widening approach to one-off consultations and discussions with tenants as well as further focus on the use and development of digital interaction, such as Facebook.

Consultation was carried out with tenants from our Housing Networks, Tenants and Residents groups, staff and other local authorities. It was agreed with members of the Tenants Panel, that the launch be postponed until after the local elections in May to bring this new strategy into alignment with the new council administration.



### **Leaflets and Letters**

All new publications are reviewed by the Editorial Panel before being made available on the website or in print format. This year, panel members were kept very busy with a variety of new publications such as, paint pack leaflet, new build satisfaction survey and a suite of capital programme letters. They reviewed over 35 pieces of literature, including three editions of Tenants News and a special Rent Consultation Edition as well as the Satisfaction Survey.

Panel members ensure all literature is easy to read and understand, and that grammar and punctuation is correct before 'tenant approving' the publication. A new 'Tenant Approved' stamp has been designed and this will be used to show all publications have been reviewed by the panel before being produced.

### **Tenants Handbook**

Work has been ongoing over the course of the year to review and update the Tenants Handbook in partnership with the TP Development Working Group. The content of each section of the Handbook will be reviewed by the Editorial Panel as an ongoing initiative.

This is available online at [www.westlothian.gov.uk/tenantshandbook](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/tenantshandbook) and tenants can also request individual pages from their local CIS Office/Library.

## **4.0 Digital Inclusion & Social Media**

### **Tenants Facebook**

The TP Facebook group continues to grow in membership and had 283 members at the end of the financial year. It offers an easily accessible method of engagement for tenants and service users, as well as providing tenants with the flexibility of engaging with the Service online. It is hoped that by being involved in this way, interest will be generated to take part in other tenant participation activities.

This Facebook Group allows the Service access to a broader range of tenants who wish to engage on a variety of housing issues. In June, the CP Team introduced themselves to the members by recording a short video explaining an aspect of their role. It was agreed that members of the Housing Network would use this medium for future consultation and work will be carried out to develop a programme of topics/issues that can be used throughout the coming year.

### ***Tenant Self Service Portal***

Several pop-up sessions were held over the months promoting the new Tenants Self Service Portal.

Local Housing Staff and members of the CP Team visited local areas to inform tenants of this new online service offering IT support in setting up a unique tenant account; allowing tenants access to viewing their own details including, rent payment information and reporting repairs.

### ***Text Messaging***

Text messaging has been used by HCBS to great effect over the last few months; most effectively as a reminder tool for tenants in relation to the Repairs Service, Tenants Satisfaction Survey, Rent Consultation Survey and Paying your Rent. The functionality allows us to engage with individuals or groups, such as a local community; allowing us to promote specific topics, such as tenants' events, completion of surveys or paying your rent campaigns.

Text messaging is effective because the message given is short and to the point, whilst providing the tenant with the opportunity to respond immediately by clicking on the link provided. This either takes the user to an email facility or to an online survey, which involves very little effort, is quick and provides tenants with a really simple way to respond and share their views.

## **5.0 Community Engagement Out and about**

### ***Street Environmental Improvement Projects***

An application form for 2018/19 was included in the winter edition of Tenants News. Applications have been received for ideas to improve and enhance environmental areas. These have been discussed and agreed with members of the Capital Programme Working Group, for those applications that met the set criteria. The work carried out will benefit all tenants in each local area.

### ***Rate Your Estate (Pilot)***

The 'Rate your Estate' procedures were piloted in Armadale in August 2017, with several partners invited to take part in an estate walkabout.

Those involved included local council and Registered Social Landlord Housing staff (as they had tenancies in that area too), Neighbourhood Environmental Teams, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service and local Councillors. Although tenants were invited to attend by the local housing office, unfortunately no-one turned up on the day.

Those in attendance carried out the walk about and identified several issues and areas of concern which were then discussed and actions taken to resolve any issues.

### ***Benchmarking Visits***

Members of the CP Team and tenants visited North Ayrshire Council twice this year, to discuss various issues around Tenant Participation and share good practice.



## Local Events

Increasingly, over the year, members of the CP team joined forces with other partners to promote Tenant Participation in local areas, here are some examples:

- **Whitburn and East Whitburn Civic Week**

In June, the team joined forces with local Housing staff to take part in local initiatives as part of the Whitburn and East Whitburn Civic Week. Police, Fire & Rescue as well as other council services set up stalls in the local area to allow residents the opportunity to raise concerns or gather information about their community from local officers. This initiative was part of Operation ?? allowing Police to highlight the trends and increase for 'summer crime'

- **Job Fairs**

Job Fairs – Members of the Customer Participation Team, took part in the job fair events in Craigshill Shopping Centre and Fauldhouse Partnership Centres to promote Tenant Participation and promote the many ways customers can volunteer to take part in shaping services and sharing their views.

