

PARAGON HOUSING ASSOCIATION

POLICY: TENANT PARTICIPATION

POLICY AREA: HOUSING MANAGEMENT

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1. Background

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (2001 Act)

The 2001 Act included provisions giving rights to tenants in relation to tenant participation and consultation and introduced the registration of tenant's organisations (RTOs) and gave RTOs the statutory rights to participation and a recognised role in the tenant participation process.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 (2010 Act)

The 2010 Act introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter (The Charter) in 2012 and replaced the previous performance standards which landlords were required to meet under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. It sets out sixteen different "outcomes" and "standards" that landlords should be working to achieve. Outcome 3 covers participation and states:

"Social landlords manage their business so that:

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decision at a level they feel comfortable with."

This outcome describes what landlords should achieve by meeting their statutory duties on tenant participation. It covers how social landlords gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants; how

they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help support tenants and other customers to build up their capacity for effective involvement.

“Other customers” refers to adjoining homeowners, housing applicants and other customers who are not a tenant.

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) will monitor the performance of landlords against the Charter Outcomes and has set indicators that will be used to monitor that performance.

The Association will seek to involve registered tenant organisations, tenants and other service users in the self-assessment of the Association’s performance.

2. Aims

The Association aims are to:

- Continue to support tenants groups and encourage new ones, formal or informal.
- Continue to improve communication by providing clear information and listening to tenants and other customers’ ideas and views.
- Ensure that all printed information sent to our tenants and other customers will be clearly written in “plain English”, jargon free and in other formats, that meets the individual’s needs on request.
- Ensure that all tenants’ groups are kept informed and updated
- Ensure that opportunities are created to encourage interested individual tenants and other customers to participate.
- Ensure that tenants and other customers are given reasonable time for consultation and participation.
- Maintain a Public Register of Registered Tenant Organisations
- Provide training opportunities for staff, elected members/committee members, tenants and other customers to develop the skills necessary to assist partnership working.
- Hold a register of interested tenants who can be contacted to participate in working groups, surveys or other consultation exercises.
- Support our tenants and other customers to scrutinise the Association’s performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes.

3. Tenant Participation Strategy

The Tenant Participation Strategy document contains an action plan which sets out the Association’s objectives for tenant participation. It shows how the Association intends to go about taking account of the views of tenants and other customers, and involving them in the self-assessment and scrutiny process. Copies of this document are available from the Associations office and also on its web site. (www.paragonha.org.uk)

4. Definition of Participation

The Association defines participation as follows:

“Tenant participation is 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 services.”

5. Types of Participation

The Association believes that tenants and other service users should be able to decide on:

- The issues they want to be involved in
- The level at which they wish to be involved, and
- Whether they want to be involved as individuals or groups

The Association will therefore provide a range of methods to encourage tenant involvement. This will enable tenants to influence:

- Policies and standards that affect them
- Decisions that affect their areas/communities
- The service they receive as individual users
- The scrutiny of the Association’s performance against the Charter

6. Membership of the Association/Management Committee

Membership of the Association is open to tenants, prospective tenants, owners and other members of the community including local authorities. It costs £1 for membership and benefits include involvement in the running of the affairs of the Association, the right to stand for election to the Management Committee and vote in its elections. Members must abide by the Rules of the Association.

An unpaid Management Committee (elected by the members) controls the Association who is responsible for policy matters. There can be up to 17 members of the Management Committee and these places are filled by the various sections of the membership.

Tenant Category	-	9 members
General Category	-	5 members
Local Authority	-	1 representative from each of the Falkirk, Clackmannanshire & Stirling Councils

7. Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs)

The Association recognises that registered tenant organisations provide a point of contact, act as a means for tenant's views and criticisms to be represented to the Association. They allow communications on a collective basis as well as information being conveyed between the individual tenant and the Association.

