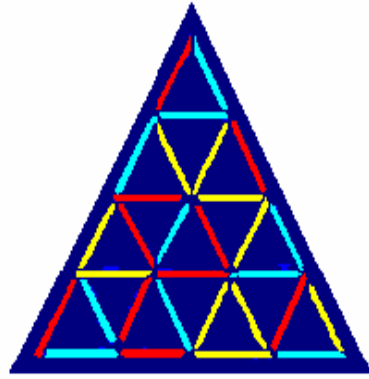


Tenant Participation Policy and
Strategy
Approved by COM 24 June 2005



CAIRN
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

**TENANT PARTICIPATION POLICY AND
STRATEGY**

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SECTION 1

Introduction

This document firmly establishes tenant participation as a key priority for Cairn HA. This strategy will change and develop as tenant participation embeds into the culture of the Association.

Tenant participation and consultation is an ongoing and open-ended process that needs to be reactive to the changing needs of tenants and the communities where they live. This strategy has been developed with tenants, Committee of Management and members of staff. It will be reviewed at least every three years although it is likely that this flexible and “living” document will require more regular review.

This policy and strategy takes into account the wide geographic spread of homes and the range of tenancy types within Cairn HA. By offering a wide range of opportunities and ways to participate, the Association hopes to make it easier for all tenants to have a say in how the Association operates.

This Strategy is designed to inform all tenants about:

- How to become involved in making decisions about services provided by the Association.
- How the Association will inform and involve tenants in future plans.
- How the Association will communicate and consult with tenants.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, placed upon the Association some legal requirements related to tenant participation. One of these requirements was that the Association must produce a Tenant Participation Policy. A second requirement was that the Association must produce a Tenant Participation Strategy linked to that Policy. For ease of use, and to ensure that the Association’s Tenant Participation Policy is a “living” document, this document combines both Policy and Strategy. Therefore, throughout this document the term “Strategy” will be used to denote an integrated Policy and Strategy document.

This Strategy has been produced reflecting the good practice and achievements which already exist within the tenant/Association relationship.

SECTION 2

Aims and key principles

The Association is committed to encouraging a culture of mutual respect between the Committee of Management, staff and tenants. This Tenant Participation Strategy encourages equal opportunities by ensuring that tenants are not excluded from actively participating on the basis of limited mobility; age; political opinion; race; colour; gender; sexual orientation, visual or hearing impairment.

The Association will:

- ❖ Foster a culture of mutual trust, respect, and partnership between tenants, Committee of Management and staff at all levels, working towards a common goal of creating more housing and better housing conditions and services.
- ❖ Facilitate a continuous process in which information, ideas and power are shared, a common understanding of problems is pursued and a consensus on solutions is reached.
- ❖ Allow all parties to contribute to the issues in question and assist in ensuring that participants are well informed on such matters.
- ❖ Recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
- ❖ Resource tenants' organisations to assist with meeting costs for administration, training and support.
- ❖ Empower tenants to take an active role, long or short term, in the design and delivery of their housing and associated services.
- ❖ Enable tenants and recognised groups to be empowered and make informed decisions. They will have opportunities to build on knowledge and skills.
- ❖ Encourage tenants to influence the decision making process, on an individual or collective basis.

SECTION 3

Statement of Action

In order to meet the key principles, it is essential that the following statement of action will be enacted:

The Association, in partnership with tenants will:

