



TIGHRA TALES

Autumn 2005

Steady Progress – but could do better!

A Communities Scotland report confirms that inspections of landlords revealed a 'mixed picture' in relation to their progress with tenant participation. Whilst many organisations have made a positive start, a few are reckoned to be failing to meet their statutory duties.

The findings are contained in the latest of a series of 'key theme' reports which have been produced to assist landlords and tenants interpret and learn from the pathfinder inspections of five local authorities and twenty-two registered social landlords.

The inspectors found that;

- Almost all the organisations had prepared a tenant participation strategy but not every organisation had made efforts to develop this in true consultation with tenants.
- Few had made a comprehensive assessment of resources required or identified appropriate targets to move forward.
- A number were not consulting with tenants and tenant organisations on specific proposals such as rent increases.
- Most were not collecting feedback from tenants regularly about the quality of services they received and some were not making best use of feedback to improve services.
- Few gave feedback to those who participated in consultation exercises.

However it was found that most were providing good quality information in a range of formats and had a variety of structures to engage with tenants, especially where there was a lack of interest from tenants in developing formal tenant groups.

You can access the report, which also describes good practice examples on www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk

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'A Home of Your Own'
Preparing young people for the challenges of a new tenancy and guiding them towards independence and participation in their community.

There are still a few copies of our film-based training programme for young tenants available. All local authority and housing association landlords have one copy of this but voluntary groups and agencies working with young people may also find it of value. Copies, which include a DVD or video are available at £40 or can be borrowed from our library.

If you would like to attend an event in Inverness or Perthshire to introduce the film please contact Judith.

Westfords Wonderful Place

Tom Greig,
 Chairman of
 Westford Action
 Group opens
 'Westford's
 Wonderful Place'



Here's another great example of what tenant and resident groups can achieve! Westford Action Group in Alness have celebrated the results of three years hard work and fundraising when they opened a new park in their community. As the youngsters flocked in to try out the new equipment, the group were congratulated on raising £75,000 and have been nominated for a 'Standing Up To Anti-Social Behaviour Award'. Tom thanked those who had helped the group raise funding from a number of sources including The Scottish Executive, Forward Scotland, Community Environmental Renewal Scheme, Wellbeing Alliance, North Highland Leader Plus Scheme, Local Wind Farm Fund and The Highland Council.

NATIONAL TENANT ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

In our spring newsletter we advised that Communities Scotland, through consultants, would be making contact with tenant groups through the summer to discuss the way forward for tenants to engage at a national level on housing and related issues. We now have this report from the tenant participation development team, bringing us up to date with latest events:

'Over August tenant representatives met with Docherty Consultants as part of a major tenant consultation. Tenants were being asked if they would like the opportunity to discuss issues that are important to them and their community with Ministers and senior policy-makers, and if so, what would be the most effective way to do this.

So far, through a national tenants conference in November and the current regional workshops, tenant representatives have said they would prefer regional tenant forums. At the regional events tenants have therefore been thinking about how to split up the country into manageable regions. This is particularly challenging in the case of rural and remote areas as it is important that the size of the region is not so large that tenants have to travel too far to get involved. However, it is also crucial that regional forums in rural areas encompass enough tenants interested in getting involved at a national level to sustain the forum.

If you are a tenant who hasn't been involved in the consultation there is still time. The final and critical part of the consultation is a questionnaire that is being sent directly to

Registered Tenant Organisations and non-registered groups through their landlord. This questionnaire gives your group to say what issues you want to engage with Ministers on, how you would like to see your regional forum operate, what training and support is required to ensure tenants can make the most of this opportunity and so on. We would strongly encourage your group to get involved in this consultation. If you would like further information please contact Kristy Docherty, Docherty consultants on 0131 554 3300 or email kristy@dochertyconsulting.com.'

TIGHRA, on behalf of it's members will be keeping abreast of progress on this issue. If you are an individual tenant or an interested party who is not a member of a tenant group and you have an enquiry or comment about how national tenant engagement is progressing you can make you views known to any of our board members or to Judith at the office.

GOOD IDEAS FROM ANGUS AND CAITHNESS

Did you realise that you could package up a football pitch and move it round to different communities?

Partners in Angus recognised that, in many green areas ball games are frowned upon and young people, as a result, resort to breaking the rules or engage in less positive activities. Together they raised funds to develop a game-based project which has spread from Columbia through Europe due to its success.

The aims of the game are to: encourage socially acceptable behaviour; provide an alternative to alcohol and drugs; encourage equality; promote health, inter-personal skills and employment prospects and reconnect young people with the community.

Funding (which included *wider action* funding to Angus Housing Association) provided pitches, a development worker and van.

Young people enjoy street football in Kirriemuir . The activity was just one of many provided during the summer months and local tenants assisted with the organisation.

It is hoped that the project can be taken into the more rural areas of Angus in the future.



HomeAid Caithness - For People Not Profit

This project exists to provide essential household furniture and electrical items to people in Caithness and Sutherland who are struggling to survive on a low income and would not be able to furnish their homes or replace items without assistance. An estimated 3,000 items will be delivered to people in need this year. HomeAid also benefits the environment by offering an environmentally—friendly alternative to normal disposal routes. It will divert an estimated 70-80 tonnes of household goods away from landfill this year.

CONSULTATION OPPORTUNITIES.

We like to keep you aware of Scottish Executive current public consultations which relate to housing or community issues.

At present there is still time to contribute views about the regulation of private landlords under The Antisocial Behaviour Etc (Scotland) Act 2004. Under the proposals there will be more control and regulation about the way private landlords manage their properties, the aim being to reduce anti-social behaviour from these premises. If you have opinions about this, see www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/current before Sept. 23rd. Or contact our office for a copy.

