



# Tenant Participation Annual Report 2020/21



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In March 2021 the TP Team found themselves on unfamiliar ground when meetings and events were suspended and home working was introduced due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Undeterred, the team rose to the challenges this imposed to deliver different ways of communicating and engaging with both tenants and staff. Over the course of the past year, the use of social media and online forums have proved to be invaluable in the delivery of Tenant Participation in West Lothian.

The TP Team have embraced these changes and, together with tenant representatives, we have been able to carry out almost all regular meetings as well as introduce new and engaging events online.

This Annual Report 20/21 sets out the varied work the team, tenants and partners have achieved over the course of the year in a virtual, online setting.

Initial set up for staff and tenants took no time at all, and within the same week as lockdown was imposed, officers were all working from home discussing the business of the day via laptops, iPads and mobile phones.

Head of Service, Ann Marie Carr mentioned that she was “astounded at how well officers and tenant representatives adapted to and embraced this new method of participation showing real dedication and commitment to tenant participation and carrying out continued scrutiny to the services being delivered to West Lothian tenants without interruption.”

The Scottish Housing Regulator’s Chief Executive, Michael Cameron shared his views on this past year, by stating’ “Social landlords in Scotland were amongst the first onto the frontline in local communities, supporting their tenants and residents through the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting public health response.

“We recognised the unprecedented circumstances that social landlords were facing as a consequence of the pandemic, and that they were working hard to manage and mitigate the impact on their operations and to safeguard their tenants and local communities.”



## Scrutiny Groups

*From April 2020 to the end of March 2021 over 30 scrutiny meetings and events were held virtually with the Tenant Participation Team, tenant reps and Senior Managers.*

### Tenants Panel

Senior Managers were keen to keep our tenants up to date with service development during the pandemic and to also ensure continuation of their scrutiny work.

In early June, the TP Team were delighted to host an online Tenants Panel with all tenant members, Senior Managers, Head of Service and Cllr George Paul (Executive Councillor for Services from the Communities Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel). Ann Marie Carr (Head of Service) welcomed everyone to this new way of meeting and thanked everyone for embracing the virtual concept and confirmed it was a great achievement and an innovative way of taking TP forward during this time

Tenants Panel meetings continued online in this way over the course of the year. Initially, every month each senior manager provided a service update, advising on changes to services brought about by the restrictions in place due to the ongoing pandemic. They advised on the priorities for each service and how they planned to move forward as restrictions changed or were eased.

Tenants Panel Performance meetings also recommenced online in September with the addition of a new formatted report for compliments and complaints which members could scrutinise easily.

In December, members held a constructive discussion around moving TP Forward and embracing the new digital concept to TP. Ann Marie Carr felt more could be done to develop this and improve on communication and was happy to work with members to ensure the new TP Strategy included this. January's meeting saw members review targets for performance and in February they discussed the proposed annual budget and rent increase.

### Editorial Panel

Members used various new tools to carry out editing virtually, such as using online editing tools to provide members with the ability to review and edit documents brought to them for approval, such as Tenants News.

As work commenced on the Summer Edition of Tenants News, Senior Managers agreed to focus on current issues and priorities, specifically relating to the changes that had been implemented due to the pandemic. Therefore, members of the Editorial Panel were asked to review a Tenants News Special Edition at home using the online tools available. This brought its own challenges for members who were not used to using these online tools, but they rose to the task and successfully approved the summer edition in good time.

Work continued on all Tenants News Newsletters in this way throughout the year, with Tenants News being published solely online due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

Following on from Tenants News, panel members were also asked to review new information leaflets for colleagues in:

- **Strategy and Development**
  - Leaflets for - Periodic Testing and Smoke & Heat Detectors, showing them as being tenant approved
- **Housing Need**
  - Letters explaining the new housing allocations process were discussed and adapted to ensure they were easy to understand for all our customers.

## Capital & Repairs Working Group

Throughout the year, service managers from Building Services and Housing, Strategy & Development Team met with tenant members to discuss repairs and maintenance and major improvement works. The managers, update the tenant representatives on the various projects being carried out and share benchmarking information. These meetings ensure that tenants views are taken onboard and offers another method of scrutinising service delivery.

### Repairs

The Repairs Manager developed a schedule of topics to discuss with tenants, which has proven to be very successful. He discussed each topic in depth with attendees and explained processes, performance information and how it is developing. Feedback from tenants is very encouraging as they feel that they have confidence in the way services are being delivered. Some of the topics discussed to date include –

- Gas Servicing and Repairs
- Out of Hours Service
- Complaints process and
- Development of the Central Voids Team.