In accordance with Section 53(3) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 the Association will maintain a register of registered tenant organisations meeting the criteria set out by the Scottish Ministers. The Register will be available for public inspections

Staff will:

- Inform RTOs if there are projects or any changes in service delivery in their area.
- Invite them to participate in reviews of relevant policies
- Offer support and information to help new tenant organisations to set up and become registered.
- Support existing registered tenant associations by offering advice and information.
- Given reasonable notice endeavour to attend meetings if requested.

The Association has a separate procedure which details the criteria set by the Scottish Ministers to be satisfied by a tenant organisation seeking registration. It outlines how staff will deal with an application to the register and also covers the de-registration process.

The Management Committee will give final approval for registration and de-registration of tenant organisations.

Registration/De-registration Appeals

Tenant organisations have a right of appeal against decisions taken about them by the Association. In these cases the Association's complaints procedure is followed.

An organisation may appeal against the Association's decision to:

- Refuse to register an organisation.
- Remove a Registered Tenant Organisation from the register.
- Refuse to remove a Registered Tenant Organisation from the register following a request from the organisation.

Following the completion of the Association's complaints procedure, an organisation has the right to appeal to Scottish Ministers. The Regulation and Tenant Priorities Team at the Scottish Government will consider such appeals on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Appeals should only be made to Scottish Ministers after the Associations internal complaints procedures have been exhausted.

8. Focus Group/Policy Consultation Group/Tenant Scrutiny Group

The Association will maintain a register of tenants who have expressed an interest in joining the Focus Group/Policy Consultation Group/Tenant Scrutiny Group and tenants will be actively encouraged to join.

At policy reviews comments will be sought from those tenants on the Policy Consultation registered and feedback used to inform the review.

9. Consultation

The Association will not limit itself to using one method of consultation but will seek to use a variety of methods, for example, meetings with Focus Group/Policy Consultation Group/Tenant Scrutiny Group, questionnaires, surveys, suggestion schemes, discussions' with tenants' organisations and day-to-day contact with service users.

Contracts

The Association will actively involve tenants and where applicable owners in the design and quality of specification for improvement works.

Post contract surveys will be carried out and the results will be reported to the Management Committee and influence future contract work.

Community Regeneration

Community Regeneration is about tackling poverty, deprivation and social exclusion within particular geographical areas, or within particular demographical groups of people.

The Association's Regeneration Strategy sets out our approach to community regeneration based on a local and long-term commitment linked to involving tenants, residents and the local community.

Annual Return on the Charter

At the end of May each year starting in May 2014 the Association will provide the SHR with the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC). This will provide information on performance in achieving the outcomes and standards in the Charter. The SHR will use the ARC to report publicly on the Association's progress in achieving the Charter outcomes and standards and also use this to inform its regulatory assessments.

By the end of the August of each year the SHR will publish a report for all social landlords including the Association with key information from the ARC. This will be available for tenants and other service users through the SHR's website. The Association will also make this available in appropriate ways to all tenants and other customers.

Landlord reporting on the Charter to tenants

By no later than the October of each year the Association will report its performance in achieving or progressing towards the Charter outcomes and standards to its tenants and other service users.

The performance report will include:

- an assessment of performance in delivering each of the Charter outcomes and standards which are relevant to the Association.
- relevant comparisons – through time, these will include comparisons with previous years, with other landlords and with national performance; and
- how and when the Association intends to address areas for improvement.

Tenants who have expressed an interest in becoming involved in the scrutiny process will become involved in:

- Reviewing the results of the relevant indicators to be reported in the Landlord Report
- Give useful feedback with their views on the style, format and usefulness of the report.

10. Information and Advice

The Association recognises that exchange of information is the most basic form of tenant participation. Information is provided to tenants and other customers for two reasons:

- To help them make the best use of the services available.
- To enable them to influence policy.

The Association will provide clear information on its services to all tenants and other customers as it understands that effective participation relies on the establishment of clear lines of communication between the Association and its service users.

Tenant participation is also about providing and arranging necessary advice and support to tenants and other customers. Staff will signpost them to appropriate agencies where we are unable to provide the type of service required by them. They will advise them of the availability of these services from other agencies and making referrals, as appropriate

11. Resources

The Association recognises the importance of resourcing tenant participation adequately and is committed to ensuring budget is provided annually.

Financial Support for Tenant Organisations

a) Registered Tenant Organisations

Registered tenant organisations are an essential basis for tenant participation and financial support is very important. We will provide a range of grants for registered tenant organisations. These will include:

1) Start Up Grants

We will pay half fees for new associations trying to get established. New registered tenant organisations will qualify for start-up grants of £78.90.

2) Administration Grant

To help with running costs, established groups will be able to apply for an annual grant. This will only be paid to registered tenant organisations (RTO). A registered tenant organisation must meet the registration criteria set out in the RTO registration procedures.

The level of grant paid will depend upon the number of members the organisation has at the date they make the grant application.

Up to 25 members	£ 121.29
26 -100	£ 247.81
101 - 200	£ 334.46
201 - 300	£ 521.71
301 - 400	£ 667.73
401 – 500	£ 834.97
Over 500 members	£1001.02

Membership will be regarded as the total number of Association properties covered by the organisation. The amount of grant will depend on the proportion of Association tenanted properties represented by the group. If tenants cease to be in the majority the Association may continue to provide grant funding. In order to qualify for a grant the Association's tenants must be represented by the RTO this means that they should be invited to open meetings, receive regular Newsletters from the RTO and be invited to participate in any consultation meetings being held. The Association reserves the right to refuse to pay a grant to an RTO if its tenants do not feel that they are being represented by the RTO.

The level of grant will be increased annually in accordance with the level of inflation used for the rent increase purposes.

3) Training for Registered Tenant Organisations

The Association recognises that tenant organisations must be independent. They must be able to make the informed decisions and to understand our policies and procedures.

The Association will offer training on a variety of subjects:

- skills training for new associations and new association members
- our tenant participation policy
- committee skills training
- advice and assistance on constitutions

Community Projects

Staff may be approached from various sources for requests for payments towards good causes. The Association will only support appropriate organisations that work within our area of operation.

12. Equal Opportunities

The Association will comply with the Equalities Act 2010 and aims to promote equal opportunities and will ensure that its staff act in a manner which will not discriminate against any individual, household or group.

Staff will ensure equal access to information for all minority groups and those with language difficulties, special needs, disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

In accordance with the registration criteria Registered Tenant Organisations require to have a written constitution that is available for inspection by the public. The constitution should set out their commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities.

13. Complaints

The Association is committed to providing high-quality customer services. It accepts that despite the best efforts of staff, problems may arise from time to time. If its customers feel dissatisfied with its policies, the way these are implemented or the level and quality of service provided, they may wish to make a complaint.

Should such a situation arise staff are committed to investigating the matter fully and ensuring a satisfactory solution is achieved as quickly as possible.

The Association has adopted the SPSO's complaints handling procedure which sets out the standard approach to handling complaints which is to be used across the housing sector.

Details of our Complaints Policy can be obtained from the office or from our website. (www.paragonha.org.uk)

14. Monitoring

The Association is committed to providing a quality service that responds to our tenants needs.

Tenants and other service users will be involved in the Associations' self-assessment and reporting of performance.

We will:

- Review the full Tenant Participation Strategy every three years.
- Review the Tenant Participation Strategy Action Plan with our partners and tenants annually;
- Provide the Scottish Housing Regulator through the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) with key performance information on progressing towards or achieving the Charter outcomes and standards;
- Involve tenants and other service users in reviewing the results of the relevant indicators to be reported in the Landlord Report
- Report to the Management Committee annually on the number of tenant's organisations which have:
 - Applied for registration
 - Been refused registration
 - Number of appeals and their outcome
 - Number of tenant organisations de-registered and the reason.

15. Review

This full policy will be reviewed every five years. The level of grant will be increased annually in accordance with the level of inflation used for the rent increase purposes