

Hillcrest Housing Association Tenant Participation Strategy April 2010

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1.0 Introduction

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a duty on all local authorities and registered social landlords to prepare a tenant participation strategy in consultation with tenants, staff and management committees or elected members. Hillcrest Housing Association provides housing management and maintenance services to over 5000 tenants in five local authority areas. These are Dundee, Angus, Edinburgh, Fife and Perth and Kinross.

Hillcrest Housing Association is committed to providing a housing service of the highest standard and believes that effective tenant participation will improve the housing services we provide to tenants. Hillcrest tenants are individuals who for various reasons want to participate at different levels of involvement and require different levels of support in order to take part. Hillcrest will offer tenants a range of options to participate at a time, level and manner which is appropriate to their individual needs.

This Tenant Participation Strategy has been produced in full consultation with Local Tenants Forums and members of Hillcrest staff from different departments. These include housing, asset management and development along with the Tenant Participation Officer. The Tenants Information Service provided independent support to those people involved in the process. The strategy incorporates their views and priorities.

This strategy is intended to be a working document and will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis.

2.0 Ensuring Diversity and Equal Opportunities

Hillcrest Housing Association will encourage and promote active measures to ensure that all tenants have equal access to participation. This strategy will be implemented within an equalities framework. We will consult and involve tenants from all our communities regardless of their age, disability, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

We recognise that tenant participation activities can be challenging for any tenant and that for many of our tenants there are additional challenges, for example, our tenants in supported accommodation, parents with responsibilities for young children and black and minority ethnic tenants.

Working with our tenants we will:

- Create community events that are diverse across a range of cultures, lifestyles and customer needs
- Produce communications materials in different languages, Braille, large print and on audio tapes where required
- Encourage registered tenants organisations to be as diverse as the communities they represent

When we organise events which will involve tenants we will give due consideration to:

- The location and timing of the event
- Ensuring venues are barrier free
- The provision of crèche facilities
- The provision of out of pocket expenses to carers to facilitate their involvement
- Travel and subsistence payments being made to tenants at the event.

We will raise awareness and understanding amongst staff, tenants and committee members of the complex ways in which prejudice and discrimination can prevent people from participating.

3.0 Defining Tenant Participation

Hillcrest Housing Association recognises the national definition of tenant participation contained within “Partners in Participation” (Scottish Office, 1999):

“Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about:

- housing policies and procedures;
- 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”.

We also take account of the key principles and duties contained within “Partners in Participation” and these can be found in Appendix 1 of this document. We believe that tenant participation is the responsibility of the whole organisation, and each department will ensure that tenants have the chance to influence important decisions that affect them. We are committed to promoting the involvement of our tenants across all areas of our service.

4.0 Aims of Our Tenant Participation Strategy

This strategy provides a framework for the future of tenant participation within Hillcrest where tenants and staff can work together to improve our services. We want to improve our decision-making processes to ensure tenants have meaningful and effective tenant participation. Our key aims are:

- To enable tenants to actively take part in the decision-making process within Hillcrest by their membership of the Local Tenants Forums
- To provide Tenant Participation at a local level with the distribution of available resources within four separate areas of operation, Angus, Dundee Edinburgh, Fife and Perthshire.

- To develop our staff's awareness of and commitment to tenant participation through training and awareness raising sessions.
- To continue to communicate effectively with our tenants, for example, by telephone, by letter, by email, as well as by face to face contact with groups of tenants and individual tenants.
- To promote the benefits of tenant participation to tenants, other customers, staff and committee members within the group.
- To develop and support the creation of area structures adapted to the needs of the tenants in each area, for example, an area Tenants Forum or an individual representative scheme.
- To increase the numbers of informed tenants able to comment on service delivery and participate in policy reviews by providing learning opportunities and resources to help tenants become involved.
- To develop our approach to promote equal opportunities for all tenants to participate. This will include developing inclusive working practices and removing barriers that prevent some tenants or groups from becoming involved.
- To contribute to community development and planning and promote social inclusion amongst our tenants.
- To ensure tenant participation is a continuous process by meeting all statutory and regulatory requirements and taking account of published good practice.
- To establish a framework for reviewing and monitoring the strategy and assessing its effectiveness.

5.0 Exchanging Information with Tenants

Hillcrest HA is committed to ensuring that concise, clear information is provided to all tenants about our housing services. All forms of communication will be in plain English and jargon free.