- ❖ Make Information to tenants easily accessible in plain English and in any other languages, on request, and in formats that meet individual needs.
- ❖ Ensure that all tenants' groups are kept informed and updated.
- ❖ Ensure that opportunities are created to encourage individual tenants to participate.
- ❖ Raise awareness of the benefits of tenant participation amongst tenants, staff and Committee of Management members.
- ❖ Ensure that tenants are given adequate time and information to consider any proposals for change.
- ❖ Agree levels of support and resources for any recognised tenants' or residents' groups.
- ❖ Maintain in each local office, a Public Register of Tenant Organisations.
- ❖ Provide training opportunities for staff and tenants to develop the skills necessary to assist partnership working.
- ❖ Improve the geographic spread of tenant participation
- ❖ Increase the membership levels of existing tenants' groups and facilitate communication between each organisation
- ❖ Encourage all forms of participation. Including, court meetings in sheltered housing, tenants' panels, themed events and design team meetings.
- ❖ Hold a register of interested tenants who can be contacted to participate in focus groups, surveys or other consultation exercises.
- ❖ Actively promote tenant participation opportunities through all Association newsletters.

SECTION 4

Keeping Tenants Informed

The Association is legally obliged to outline the processes it will employ to keep tenants informed.

Before tenants can decide how they wish to be involved they need good quality information, which is accurate, up-to-date and easily understood. This Strategy recognises that some tenants will actively join a tenants' group and participate collectively in the strategic development of the services. Others, however, may be content with the opportunity to comment on the quality of service by responding to questionnaires and surveys or by attending locally held "themed" meetings.

The Association will provide information in different formats on request. As a minimum, the Association will provide for all tenants:

- A clear and concise Tenancy Agreement
- A regular localised Tenants' Newsletter - *Cairn Attention*
- Leaflets and Guides on services provided
- An Association web site
- Individual letters related to a range of service issues
- Home visits to discuss services or matters related to individual tenancies

In addition, the Association will make provision to run open days, exhibitions and tenant conferences on specific major issues. These events will be designed to inform tenants and to provide an opportunity for tenants to play an active participation role in Association policy and services development.

The Association will publish all Policies and Procedures and make copies of these available to all tenants, on request.

Tenancy agreement

All tenants are provided with a copy of their Tenancy Agreement. This sets out the rights and responsibilities of tenants and the Association.

Tenants Newsletters and Leaflets

The Association will distribute a general newsletter for all tenants, *Cairn Attention*, at least once each year. This will contain general housing services advice and information about new initiatives within the Association and information on the Association's performance across a number of key performance areas. This newsletter will have a local perspective on the front page of every issue.

In addition, the Association will distribute newsletters and leaflets related to specific events or issues to the relevant tenant group. For example, sheltered housing tenants will receive at least one Housing Support and Care newsletter each year.

The Association will aim to produce newsletters with tenants' groups or individual tenants as appropriate.

Policies and Procedures

The Association will develop clear and concise policies and procedures related to the services provided to tenants, which are clear and concise. These will be developed in partnership with tenants' groups and individual tenants. Tenants can request a copy of these policies and procedures at any local office. Copies of policies and procedures will be provided to tenants who request them, free of charge.

Leaflets, Guidance and Information Packs

The Association will provide leaflets, guidance and information packs on its policies and procedures and services. These will be in plain English and will be made available in other languages or in other formats on request. These leaflets will be available at all local offices.

Cairn HA Web Site

A web site giving full details of the Association, local offices, staff structure and information on ways for tenants to comment on services and get involved, will be accessible to tenants on www.cairnha.com

Open days and exhibitions

When the Association wishes to propose a new initiative or development that might affect the services we provide to tenants, open days and exhibitions will be held in local venues. Tenants will be invited to these and will be given the opportunity to express their views and have these recorded.

Individual letters to tenants

On many occasions, tenants will receive individual letters from officers of the Association. These letters will be clear and concise and in plain English and signed by the person responsible for the letter. The letters will contain contact details and the office address and telephone number.

Personal visits

When it is necessary for an officer of the Association to make a home visit to a tenant, the tenant or tenant's representative will be given prior warning and a

convenient date and time arranged. Where a tenant, or their representative does not respond to requests for a home visit, an officer may call unannounced.

Any officer making a home visit must show their Association Identity Badge.

Conferences

The Association may hold mini conferences for tenants across Scotland.

