

Housing Strategy and Development Briefing Note

Housing and Community Safety Services

Consultation Toolkit

March 2015



Introduction

Welcome to the latest in a series of regular briefings prepared by the Housing Strategy Team on the big issues concerning housing. These briefings will be shared with staff, tenants and elected members and keep everyone up to date with regards the ever changing policy context that we are operating within.

The Housing Strategy section is responsible for:-

- Supporting the development of a culture of continuous improvement in Housing services and to facilitate opportunities to excel;
- Developing and implementing effective strategies for Housing and Community Safety Services within West Dunbartonshire;
- Developing the Council's housing strategy to ensure that it supports the delivery of our strategic priorities;
- Performance management within Housing and Community Safety services; and
- Promoting effective management and the involvement of tenants across all aspects of Housing Services.

For further information on Housing Strategy please telephone 01389 737889 or e-mail: housing.strategy@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Briefing Note

Housing and Community Services Consultation Toolkit

March 2015

Introduction:

A new consultation toolkit has been developed to support all housing service areas improve and evidence tenant involvement. The toolkit has been agreed by the Housing Management Team and will be implemented from 1st April 2015. Briefing sessions to service areas about the toolkit are available on request.

Background:

During the development of the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy (2013-16) a comprehensive review of existing practice was carried out. The review highlighted that although there was some good practice, the Council's approach to involving tenants and recording the outcome of tenant involvement was not consistent across all housing services.

A key aim of the Strategy is to improve the culture and practice of involving tenants across all of housing services. The strategy action plan sets out a number of actions to support this aim, one of which was the production of a new consultation toolkit to support staff across housing services.

Key Points:

- The toolkit is a short, sharp planning aid designed to assist housing staff who are responsible for planning, carrying out and recording tenant engagement (consultation and or participation) activity.
- Key areas of good practice and areas to avoid are highlighted.
- Opportunities to collect equalities information are included in the toolkit.
- The toolkit has simple planning and recording sheets which should support and streamline engagement processes, avoid extra tasks or poor decision making.
- From 1st April 2015 housing service areas will use the consultation toolkit when carrying out consultation and participation activities with tenants and tenant organisations and our other customers.
- From 1st April 2015 the consultation recording sheet will be submitted as a background paper to Council Committee reports where consultation/participation contributes to the decision making process.
- The consultation toolkit will be made available on the intranet but in the meantime is available by contacting the Housing Strategy Team.

- The toolkit will be reviewed by the Tenant Participation Team in March 2016, staff using the toolkit are encouraged to feedback their thoughts or suggestions for change and improvement.

How can we improve?

The toolkit will support housing services to improve tenant involvement ensuring a consistent approach across housing services and a better outcome for tenants.

Service areas using the toolkit can support and evidence tenant involvement as part of their annual self-assessment now required under the Scottish Social Housing Charter, in the Charter report to tenants and to the West Dunbartonshire Scrutiny Panel.

The Council will be able to demonstrate good practice to our tenants and the Regulator by including the Consultation Recording Sheet as a background paper to Committee Papers.

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Consultation Toolkit for Housing and Community Safety Services



Introduction

Involving tenants and other service users in decisions about their homes and communities is now accepted as normal practice within social housing.

The Tenant Participation Strategy outlines key legislative and regulatory requirements to involve and consult our customers; however our commitment to consultation goes beyond statutory requirements. Our services and policy development should be based on a sound knowledge and understanding of what our customers need and want.

Good practice in consultation should be carried out by all parts of Housing and Community Safety Services and is not the sole responsibility of the Tenant Participation Service. This toolkit is designed to ensure that your consultation is meaningful for both the Council and customers taking part, that it reflects good practice and that it can be evidenced.

We have a duty to consult individual tenants and tenants and residents' groups about

- proposals for managing housing and the standard of service we provide
- proposals to sell, transfer or demolish our housing
- rent and rent policy, development (specification for capital work, design and layout of new developments, environmental proposals), managing housing (allocations policy, repairs and maintenance service, managing estates, managing properties, tenancy agreements, dealing with anti-social behaviour, developing estate-management area action plans)

We have agreed to give tenants and tenant organisations at least eight weeks to respond to consultation. If we are unable to provide an 8 week period, we must ask for permission from the Head of Housing and Community Safety. If permission is granted, we will explain why the consultation must be carried out within a shorter timescale.

Before you start – Is it Consultation?

Consultation with the public raises expectations. Make sure that you know the difference between providing information and consultation.