Hillcrest HA will provide tenants with a range of information using the following methods:

- A Tenancy Agreement
- Two newsletters per year
- Comprehensive Information Leaflets
- The Complaints Procedure
- A Tenants' Handbook
- Area Office Open Days following consultation with local groups
- An annual rent increase letter

- Our website
- Individual letter, emails or telephone calls,
- Public or Forum meeting.
- A public register of registered tenants' organisations
- Feedback from surveys
- Information on the Right to Buy
- Welcome Events
- Workshops for policy reviews

On request Hillcrest Housing Association will provide:

- Our tenant participation strategy
- A copy of our Annual report
- Policy and procedures in relation to setting of rents and service charges.
- Policy and procedures about admission to the housing list, allocation priority, transfers and exchanges.
- Our repairs and maintenance policies and procedures.
- Information on our decision-making processes in relation to housing management and other related services.
- Any Policy and Procedure

6.0 Structures for Tenant Participation

In line with Section 54 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 Hillcrest HA will involve tenants individually, in non-registered groups and in registered tenants' organisations (RTOs). Their views will be taken into account on all of the following issues:

- Our policy, or changes to our policies on rents, housing management, repairs and maintenance where the proposal is likely, if implemented, to significantly affect the tenants.
- The standards of service in relation to housing management, repairs and maintenance which Hillcrest intends to provide.
- The tenant participation strategy.
- A disposal of housing stock which would result in a change of landlord.

In term of allowing for meaningful tenant influence in the decision-making process Hillcrest acknowledges that tenants wish to participate in a variety of ways and at different levels. We therefore make the following commitments:

- We recognise that groups may not wish to be involved in every policy review so will assist them to prioritise which ones they wish to be involved in.
- To support the activities of local Tenants Forums and provide opportunities for them to meet with local Housing Staff on a regular basis.
- To develop and support tenant representative schemes within all our areas.
- To tailor our tenant participation activities to meet the needs of all of our tenants across geographical boundaries and individual needs.
- To assist with the creation of RTOs where there is a demand from our tenants and develop registration procedures and criteria.
- We will also continue to work with informal groups of tenants who are unable to meet the registration criteria or who do not wish to become an RTO.

We will undertake other tenant participation activities throughout a period of time, including:

- Continuous satisfaction surveys including new tenant visits, repair satisfaction surveys and exit interviews with tenants leaving properties.
- Estate inspections and feedback groups with tenants.
- Addressing views expressed through the complaints procedure.

7.0 Resources for Tenant Participation

Hillcrest HA has a commitment to developing tenant participation across the organisation and recognises that sufficient resources must be made available to implement the strategy effectively. Section 54 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires landlords to carry out an assessment of the resources required for effective tenant participation. The details of our resource commitments are contained in Appendix 2.

8.0 Tenant Participation Strategy Links to Other Policies and Strategies

This tenant participation strategy links to the following other policies within Hillcrest HA:

- Tenant Participation Policy
- Communications Strategy
- Openness and Confidentiality Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Complaints Policy

These are all available on request and the equal opportunities and complaints policies can be downloaded from the Hillcrest HA website. The Freedom of Information Act is also included on the website.

When reviewing the above policies account should be taken of their impact and links to the tenant participation strategy.

9.0 Evaluation and Monitoring Procedures

Hillcrest HA recognises that we must secure our long-term commitment to developing tenant participation and we will continue to involve our tenants in deciding the most practical and efficient way of achieving this. We are committed to reviewing this strategy jointly with tenants to monitor continuous improvement.

We are aware that Hillcrest's performance will be assessed by Scottish Government against the following performance standard:

"We have published and are implementing a sound strategy for encouraging and supporting tenants, residents and service users to participate actively in all areas of our work. We support tenants who take an active interest in managing their homes" (Regulation and Inspection).

Information will be recorded and publicised to tenants and annually to the Communities Sub-committee on levels of:

- Numbers of Area Forums held with tenants and the numbers attending.
- The number of tenants' groups established.
- The number of RTOs being registered.
- The qualitative input of tenants into policy reviews.
- The involvement of tenants from the consultation register.
- Feedback provided to tenants on their input and views.
- Evaluating the success of training for tenants and staff

Using this monitoring and evaluation framework we will provide an annual action plan to ensure an evolving approach to tenant participation. The strategy will be reviewed every three years.