SECTION 5

Listening to Tenants and ways to participate

The Association is committed to tenant participation and working in partnership with tenants. To help meet this commitment, the Association will ensure that staff are given support and regular training. The Association will designate an officer within the Service Development Team, to act as tenant participation lead officer.

This Strategy recognises that tenants who have particular issues, concerns or problems that they wish to raise with the Association can do so themselves directly or through the local tenants' group or recognised tenants' representative(s).

The Association will maintain a register of individual tenants who have stated a desire to be consulted on housing service issues. This register will be regularly reviewed and new members will be actively sought by the Association.

The Association actively seeks feedback on service delivery from all its tenants. To enable tenants to attend meetings, the Association will make provision to meet reasonable care and transport needs. To make sure that all tenants have an opportunity to have their views heard and are included at an early stage of policy development and procedural review, a range of consultation techniques will be used, including the following:

- Local tenant meetings
- Local themed meetings
- Specific issue meetings
- Home visits
- Door-to-door surveys
- Postal surveys
- Telephone surveys
- Focus groups
- Road Shows
- Local conferences
- Local area meetings of interested tenants
- Local meetings held jointly by the Association and a recognised tenants' group

The Association will consult tenants on a wide range of service delivery and policy development issues, including the following:

- Responsive Repairs and Planned Maintenance programmes.
- Policies and procedures related to allocations, estate management, tenancy agreements, tenant participation, vacant property management, anti social behaviour and data protection and information provision.

- Modernisation and new build developments, including the appointment of design teams where existing tenants live adjacent to the new stock.
- Rent and service charges setting and review.
- Complaints procedure.

Participation issues

The Association believes that active tenant participation can benefit the quality of the service received by tenants and the wider community. The Association also recognises and supports tenants' groups who will work in partnership with the Association to improve the quality of life for all tenants.

Key decisions– a timetable for participation

The Association will produce a timetable that illustrates when key decisions are taken. For example, in relation to rent setting or investment spending. This timetable will allow tenants' groups and individual tenants to receive appropriate information and to consider any training needs they might have to allow them to take an informed and active role in the decision making process.

Where possible, groups and individuals will be consulted over a 2-month period on a particular issue or topic. However, on occasion, this timescale may be shorter. Where consultations are generated by an external agency, for example the Scottish Executive, it might not always be possible for the Association to give a 2-month consultation period. In addition, in accordance with the Association's financial planning processes and Committee of Management schedule, the rent review consultation period will be one month.

SECTION 6

Responding to representations made by groups

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduces a duty on Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords to respond to any issues or concerns raised by registered tenants' groups. The Association will attend, on request, any meeting held by a registered tenants' group or any other tenant group, provided that where possible, two weeks notice is given.

Some issues raised by tenants may be resolved through the provision of information, others may need more time and consideration before they can be resolved. A request for an officer to attend a tenants' meeting must detail the nature of the issues and concerns in order that the appropriate officer can attend.

SECTION 7

Resources and Support for Tenants' Groups

The Association will keep tenants' groups informed and involved. It will work in partnership with groups and organise consultation on areas of mutual interest or concern. The Association will actively encourage the formation of groups and support them to register but recognises that some groups may not wish to register. The Association will continue to work and support non registered groups.

The Association will provide support for new and existing tenants' groups including the following:

- Provision or hire of meeting venue.
- Assistance with the production of promotional material and photocopying.
- Staff attendance at meetings – where possible, tenants should give 10 days notice with a full outline of any issues to be raised.
- Training
- Advice and support relevant to the tenant participation process.
- Links and information from other organisations. For example, TPAS, Communities Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Funding

The Association will fund Registered Tenants' Groups. Groups who do not wish to register will also have access to funding.

Registered and recognised tenants' groups can apply for start-up and annual running cost or special project grants. Start-up grants will be awarded according to the size of tenant body represented by the group. The minimum start-up grant awarded will be £100. The maximum start-up grant awarded will be £500. (See Appendix 1) All tenants' groups will be required to have bank/building society accounts set up in the groups' name. Funds will be paid to the group in the form of an Association cheque with the "payee" being the registered or recognised group name.

Tenants' groups must keep financial records and statements on an *income and expenditure* basis and retain these in accordance with the groups' constitution or other agreement related to receipt of the grant.

Groups can apply each year for a top-up grant. This funding request should be specific about the projects or events the group would like to undertake in the coming year and the amount of grant they would need for these plans.

Tenants' groups will be required to have their accounts checked (audited) annually and sent to the Association for approval. The Finance Department of the Association will provide the audit service for a tenants' group, if requested to do so.

The Association can request to see a group's accounts at any point.

Groups can apply for additional funds to cover the costs of Conferences, training events or other related needs.

Grant application forms are available at Association offices and staff will assist with the completion of these forms where requested.

Training

The Association recognises the value of training for both tenants and staff. Training can be arranged either in-house or by an outside agency. The Association is a member of TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) who provide training for tenants and staff.

Training needs can be identified for whole tenants' groups or for individuals within groups. Good quality, relevant training courses on tenant participation or other topics can be identified by officers or members of a tenants' group.

SECTION 8

Strategy Monitoring and Review

The Association wishes to examine and evaluate what is being achieved through this Strategy. This review of the effectiveness of the Strategy in meeting its stated aims and objectives, will allow the tenant participation practices and ethos of the Association to be continually improved.

This Strategy will be comprehensively reviewed at least every 3 years. However, as new initiatives and ideas are developed, these can be incorporated into the Strategy before the full review date.

Tenant Satisfaction Survey work will test the effectiveness of the Strategy and will seek tenants' views and ideas for improvement.

Tenants' groups will be encouraged to constantly evaluate and review the Strategy with a view to continuous improvement.

SECTION 9

Register of Tenants' Organisations

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced a duty on the Association to keep a register of Tenant Groups. The Association has established a Register of Tenant Organisations and this is available for inspection, on request, at all local offices.

How to register

The Association will provide a registration form. All tenants' groups must have the following to meet the registration criteria:

- Formal Constitution
- Equal Opportunities Statement
- Open Membership Policy
- Elected Office Bearers
- Minutes of all meetings which are available for inspection
- Accounts which are audited on an annual basis. This need not be done through an accountant, the Association can offer this service to groups.
- Open meetings that are advertised and accessible to all tenants in their area
- A clearly defined area of operation

The Association recognises and seeks to support both formally constituted groups, as well as more informal groups that emerge in response to a particular issue or groups who do not wish to register. Informal groups will receive support "in kind". For example, staff support to get started or help with photocopying. Any informal group that wishes financial support should contact the Head of Services in the local office.

Annual updates

Tenants' groups are required to re-register annually.

Refused registration

The Association can refuse registration to a group or remove a group from the register if:

- A group no longer meets the criteria for registration
- Has failed to comply with its constitution
- The group ceases to exist or does not operate
- There is a mutual agreement between the landlord and the tenants organisation to remove the group from the register

Equal opportunities in Tenants' Groups

The Association encourages tenants to adopt an inclusive approach to involving all minority groups in their Communities.

Tenants' groups who act in a discriminatory or offensive way towards minority groups will be subject to the following sanctions:

- Withdrawal of registration
- Withdrawal of funding
- Withdrawal of support in kind (for example, use of premises or officer attendance at meetings)

If a group is refused registration or registration is removed, that group can firstly appeal to the Executive Director of Operations. If the Group is not satisfied with the decision, an appeals system for the involvement of the Committee of Management will be made available, and, thereafter, an appeal can be made to Communities Scotland who will act as independent mediator.

Register of actively interested Tenants

This Strategy recognises that joining a local tenants' group does not suit all tenants. The Association will therefore keep a register of actively interested tenants who have indicated that they would like to be consulted over issues that may affect them.

To register an interest, tenants can request a registration form from any local office, or at any sheltered housing court.