

Grove Community Housing Association



Tenant Participation Vision Strategy 2019

Forwards

Grove Community Housing Association has always been deeply committed to meeting the housing and community needs of the people of the Grove area for over forty years. It was important to us when we built our new offices that they would be the heart of where our tenants live, enabling positive face to face interaction and connection with our tenants in our work to stay strong.

As a Board we are fully committed to building on how we demonstrate our involvement with our tenants. We fully encourage your involvement at a level you are comfortable with and have the time for. We understand everyone has busy lives but your views matter to us. This could be popping in to the office and giving us feedback on a recent repair carried out, completing a survey, taking part in the community garden, coming along to events to talk to us about what we do, or even joining a tenant policy group or a Board apprentice scheme. It can be a one- off event or a longer-term commitment, again it is up to you and we will fully enable you to participate to the level you want.

Mr Philip Oliver Chairman



Dear Tenant,

You, the tenant, should be at the heart of any good Housing Association. We want you to become involved if you aren't already and tell us how you wish to communicate with us and at what levels. There can be plenty of options put on the menu to suit everyone's level of interest.

The reason this is a 'Vision' Tenant Participation Strategy is that we strongly believe tenants must take the lead. With first-hand experience of what it is like to live in a Grove Community home, you must be in the driving seat in developing the Tenant Participation Strategy for 2020-2023 – we will ensure our staff are here to provide you with the fuel and are there for you during the journey to make it happen!

I and my team were delighted to organise and host what was hopefully the first of many end of Summer BBQ's at our amazing Community Garden and the community spirit was plain to see. Despite our typical Northern Irish weather, we had a great turn out, it was lovely to give something back to the community and for me personally to put a name to the faces of some tenants I hadn't yet met. Our community event and this document are the building blocks of what can be done.

Please get involved and ensure your voice is heard. By doing so we are then able to adapt to what you really need and move forward in a truly meaningful way. The goal in mind is having happy tenants in well maintained homes and part of a community that is supportive and welcoming. A thriving community is a growing community, we are excited about our plans to start building again, providing new family homes. Please support our work and come and talk to us, our hearts and minds are open to positive suggestions to make things better. We can then be proud of how much more we can achieve when we work together.

Ms Agnes Crawford
General Manager



End of Summer B-B-Q 2019



Introduction

Welcome to our Tenant Participation Vision Strategy 2019 – 2020. This is our first strategy which sets out our commitment to developing and promoting a positive working relationship with our tenants and wider community. As an organisation we value input from our tenants and recognise that effective consultation and participation will enable us to continuously improve the homes and housing services we provide.

This Vision Strategy will inform you of the steps we will take to achieve good tenant participation in housing services. In order to devise a three-year Tenant Participation Strategy, we first need to find out the types of households we have, how we are going to provide tenants with information, how we are going to consult with our tenants, and how they want to be involved. This vision document will set out how we intend to seek the views of our tenants which will form the direction for the development of the three-year Tenant Participation Strategy.

The Association recognises that it is important to offer a range of involvement methods which are fit for purpose and appropriate to the needs of our tenants, providing the opportunity for tenants to get involved with us on whatever level best suits them.

The Association has commissioned the services of Empowering Communities, the trading subsidiary of Supporting Communities, to assist with the development of this our very first Tenant Participation Strategy. Supporting Communities has 40 years' experience developing tenant participation and consulting with local communities within the third sector on behalf of social housing landlords. Supporting Communities was appointed the Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO) for Northern Ireland by the Department for Communities.



A Brief History

On 14th October 1976, Grove Community Housing Association was registered as an Industrial and Provident Society. It became the fourteenth housing association in Northern Ireland to be registered with the then Department of the Environment on 5th May 1977. The main priority at this time was to have the area declared a Housing Action Area to obtain full administrative, legal and financial assistance to improve it both physically and socially.