- **Rent Consultation Pop-up Events**

Five one off sessions were held in local communities to give tenants the opportunity to come along and discuss the rent increase proposals. The sessions were advertised in the Special Edition of Tenants News in October 2017, with consultation sessions held between 17<sup>th</sup> October and 7<sup>th</sup> November in:

- *Bathgate Partnership Centre*
- *Strathbrock Partnership Centre*
- *Whitburn Community Centre*
- *West Lothian Civic Centre*
- *Linlithgow Burgh Halls*

## Management Plan Launch

An event for staff was held on 13<sup>th</sup> June at West Lothian College to brief staff on management priorities for the year ahead, and to celebrate achievements from the previous year. It is also an opportunity for staff to be recognised for their academic achievements and also be awarded for 'Going the Extra Mile', where we recognise those who have provided customers and colleagues with outstanding service.

The evaluation forms and anecdotal feedback from colleagues indicate that the venue, format and content was deemed valuable and satisfaction with the event has increased based on the 2016 results.

## 6.0 Awards and Recognition

### TIS National Excellence Awards

The Service's suite of new initiatives to promote tenant participation was shortlisted for the Tenant Information Service (TIS) Excellence Awards 2017, under the Tenant Participation Excellence category. The council was successful and announced as the winner at the prestigious ceremony which took place in Glasgow on 10th June.



*(The CP Team and Tenants Panel accepting the award)*

### Good Neighbour Awards 2016



Each year we ask tenants to nominate a neighbour they feel deserved recognition for their thoughtfulness and consideration towards others.

All nominations received came from neighbours who wanted to say 'thank you' for the help, support and friendship they receive from their good neighbours.

The Tenants Panel members found it difficult to choose an overall winner and decided that recognition should be given to everyone nominated. Everyone nominated were invited to attend a special ceremony at the Civic Centre in Livingston to be presented with a framed Good Neighbour Certificate and bouquet of flowers from Executive Councillor for Services to the Community, George Paul and Head of Service, Alistair Shaw.

### TPAS Scotland National Good Practice Awards

The Homeless Housing Network Sub Group was recognised for its outstanding work over the year at the TPAS Scotland Annual Conference, which took place in St Andrews in November. The Sub Group works together with staff from the councils Housing Needs Service to develop and shape its services. This important work resulted in the Sub Group being named as a finalist at the TPAS Conference in the category 'Best Practice in Involving Customers' Award. Well done to all involved!

### TP Through the Years

This year, West Lothian Council held an event to mark 20 years of Tenant Participation and to recognise the long service and contribution made by tenant representatives who have worked tirelessly for many years on behalf of their communities and fellow tenants.



The highlight of the event was a presentation of an award for 'Outstanding Contribution to Tenant Participation' to local tenant Danny Mullen.



Danny was well known and respected for his work with the Scottish Government, Tenant Information Service (TIS), Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), West Lothian Housing Partnership and the Scottish Government's Regional Networks.

He was a passionate campaigner who was well known for his iron will and his exceptional ability to challenge and influence decisions to ensure the best outcome for his fellow tenants; he was a true tenants' hero.

***Sadly, Danny passed away in February 2018; he will be sadly missed by his family, friends and all those who had the privilege to work with him.***

## Consultation

- **Satisfaction Survey**

This year, a satisfaction survey was sent out to every West Lothian Council tenancy asking tenants to complete and return it to help inform us of how they feel about their home and the quality of the services we deliver.

This was followed by promoting the completion of the survey online and by sending text reminders to over 8,000 tenants (those who have their mobile number listed as their primary contact number).

The questions we ask make sure we collect the type of information our tenants have told us is important to them, and to the Scottish Housing Regulator – who want to know our tenants views on how we are performing. We will work on ways to improve where any comments we have received suggest a need for us to do things differently, or where our performance has dipped from the previous survey.

In 2017 the number of responses to the survey from tenants more than doubled compared with those received in 2015, with a record response rate of 2,365.

- **Rent Consultation**

In autumn 2017, every household received a Special Edition of Tenants News to inform tenants of the beginning of the rent consultation process on a new rent increase starting in 2018. A separate rent survey card was included, so tenants could fill in and return so they could tell us which their preferred option was. Tenants were also given the option to complete the rent consultation online.

The response was very good with over 1,192 surveys returned. Of the 1192 returned, not all tenants completed each question, however, a total of 1156 responses were received in answer to Option 1 and Option 2, as shown below:

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| • Option 1 - Annual increase of 3% per year over five years | 986 responses |
| • Option 2 - Annual increase of 4% per year over five years | 170 responses |



*If you would like to know more about TP, please contact us on 01506 281882 or 281885. Alternative you can email us: [TP@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:TP@westlothian.gov.uk)*