Coming Soon!

Information and Consultation Day for Older People.

TIGHRA with Trust and Hanover Housing Associations will host an event at Elgin in May for tenants interested in improving their knowledge of housing options, care, support and benefits . There will also be an opportunity to discuss how consultation with service users could be improved. Details will follow soon.

ALLOCATE = CONSULT



Allocation policies are high on the list of priorities which attract the concern of tenants and tenant organisations.

Housing waiting lists in many areas continue to grow whilst recent legislation, trends and rising house prices put additional pressures on communities and housing services. Whether tenants are being adequately consulted about potential changes to allocations policies is subject to debate but it is important that residents in communities have a voice in how the structures and processes of allocations develop. Landlords are getting increasingly engaged with partners to develop new initiatives and tenant representatives will want to ensure that they are involved, meaningfully, in any discussions which lead to change. So what are the challenges at present?. Indicated below are just some of the

issues which should involve tenant participation;

- **The change in homelessness legislation will result in more people who are defined as 'statutory homeless' being entitled to permanent accommodation. This is a positive move but there are many hidden homelessness households, especially in rural areas where people may be more reluctant to seek statutory homeless status. Also there are those with high priority need on medical or other grounds on the standard waiting list. How are their needs prioritised?**
- The Right To Buy legislation continues to drain away the number of potential homes in rural communities. Those who want to remain in their community for work, family or social reasons have few options for affordable homes. Communities themselves will be at risk of losing schools, services and those who need support and assistance may find that keyworkers have disappeared, seeking more affordable homes and facilities in urban areas. Community lettings initiatives are proving helpful in some rural and remote locations where new building is taking place and residents could be asking those engaged in new developments to consider this option.
- **Combined housing registers and choice-based lettings initiatives are being encouraged and many landlords are working together to develop models which should ease the application process. Whatever the likely advantages there are perceived to be with these systems, tenants should be involved in discussions and be given opportunities to get involved with testing and developing the services.**
- Last, but not least, the letting of homes isn't just about bricks and mortar. Sometimes potential tenants are quite vulnerable and require support, assistance and guidance to ensure that they and their neighbours can live at ease with each other. Sensitive allocations are important but must be done objectively and not penalise particular age-groups or households. Most importantly, support through landlord and community services must be available and tenants may want to seek assurance (at a national as well as local level) that funding is available and utilised, to develop projects which provide positive support to vulnerable tenants in a way which encourages voluntary and committed participation.

VOLUNTEERS SHOW THE WAY FORWARD FOR RURAL PARTICIPATION.

Did you know that 2005 is designated as the 'Year Of The Volunteer'?

It is also the year when TIGHRA conducted research into the role, support, training and recruitment of tenant volunteers in rural communities across Scotland.

Our findings, which are detailed in the report '*Supporting Tenant Volunteers In Rural Areas Of Scotland*', confirm our belief that tenant volunteers are a growing force in enabling effective tenant participation in rural communities.

But, how do we define tenant volunteers in the first place?

Our research did not seek to examine the roles played by tenant group representatives or board of management members as these structures are already well established. Rather, we were looking at the role played by individuals who, through contributions to panels, steering groups, forums etc. provide 'example' views to assist the consultation and information process. These people we called '*independent volunteers*'. We were also examining the role of those individuals who contribute as representatives of their community—'*representative volunteers*'.

Village Voices, Tenant Information Volunteers and Community Networkers are some of the titles used in different areas to identify volunteers.

We found that, where it has been difficult to develop local tenant groups in rural or remote locations, tenant volunteers are increasingly being seen as a valuable resource to assist tenants to have an effective voice in housing and community matters.

However, to ensure that volunteers and communities remain motivated it is essential that those supporting the service, through the tenant participation strategy, have the necessary skills and knowledge to get the structures, recruitment, support and training right.

To assist in this TIGHRA will offer training to officers or experienced tenant representatives next spring.

Details will be issued to rural local authorities and housing associations later this year.

If you would like to receive a copy of our report please contact the office, or access it on our website www.tighra.org.

Board Member Profile



Marion Brown

Marion (who is pictured above with a friend) has been a board member of TIGHRA since 1994.

As Tenant Participation Officer for Perth and Kinross Council, Marion is well placed to provide a valuable insight into the particular issues affecting tenants and residents of attractive and accessible rural areas, where affordable homes are increasingly hard to find.

Perth and Kinross has seventeen registered tenant organisations including a hardworking federation based in Perth. Marion advises that most associations support registration and are working towards that status, but the same consultation opportunities are currently given to non-registered groups in order that as many tenants as possible have access to participation.

As well as being concerned about the lack of affordable rural housing Marion is also a champion of better provisions for young people and more recognition, at a high level, of the specific difficulties of enabling tenant participation in rural areas.



IS IT TIME FOR AN AUDIT?

You'll have reviewed your tenant participation policy by now— Yes?

Well whether you have or you haven't now could be a good time for an audit. An audit of tenant participation and services is the best way to determine if the proof of that consultative pudding really is in the eating or if the results are not as satisfying as expected.

TIGHRA knows the questions to ask so contact us about an independent audit soon.

Culture?
Information?
Newsletters?
Equality?
Group registration?
Panels?
Volunteers?
Training?
Targets?

Board Merger!

Congratulations are due to Mr and Mrs Sandy and Anne Allan who were married in August at Peterhead. Anne (formerly Anne Fowler) is Chair of TIGHRA and Sandy is the Treasurer.