If you are simply providing information then be careful not to describe what you're doing as consultation. Consultation implies **views and opinions are sought** and that the views given are **going to be considered before** a decision is made.

The more time you take to plan your consultation at the start the better the outcome. The steps below take you through some of the key stages of the planning sheet at the end of toolkit. Use the planning sheet before you start your consultation.

Step One: Set out the aims and objectives of your consultation

Think about and write down the aims and objectives of your consultation.

1.	What is it you are consulting about? Are you measuring satisfaction or prioritising future spending, perhaps you want to set targets for a service or shape the way a service is delivered. Whatever the issue is – write it down. If you're not clear no one else will be.
2.	Who are you targeting? Whose views are you trying to obtain? Who will be affected by your proposals? Make sure you include all the right people and that you don't leave anyone out.
3.	Timescale Housing and Community Safety Services has committed to providing a minimum of 8 weeks consultation. If you have a deadline for a report you need to work your way back to ensure that you have enough time to meet your deadline and to ensure that the 8 week timescale is met.
4.	What will happen once you have people's views? Set out how views are going to be incorporated into decision making (be able to evidence this) and make sure you think about letting people know the next steps after you have their views and feedback about final decisions.

GOOD PRACTICE POINT

Avoid arranging consultations during or shortly following holiday periods, watch out for other local events or consultations which may clash.

Step Two: Decide which methods will be used

There are a wide range of methods (all with advantages and disadvantages) you can use in order to obtain people's views. The methods you choose should depend on the scale and significance of your consultation.

1. Think about who you are aiming to get views from and what methods will best suit them (for example using interactive methods with younger people).
2. Use a number of methods in order to increase people's opportunity to get involved, for example the Housing News, leaflets, posters, public meetings, conferences and seminars, drop in groups, questionnaires and surveys. You can also tap into existing groups such as RTOs, Sheltered Housing Forum etc.

Don't just rely on consulting tenants and residents associations, individual tenants have legal rights to be consulted too.

3. Some methods cost more than others, think about the resources available to you.
4. Once you have decided which methods you will use make sure that everyone can get involved. Consider people's individual needs (meeting places which are accessible, information which is available in large print or in other languages). Make sure your methods are inclusive.

GOOD PRACTICE POINT

Discuss your ideas with existing tenant groups as part of your planning process. They are a good source of information and will be more likely to support your project if you do.

Step Three: The Consultation Calendar and promoting your consultation

The tenant participation section maintains an annual consultation calendar which is shared with tenant organisations and is on the Council's website. As soon as you know you are going to carry out a consultation you should add it to the consultation calendar.

When you are planning your consultation think about how you are going to promote it. Posters at area offices/libraries, information screens at One Stop Shops, inclusion in the Housing News, press release, local radio, Council's website, letters, SMS text messaging and or social media.

Four editions (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) of the Housing News are delivered to all our tenants and tenant organisations. Think about this when you are at your planning stage.

Step Four: During your consultation

The following information must be shared as part of your consultation:

1. (where relevant) how your proposal will affect people taking part
2. how and when the final decision will be taken
3. how and within what timescale they can make their views known
4. the contact person dealing with the consultation
5. information on how and where to complain

Structure your consultation by asking specific questions. This helps people to understand what is being asked of them and will ensure that their responses are focused and meaningful.

GOOD PRACTICE POINT

Consultation planning should include opportunities to gather information about equal opportunities. All housing and community safety services are required to ensure that they are meeting equal opportunity requirements.

If you are designing a questionnaire or holding a meeting think about ways to gather equalities information about who is taking part in your consultation (The Council's Equal Opportunities form is at the end of this toolkit).

Step Five: You said – we did

Providing feedback to participants is a vital part of carrying out your consultation.

People are more likely to get involved in future consultation if they get feedback about what we did with their views (whether we agreed with it or not*) and the outcome of the consultation. It makes people feel valued and assures them that their time was not wasted.

It's not acceptable to carry out consultation and not provide feedback – make sure that you build it into your consultation plan.

There are a range of methods you could use in order to provide feedback to people who gave up their time and took part in your consultation, for example reports, newsletters, or meetings. You must also report the outcome of your consultation more widely. Other people who may be affected by your consultation are entitled to information about the outcome. You can use the Council's website, the Housing News or press releases – this also tells others who didn't take part that getting involved has an impact and is worthwhile.

*NB: Consultation means that views are considered as part of the decision making process. There will be times when views and ideas expressed by our customers can't be delivered, this might be because of resources or legislation for example. Feedback should explain why.

