



RURAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION

TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

(2016 -2020)

INTRODUCTION

Rural Housing Association is a Registered Housing Association established in 1992 and has 437 properties dispersed throughout Northern Ireland. At Rural we are committed to providing our tenants with plenty of opportunities to get involved and help shape, influence and improve our services. We understand and appreciate that our tenants knowledge and understanding of the issues and concerns they have within their communities is invaluable in making sure we focus our attention on addressing them.

We have developed a Tenant Participation Strategy which details how our tenants can become involved in the decision making process; how they can be involved in scrutinising and monitoring the service and how they can provide feedback.

Tenant Participation

Tenant participation is a continually evolving process, progressing as new issues arise. Tenants may want to get involved in Tenant Participation because they want to help create a better sense of community in the area where you live or to try to improve services for the communities you represent.

Other reasons tenants become involved are to reinforce a common identity and give individuals a sense of belonging within an estate/neighbourhood, to liaise with statutory and voluntary agencies as representatives on behalf of their estate/ neighbourhood, for example, district councils, Department of the Environment and to assist in sharing information and completion of forms particularly with the onset of welfare reform changes being implemented in the forthcoming months.

The Association recognises that due to the dispersed nature of our stock across rural areas in Northern Ireland; involving all our customers in meaningful engagement is always going to be a challenge, therefore it is even more important that we work hard to develop other ways to encourage our customers at a local level to get involved in the decisions that affect the services they receive.

The Department for Communities' published a Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2015 to 2020 to help landlords develop consistent ways for engaging tenants and to ensure that they have opportunities to get involved in housing and community issues that affect them. Rural Housing Association recognises the importance of tenant participation and is committed to encouraging and supporting tenants to become involved in making decisions about the services the Association offers.

The Rural Housing Association Strategy has been developed to reflect the Department for Communities 10 Principles for Tenant Participation

[tenant-participation-strategy-2015-2020](#)

- 1 Tenant participation comes from and promotes a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, board members and staff at all levels. It exists when all these interests work together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.
- 2 Tenant participation is a continuous process. Participants share information, ideas and influence. They work towards a common understanding of problems and a consensus on solutions.
- 3 Good tenant participation is about sharing information. All participants need to have all the information available to consider issues properly. That information needs to be clear, timely and accessible. Information must be in a form that all participants can understand.
- 4 Decision-making processes should be open, clear and accountable.
- 5 Tenant representatives should have enough time to consider issues properly. They should have the opportunity to work out a common view before meeting landlord representatives.
- 6 The landlord must recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
- 7 Good working relations evolve gradually so must be flexible to adapt to local circumstances
- 8 Tenants' organisations need adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
- 9 Tenant participation in rural areas must suit the particular circumstances and needs of rural tenants.
- 10 Tenant participation must meet the requirements of legislation on equality and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Tenant participation is a continually evolving process, progressing as new issues and drivers arise. Rural Housing Association has developed this strategy to be flexible and adaptable to its own business needs for example; the Association is mindful that due to the dispersed nature of our stock, involving tenants in meaningful engagement is always going to be a challenge, therefore it is recognised that we must identify other ways to encourage involvement at a local level from our tenants throughout our housing stock.

Our aim is to ensure that our tenants/other service users' have a choice in the areas they want to participate in; the level of participation; and whether to be involved as an individual or part of a group.

When developing our strategy and opportunities for involvement we want to ensure that our tenants have an opportunity to influence Policy decisions that will affect them; general area or communities they live in; Services that they receive as an individual user; and their landlord organisation's business planning and identification of future priorities.

This strategy outlines the Association's commitment to keeping tenants informed about all aspects of our work and providing opportunities for tenants to participate and influence decisions on the way in which services are delivered. The Association is committed to offering tenants opportunities to become

involved at whatever level suits them in the drive for continual improvement in the delivery of our services.

Tenant participation means enabling tenants to take part in decision-making processes and influencing decisions about housing policies, housing conditions, tenancy management and any other related services. Tenant participation is a two-way process, which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power in order to improve the standard of housing conditions and services.