On 2nd April 1977, Grove Community Housing Association made its first official purchase of a property when it secured 63 Glasgow Street for £600.00. The most expensive of the 23 houses bought that first year cost £1,750.00 and the cheapest cost £143.00. The majority of these were rehabilitated as the aim of the Housing Action Area was to improve existing homes and keep communities together.

During the summer of 1977, committee members of Grove Community Housing Association conducted a survey of the Grove's. It found that only 7% of the households interviewed had the use of all five standard amenities i.e. a fixed bath or shower, an internal WC, and wash hand basin, a sink, and hot and cold running water at three or more points. A startling 76% of the households lacked four out of five basic amenities.

Grove Community Housing Association was originally located in a three storey house at 139 York Road. As time progressed, the need for new premises was identified and with the help of an Urban Development Grant, the current office at 171 York Road as completed in 2003.



Tenant Participation

Tenant participation is an essential part of the work of a social housing organisation. It means that all tenants have a range of opportunities to have a say about how their housing services are delivered. It is a two-way process where landlords value the engagement and recognise it as a vital component to improving their business. Tenant participation should build meaningful relationships between landlords, tenants and the wider community.

There are a number of levels of tenant participation ranging from operational to strategic. These are broadly represented as information, consultation, involvement and partnership. All levels of engagement are equally important in the effective delivery of services.

Traditional methods of conducting meetings are not always the most suitable for a variety of reasons. Some tenants may be quite happy to complete surveys, provide feedback on literature from the comfort of their own homes, whilst others may want to scrutinise services or indeed sit on our Board. This Vision Strategy aims to find out how our tenants want to get involved and in turn introduce opportunities for tenant participation.



Our Commitment to Tenant Participation

Grove Community Housing Association has a small but dedicated staff team that will promote and develop this Vision Strategy. This document will enable us to consult with our tenants, Board, staff, relevant outside organisations, and Empowering Communities to devise a meaningful tenant participation strategy for 2020-23.

Consultation will include:

- Discussions at our community BBQ and garden party in August 2019;
- Completion of tenant involvement questionnaires online, by post and following our community BBQ and garden party in August 2019;
- Launch of our Vision Strategy during our Mid-term Halloween event and talking to tenants to gather views and listen to feedback;
- Tenant Satisfaction Survey results 2018 will be presented and feedback sought on how to improve the results;
- Tenants being informed that the Vision Strategy is on the website for a three week consultative period and provided with copies;

From the above, we will know how tenants will want us to provide information to them, how we are going to consult with our tenants, and how they want to be involved.

- Staff training and staff session including review of tenant satisfaction survey results;
- Discussion and full endorsement by the Board of Management at its meeting in September 2019 and regular 'Tenant Voice' updates at Board meetings;

The Association recognises that tenant participation can lead to real, positive outcomes for tenants, communities and Grove as a registered housing association.

These benefits may include:

- Services that reflect tenants' needs;
- Improved services;
- Increased tenant satisfaction;
- Enhanced community spirit;
- Sustained communities;
- Better quality of life for tenants;
- Ensuring tenants have a real say;
- Better relations between landlord and tenant each being more aware of the others position;
- Building mutual respect and trust; and
- Improved effectiveness and efficiency resulting in better value for money.

Barriers to Getting Involved

What stops tenants participating is the most fundamental question of any tenant participation strategy. It is therefore important to identify the barriers and how these can be overcome. This will be one of the first areas the Association will examine with tenants. We can then work to put reasonable measures in place to reduce/remove the barriers.

Some examples of barriers are:

- Lack of training/confidence;
- Understanding published information;
- Transport;
- Child care requirements;
- Travel and other expenses; and
- Time constraints

If the above barriers are highlighted when engaging with our tenants, we will propose solutions such as:

- Providing training and support for tenants who are committed to engaging with the Association – dates of tenant training delivered by Empowering Communities will be provided to tenants;
- Providing information in alternative formats to ensure it can be understood by all;
- Keeping events local but providing transport and covering the financial costs incurred by tenants where required in carrying out their roles;
- Offering a wide range of participation methods to suit all lifestyles;
- Arranging meetings at times and locations most accessible to tenants; and
- Providing practical and financial support, including dual purpose events to engage interest such as health and well-being events.



GET
INVOLVED!

Regulations around Tenant Participation

The Department for Social Development, now known as the Department for Communities produced

“A Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2015 to 2020”. It sets out what social landlords should do in order to give tenants the opportunity and choice to participate in the decisions that affect them.

The Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2015 to 2020 states that housing associations must:

- Consult their tenants on issues affecting their tenancies;
- Have a complaints procedure in place; and
- Survey tenants annually.

It sets out 10 principles of good participation in Northern Ireland. These are based on:

- What social landlords should do;
- How tenants’ capacity for greater participation will be developed and supported; and
- What government will do further to lead this development.

The 10 principles are:

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.

A copy of the Department for Communities' strategy can be found at www.communities-ni.gov.uk or by contacting the Department for Communities directly:

Housing Regulation Project Team
Department for Communities
Third Floor, Lighthouse Building
Gasworks Business Park, Belfast, BT7 2GB
Tel: 028 9082 9044
Text phone: 028 9052 9304
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

There are also opportunities for a Grove Community tenant to get involved with some tenants of other Housing Associations to review relevant policy. More details of this will be provided at the events we hold and in the communication we issue.



Equality

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality between all the Section 75 groups. The Department for Communities is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Grove Community Housing Association is committed to treating people equally and fairly and ensures our service is accessible to all, irrespective of a person's disability, gender, age, race, religious or political belief or sexual orientation.

With this in mind:

- All groups and individuals involved in our tenant participation practices will have equal access, be encouraged and supported to participate;
- Information will be available in a variety of formats including languages, large print on request and is easily understood;
- We will identify groups that are underrepresented and through consultation, we will actively encourage individuals to be involved throughout the period of the strategy: and
- In return, the Association expects those involved in the tenant participation practices to promote equality and welcome participation from all our communities.

Tenant's Voice



Action Plan to inform the Tenant Participation Strategy 2020 - 2023

What	How	When
Consult with relevant persons on this Vision Strategy	Discussions at community BBQ and garden party Facilitate sessions for staff Table at a Board of Management meeting	August 2019 Sept/Oct 2019 September 2019
Build relations between staff and tenants	Discussions at community BBQ and garden party Grasping opportunities on a daily basis Host events to hear the tenants voice and incorporate feedback into workable actions	August 2019 Ongoing August 2019 October 2019 December 2019 Jan/Feb 2020
Determine how tenants want the Association to communicate with them	Completion of Tenant Involvement Questionnaire	September & October 2019
Identify reasons for tenants not to get involved	Completion of Tenant Involvement Questionnaire	September & October 2019
Clarify methods of engagement tenants would be interested in	Completion of Tenant Involvement Questionnaire	September & October 2019
Compile an Interested Tenant Register	Analysis of the Tenant Involvement Questionnaire	October & November 2019
Monitoring of the vision strategy	Hold consultation sessions with tenants, staff etc.	October - December 2019
Evaluation of the vision strategy	Hold consultation sessions with tenants, staff etc.	January 2020 evaluation February feedback 2020

Creation of the strategy and action plan 2020 – 2023*	Hold focus group meetings with tenants, staff etc.	February - March 2020 with Board approval March 2020
Keep tenants involved and informed throughout the period of the vision strategy	Newsletters, social media, face to face events	Ongoing

* As stated in the Department's "A Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2015 to 2020", the following will be embedded into the action plan:

- Regularly seeking the views of tenants, being responsive to and considering those views;
- Offering tenants a menu of participation activities so that they can participate as individuals, within formal or informal group structures or as specialist posts;
- Providing opportunities for tenants to scrutinise the services they receive and the decisions that impact them;
- Providing the appropriate training and support to tenants and staff to encourage, promote and provide the skills required to make participation an integral part of the organisation; and
- Developing relationships and engagement opportunities for tenants and others within the community or those whose role has an impact on tenants e.g. other government departments or housing organisations.



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