Step 5: Evidencing your consultation

At the end of each year the Council is required to evidence the number of consultations carried out and their impact. This includes recording information about the methods used, the number of individual tenants and tenant organisations who got involved, whether or not feedback was provided and the outcome of the consultation.

Planning your consultation and using the consultation recording sheet enclosed in this toolkit will help ensure that you have this information to hand.

GOOD PRACTICE POINT

The consultation recording sheet at the end of this toolkit should be completed and submitted as a background paper with Council Committee Reports where consultation is a key part of the decision making process..

Other sources of help and information

Share your consultation plan with the tenant participation team and the WDTR0. They are happy to advise you about meeting statutory requirements, good practice and maximising your consultation. Other sources of help include:

- Tenant Participation Strategy 2013-16 'Involving You'
- Tenant Communication Strategy
- West Dunbartonshire Council Consultation Toolkit (August 2012)
- The Art of Consultation (Jones et al 2009) – available from TP

Housing and Community Safety Services Consultation Planning Sheet

1. Issue (where can people have influence)
2. Target (who's being consulted?)
3. Broad timescale
4. How people's views be used and next steps
5. Summary of methods to be used during consultation
6. Promoting the consultation



Information you should provide to participants as part of your consultation:

7. How will the proposal affect tenants (and other customers)?
8. How and when will the final decision be taken?
9. How and within what timescale can participants make their views known?
10. Who is the contact person dealing with the consultation?
11. How and where can people complain?
12. When and how will feedback be provided



Housing and Community Safety Services Consultation Recording Sheet

Housing ServicePerson responsible:.....

Consultation Start date:.....End Date.....

1.	Title of consultation / participation exercise	
2.	Aims and objectives	
3.	Invited to get involved: (e.g. all tenants, tenant from the interested tenants register, RTOs, staff)	
4.	Methods used to promote/invite stakeholders to get involved? (e.g. letters, posters, website)	
5.	Who took part (Actual number of individuals and or number of tenant organisations represented)	
6.	Method(s) used to obtain views? (e.g. focus/working group, newsletter, survey) Why ?	
7.	What good practice or minimum standards can you evidence as part of your consultation?	

8.	Outcome of consultation?	
9.	How did the consultation influence decision making?	
10.	Are you able to demonstrate this?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
11.	How was feedback about the consultation and final decision given?	
12.	Was the eight week timescale observed? If no please say why?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
13.	Was equal opportunities information collected?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
14.	Did you check with participants that they were happy with the opportunities given to make their views known and that they felt that they were listened to and acted upon?	

What worked well, what didn't work well – or any other comments you have.

Comments:

.....

.....

Service Provision

We ask for this information to make sure that all people have an opportunity to access services. It is used to produce statistical reports to support fairness.

If you chose not to fill the form in, it will in no way affect how services are provided.

Your information will remain **confidential**. Care will be taken to ensure that you cannot be personally identified through reports on the results of the application process.

Please tick (✓) the relevant box in each section, or complete details as appropriate

Section 1 What Is your postcode:

G60	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G81	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G82	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G83	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you don't know your postcode, name your nearest town/village here:

Section 2 What is your gender?

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 3 Have you ever identified as transgender?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Section 4 What is your age?

Under 16	<input type="checkbox"/>	55-64	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 - 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	65-74	<input type="checkbox"/>
25 - 34	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over 75	<input type="checkbox"/>
35-44	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
45-54	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Section 5 Do you consider yourself disabled?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Please indicate which of the following impairments affect you.

Physical impairment, or mobility issues

Sensory, such as eyesight or hearing

Mental Health Condition

Learning Disability (such as Down's Syndrome or dyslexia)

Long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, diabetes or HIV

Other (please state):

Prefer not to say

Section 6 What is your sexual orientation?

Bisexual	<input type="checkbox"/>	Heterosexual	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gay/Lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section 7 Ethnic and Cultural Origin

Choose **ONE** section A-G, then tick **ONE** box which **best** describes your ethnic group or background.

A White

Scottish
English
Welsh
Northern Irish
Other British (please state)

Irish
Gypsy / Traveller
Polish
Other white ethnic group (please state)

B Mixed or multiple ethnic group

Any mixed or multiple ethnic group (please state)

C Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British

Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British

Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British

Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British

Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British

Other (please state)

D African

African, African Scottish or African British

Other (please state)

E Caribbean or Black

Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British

Black, Black Scottish or Black British

Other (please state)

F Other ethnic group

Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British

Other (please state)

G Prefer not to say

Section 8 What is your religion or Belief?

None Hindu
Christian Jewish
Muslim Sikh
Buddhist

Other (please state)

Prefer not to say