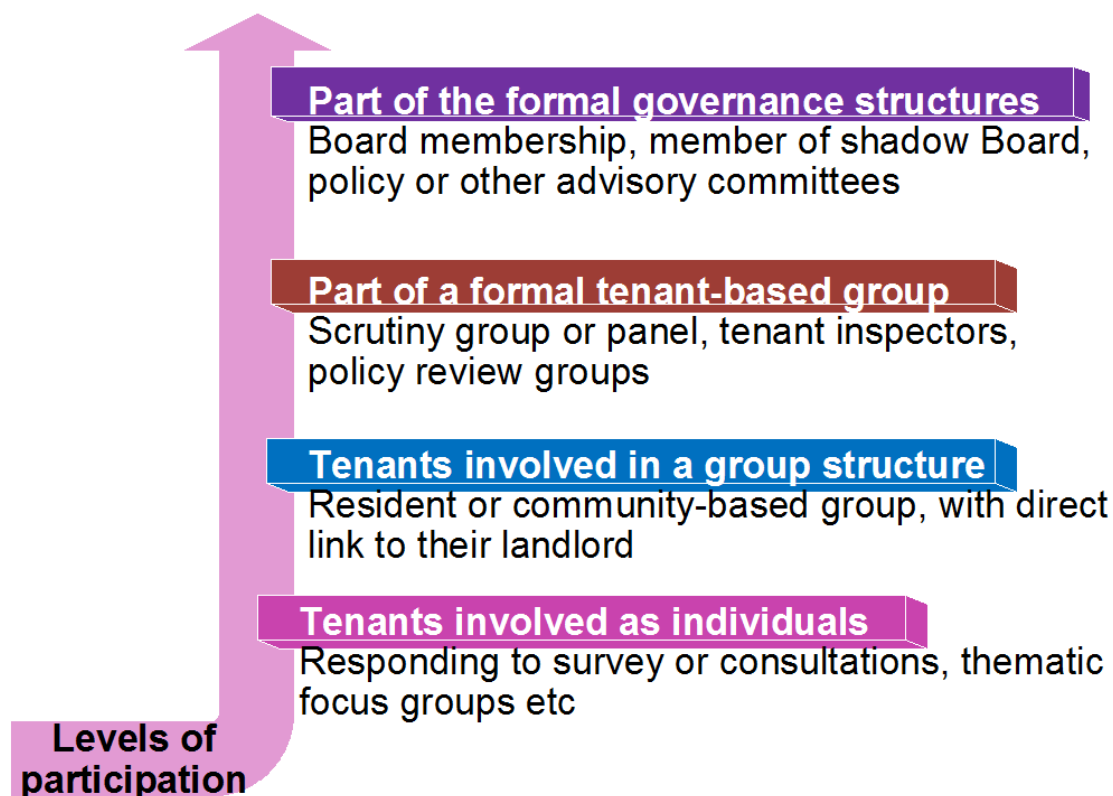
In monitoring the success of this strategy the Association will work closely with relevant partner agencies, Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations & Department for Communities and any other stakeholders involved in promoting and supporting tenant participation and its tenants and residents.

TENANT INVOLVEMENT

We appreciate that whilst Tenant Participation is an evolving process not all of our tenants and customers will want to be part of a group and attend meetings. We understand that people have different needs and therefore we feel it is important to offer different ways or activities for Tenant Participation, however, we must respect a tenant's right not to participate. Where it is clear that an individual tenant does not wish to participate, then this right will be observed so long as we can continue to comply with the legal requirements placed upon us.

MENU OF PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES WITHIN RURAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Detailed below are some of the ways Tenants/Tenant Groups/Resident/Community Groups can become involved in Tenant Participation work, drive change and scrutinise the services provided by the Association:



- **Member of Board of Management** (Tenant Member sits on the Board of Management to ensure decision making at the highest level of the Association)
- **Member of an Area Panel/Tenants Forum**
- **Member on local Inter-Agency Group**
- **Member of a Residents Group** – Tenants/Residents may wish to come together to form a group to represent the interests of your particular area or to deal with one particular issue, for example, anti-social behaviour – Contact us to see if there is a group in your area – if there is no group, we can help you set up one
- **Tenant Champions** – Tenants Champions support the Association by working within their schemes or local areas by passing on information to others about a variety of issues such as welfare reform, energy efficiency or helping others to complete application forms on the computer
- **Mystery Shopping** – After contacting us or using one of our services you report your findings back to us by completing a short form – on whether our services meet the required standards – this helps us identify any weaknesses – your identity is kept secret from staff