### Capital Improvement Works

The Manager in charge of the Capital Improvement Works to existing council homes meets with tenants to discuss –

- budget spend
- updates on ongoing capital works
- The Street Environmental Improvements Projects (SEIP)
- Assisted Decoration Scheme.

### Tenant Participation Development Working Group (TPDWG)

Members meet to ensure TP stays high on the services agenda looking at ways of engaging with more tenants and ensuring that Housing Services meet their legal obligation to consult with their tenants.

Members meet online monthly and have spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the TP Strategy document. The members of the TPDWG have also discussed:

- The Spine and Ribs Customer Journey - how to help customers navigate the service seamlessly and easily.
- TP moving to digital
- Changes to the Housing Allocations Policy and Choice Based Lettings
- ARC Submission and Action Plan
- Developing a Lending Library
- Facebook Group

### Tenant Led Inspection Update Dampness & Condensation

Another scheduled piece of work was completed online in June with. tenant inspectors meeting with the services Repairs Manager (via WebEx), who gave an update on the inspection into Dampness & Condensation Action Plan.

The inspectors were reassured that work had been carried out to continue with this inspection's recommendations despite such difficult times. So far ten of the fourteen recommendations had been completed and work was underway to address the remaining four.



The inspectors found the meeting very positive and commented on the commitment given by the service to meet their recommendations and to develop them further. A final 'sign off' meeting has been arranged for June 2021 to complete this inspection.

## Learning and Development

*This year saw 10 learning opportunities for tenants carried out by officers across the service.*

This year, our customers have still had the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge relating to the services we deliver. This allows them to fully embrace tenant participation and carry out scrutiny exercises with a strong knowledge base.

This year, the TP Team hosted the following sessions:

- **Briefing on Housing Scotland Act 2014** -An overview of the changes in legislation which could impact on a tenancy regarding:
  - Sublet all or part of your house to someone else
  - Assign your tenancy (pass the tenancy on to someone else)
  - Become a joint tenant with someone else and
  - The changes around the rules to Succession (take over) a Scottish Secure Tenancy on the death of the tenant.
- **Housing Options** – Tenants were taken through the various types of housing solutions available in West Lothian. These include: Social housing, private renting, local registered social landlords and buying options.
- **New Build Terminology and New Build process** – Colleagues from Strategy and Development were invited to discuss various topics around the New Build process from a tendering process, site layouts, overcoming difficult issues, through to the hand over when builds are complete. Customers were informed about the complete journey and found the session to be very informative and useful for scrutinising the service going forward.
- **Land Assembly** – following on from the New Build training event, tenants went on to learn about the process of identifying land which could be used as a new build site. They were taken through the desktop study to the full, invasive site investigation> onto title checks and the local history. Tenants were surprised at the lengthy process taking place before a new build site can be agreed.
- **Scottish Housing Investment Programme (SHIP)** – Sets out strategic investment priorities for affordable housing over a five-year period. Each local authority has an obligation to prepare this strategic document in consultation with their tenants.
- **Housing Application Online Form** – Tenants were involved in testing and reviewing the new online application form to apply for a house. Their feedback was taken on board and included in the final version of the form
- **Out of Hours Repair Training Session** – Tenants were taken through the process for dealing with requests for repairs, out with normal working hours, with the Repairs Manager providing an overview of the service and how repairs are categorised and carried out to ensure customers are satisfied with the service.
- **Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP)** – Tenants were given regular updates throughout the year on the challenges and progress made in delivering the Council's RRT plan, with the aim of improving service to homeless customers and focussing on the prevention of homelessness across West Lothian.
- **Choice Based Lettings** – An overview of a new proposed method of letting houses in West Lothian, was provided. This method could potentially give customers greater choice in choosing where the stay as properties become available, with properties being advertised and applicants bidding for these if they wish.

## Consultation Events

*This year, five consultation events took place*

This year, saw some important consultations from the Scottish Government, which our tenant representatives were keen to take part in. to help shape future housing services.

As a result, the TP Team arranged online meetings where tenants met with experienced officers who assisted in supporting them to understand what was being asked of them and reply to the various consultation questions. The consultations participated in were:

- **Modifying Local Connections** -Tenants were invited to join us online to discuss and respond to the Scottish Governments Consultation. Tenant representatives were able to discuss and complete the online consultation and submit it on behalf of tenants of West Lothian Council.
- **New Build Heat Standard** - In February, tenants discussed the Scottish Government Consultation on the New Build Heat Standard Scoping Consultation. The Government explained they “are committed to ensuring that, from 2024, new buildings must use heating systems which produce zero direct emissions at the point of use and that they were currently developing a New Build Heat Standard.” Tenants were joined by a senior member of the Development Team who took them through the consultation paper and helped them share their views. These were, in turn, sent back to the Scottish Government to help develop this new standard.

### Topical Consultation

Further consultation events took place throughout the year on specific topics and in particular local areas. These included:

- Consultation carried out where tenants were asked their views on the new Housing Allocations Policy. Senior Manager, Katy McBride, explained the new policy and pointing system in great detail. She went on to update tenants on the feedback received from the Housing Allocation Policy Consultation that had been carried out with applicants and the implementation of the new Applicants Online Portal which tenants had tested previously.
- Tenants in the Kirkhill area of Broxburn were consulted on the proposal of erecting a playpark for young children within the new build site. Housing Staff and colleagues from NET’s Land and Countryside Services contacted local residents to gather their views and opinions on this proposal.

## Additional TP Activities

*This year, there were a number of additional TP Activities which took place over and above our traditional activities.*

### TP Facebook Group

The TP Team continue to see a steady flow in the number of tenants following posts on the TP Facebook Group Page.

The team post useful information from various sources such as Scottish Government, NHS and the Council's Corporate website as well as queries from tenants and light-hearted quotes and phrases. The team are working with the Tenant Participation Development Working Group to develop a programme of posts and ensure they have a method of communicating with fellow tenants.

The current Facebook insights show:

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| There are 339 members   |
| 413 posts were made in the past year  |
| Post reach, on average, 45% of members<br><i>*it is likely this has fallen due to the changes in how Facebook display their timelines</i> |
| There are 279 active members  |



### Connecting Scotland Programme

In the first phase of this programme, Housing Services were fortunate in receiving funding from the Scottish Government to help service users get online by providing an internet mobile device and support to develop digital skills. There were different types of criteria for people to qualify for a device, including extremely vulnerable and those at risk of severe illness.

Despite promoting this programme on our Facebook Group and through local office involvement, only a handful of tenants took up this offer, but they now have the ability to regularly communicate with us and others using their new device.

### National Excellence Awards

This annual event is hosted by the Tenant Information Services (TIS) to recognise and celebrate housing organisations, staff, volunteers, tenants, residents and community groups who are leading the way in making a difference within the Scottish Social Housing Sector. Categories honour excellence in everything from partnership working and scrutiny practice, to digital innovation and community regeneration.

The 2020 award ceremony brought its challenges as the event was hosted online. However, undeterred, TIS managed to present a fun and entertaining event in a professional manner.

Our Tenant Inspectors were a finalist in the category of Danny Mullen Scrutiny Excellence Award this year, but were pipped at the post by the worthy winner, Kingdom Housing Association.

## **The TP Team**

Home working brought its challenges for staff in that their normal daily workload changed and they found themselves supporting colleagues from the various services, helping with pieces of work and ensuring critical reporting was in place and updated efficiently. Here is some of the additional work they carried out behind the scenes:

### **Covid-19 Tenant Welfare Calling Campaign**

When lockdown started, Housing, Customer & Building Services seen it as of vital importance to ensure our tenants were okay and had support where they needed it. As such, the decision was made to reach out and speak to every one of our tenants.

This was a mammoth task so was split out amongst the service; Housing Officers were tasked with calling, texting or emailing all of their house files and preparing reports as to how our tenants were managing during the challenging time. The TP Team also took the opportunity to carry out a 'spring clean' of their systems.

This is a great example of the partnership work that goes on across the service.

### **Performance and Change (P&C) Meetings**

Weekly Team Meetings have given TP team members the opportunity to meet their colleagues via WebEx and catch up with workloads and priorities. As a close-knit team, where work can cross over various team members, this catch up time allows everyone the chance to find out what is going on in the service and helps with ongoing work.

Direct communication amongst teams has been of vital importance during the pandemic as everyone is working from home. These weekly sessions also help us keep in touch and ensure everyone is looking after themselves and not feeling too isolated.

### **Research and General Admin**

The TP Team were asked to look at different means of communication through social media and make recommendations to help improve engagement with tenants from the comfort of their own homes. The findings were pulled together in a report for the Service Development Officer and Senior Managers and we are pursuing various leads to promote online participation in the future.

*If you are interested in finding out more about Tenant Participation in West Lothian, please contact the TP Team, who will be able to provide any information you need.*

*Email us at:- [TP@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:TP@westlothian.gov.uk)*

*or call our Customer Service Centre on 01506 280000 and ask for the TP Team*