- **Annual General Meeting** – The Board is elected by the Association’s membership at the AGM held in June each year. Advance notice of the meeting is publicised and tenants are encouraged to become Board Members via newsletters or other publications.
- **Scheme/Property/Estate Visits** – Consultation & Feedback via Scheme/Property/Estate visits – We aim to meet all of our tenants face-to-face at least once a year and use this opportunity to ask tenants their views on preferred participation and consultation methods. We will also ask people about which issues they would like to be consulted on.
- **Estate Walkabouts** are joint inspections of a scheme or a local area with interested tenants, local groups and representatives from other agencies to address any issues or areas of concern (If you are interested in us establishing these in your area please let us know)
- Face to face meetings or telephone consultations
- **Tenant Satisfaction Surveys** which are completed annually –Whilst it is important we keep our tenants involved on all matters it is also important we listen to their views and act upon them
- **Repair Satisfaction Surveys** completed after each works order to ensure any dissatisfaction is addressed
- **Six Monthly Tenant Newsletter** – Input to or any other written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing (Tenant Competitions normally publicised within Tenant Newsletter)promotion of tenant participation activities
- **Information leaflets** on an ad hoc basis concerning for example updates on welfare reform, rent payment methods, maintenance issues
- Rent Increase letters forwarded to all tenants 28 days prior to 1 April each year.
- Electronic Versions of Annual Report, Business Plan & Corporate Strategy are available publicly on our website at www.ruralhousing.co.uk and includes information on Tenant Participation and the Association performance targets and results for each year.
- **Communications Group** – By Being Part of our where you could help us ensure our Tenant Newsletters, leaflets and other written documents are written in plain English, easy to read and informative – involvement is by email
- Our Participation Register is a list of tenants who can’t or don’t wish to join a formal tenant’s group but would still like to get involved; for example if you tell us about the type of things you would like to get involved in we will contact you to obtain your views
- **Compliments and Suggestions feedback** form contained within newsletter and available on website – Tenants contributions to the development and improvement of our services is essential to ensure that we provide the highest level and quality of services thus tenants are invited to submit any comments, suggestions or compliments they may have.
- **Use of Social Media** (face book, twitter)
- **Conferences and other training events**
- **Consultation with local Community Groups** reference future developments –It is a core belief of Rural Housing Association that the housing requirements of small rural communities are best identified, understood and solved through close co-operation with local community groups. To this end the Association works closely with all local communities in assessing needs and delivering appropriate housing solutions in what is, predominately a very specialized rural market.

CONTINUALLY SHARE INFORMATION

We acknowledge that there is a risk of over burdening tenants, therefore we will provide summary information for example, using our annual newsletter, rent statement letters and leaflets. In each instance we will seek to identify tenants who may wish to become more involved.

CREATE FLEXIBLE AND LOCALITY SPECIFIC MEANS OF WORKING WITH TENANTS

In view of the spread of our stock it is important that the Association recognises the local differences and makes adequate provisions to allow participation at a local level. The Association staff will engage with other providers such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, other Housing Associations and registered groups to keep abreast of the wider social factors and issues in our areas of housing management.

The Association recognises that there are limited opportunities for some of our tenants to visit our offices therefore, we will aim for scheme/property/estate visits to be undertaken annually to allow our staff to engage with all of our tenants. Groups, tenants and representatives will always be encouraged to give their opinions on outcomes expected from a service, e.g. cyclical painting etc.

SUPPORT AND TRAINING PROVIDED BY THE ASSOCIATION

As a landlord we recognise the importance of supporting and resourcing tenant participation adequately. We are committed to providing resources for Tenant Participation as follows:

Training: Rural Housing Association recognises that raising awareness and the provision of training play a crucial role in the effective implementation of Tenant Participation hence it is the Association's aim to ensure that all its staff are well equipped to engage with tenants. Whilst the majority of tenant contact will be with Housing & Technical Staff, all staff within the organisation will have a role and will be given an understanding of the principles of this policy. Staff and tenants will be encouraged to attend training and conferences as applicable.

Access to information and advice: With regards to those tenants who have expressed an interest in either forming a forum or association of tenants' interests, we will provide support and assistance in setting up a group. A constitution template with guidance notes will be available to groups.

Administration Services (taking minutes, mailing and photocopying of leaflets etcetera)

Translation and Interpretation Services provided on request

Six Monthly Tenant Newsletters An update on Tenant Participation within the Association will be included in each tenant newsletter issued and tenants will be invited to continue submit entries or any other contribution as appropriate.

Scheme/Property/Estate Visits: A member of the Housing or Technical Team will visit tenants at least once a year in their homes to allow for the dissemination of information and feedback on services.

Tenant Participation – Getting Involved?

The Association wants to promote Tenant Participation and ensure that our tenants know the benefits of getting involved. Tenants will be provided with information highlighting to them the opportunities for them to meet new people, develop new skills and get a better understanding of the work of the Association and the services provided to help make a difference to your homes and neighbourhood.

EQUALITY

Tenant participation has a strong link with the Association's Equality Policy and it is important to recognise that tenant participation includes all tenants, should they choose to participate.

In carrying out its functions Rural Housing Association will have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the following groups.

- persons of different religious belief,
- political opinion,
- racial group,
- age,
- marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without

In relation to tenant participation and the provision of information, we are committed to providing accessible information. No tenant should be discouraged from contributing due to a lack of accessible information. This means that we will provide documents upon request:

- in large print for those with visual impairment or deteriorating eyesight;
- on tape for those who are unable to read printed matter;
- in Braille for those who prefer this means of communication;
- translated into another language, and;
- In any other feasible format that tenants may find helpful.

MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF TENANT PARTICIPATION

The Strategy is intended to cover a three-year period, but will be subject to annual evaluation to help ensure that it continues to be relevant, current and meets the changing needs and expectations of our tenants, Board and staff.

OTHER RELATED DOCUMENTS

RHA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY/ RHA EQUALITY SCHEME/ RHA COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES