

How social landlords support tenants to engage

March 2025

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1. Summary

- 1.1 In 2024, the Scottish Government (SG) commissioned TPAS Scotland (TPAS) to conduct a thematic study with the aim of researching the support available to tenants to engage and participate with the work of their landlord, and to provide a baseline report on the range and variety of available support.
- 1.2 TPAS has been supporting tenants' groups and landlords for over 40 years, providing services that help upskill tenants to become involved in a range of housing issues, and supporting landlords to make this happen.
- 1.3 A series of discussion groups with tenants and officers took place during spring 2024 via Teams to discuss support available for tenants to participate. In addition, a survey was issued to TPAS members to capture additional information.
- 1.4 From these discussions and survey responses, details of the range of ways through which landlords support tenants to engage and participate was established as well as a picture of how tenants viewed this support.
- 1.5 Originally as part of scoping for this study, one area of interest for research was the role of mentoring, however during the course of the research it has been established that mentoring, either formal or informal, is not a key priority for either landlords or tenants.
- 1.6 Succession planning for all groups was another area of interest, and the research also considered succession planning arrangements for RTOs and scrutiny panels in addition to the planning that many landlords routinely undertake in relation to their governing body. 40% of landlords who responded to the survey have no succession plan in place for any of their groups.
- 1.7 Based on the discussion group feedback, individuals derive clear, positive outcomes from participating with their landlord, including accessing training, learning and the opportunity to work in partnership with – and learn from – other people. These skills can often have a beneficial impact on other areas of life, including employment and education, and can help to support people in playing stronger roles in their community and wider society.

- 1.8 In turn, with the active involvement and participation of their tenants, landlords are able to develop services, policies and strategies which take account of the priorities of tenants and are therefore more likely to lead to enhanced service-delivery, improved performance and tenant satisfaction.

2. Background

- 2.1 The introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 created a legal requirement for landlords to actively develop and support tenant participation.
- 2.2 All social landlords in Scotland must have a Tenant Participation Strategy in place, developed in consultation with tenants and RTO's, which enables tenants to participate in landlord decision making and supports continuous improvement in landlords' performance.
- 2.3 The Scottish Social Housing Charter was introduced in March 2012, setting the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when conducting their housing activity.
- 2.4 Landlords must provide information on the Charter indicators and outcomes through the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) which is submitted annually to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). At indicator 5, landlords must provide data on the "percentage of tenants satisfied with the opportunities given to them to participate in their landlords' decisions".

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The main method of gathering evidence for this research was through a series of discussion groups aimed at tenants, tenant scrutiny panel members, Regional Network members (now Tenants Together Scotland), Tenant Participation Officers (TPOs) and housing managers/Directors. Each discussion group had a different focus, with some tenants attending more than one group. 33 tenants and 17 housing staff participated in the discussion groups.

- 3.2 A desktop review of a sample of 40 landlords' websites was undertaken. The sample included Housing Associations, Co-operatives, and local authorities. The purpose of the review was to gauge how easy it is to find information on how a landlord supports tenants to participate and engage.
- 3.5 To supplement the data yielded by the discussion group sessions, a high-level survey was set up and issued to TPAS members using Smart Survey software, the results of which are included in this report at section 4.

4. Evidence

Discussion Groups – Housing staff

- 4.1 Landlords were asked to describe the range of support they offer to tenants in order to encourage and facilitate tenant participation, and the responses are set out in table 1 below.

Table 1 Landlords Support to Engage and Participate

Face to Face Meetings	Scrutiny Panel	Grants	Training
Estate Walkabouts	Tenants part of Governing Body	Mystery Shopping	Expenses
Digital	Consortium of groups e.g. NETRALT	Surveys	Roadshows
Facebook Group	Selection of methods	Accessible Communication	Dedicated TP Team
Working Groups	Participatory Budgets	TP Budgets	Annual Tenancy Visits
TP Strategy	Digital Lending Library	Incentives	Induction for RTO Members

The consortium of groups in the North East, NETRALT (North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together) was highlighted as an effective way of combining resources across landlords and tenants' groups to provide more support for tenants, including joint training sessions and sharing of good practice. NETRALT's website can be found here: <https://ntp.netralt.org.uk/about-us/>

One landlord, who has properties across a large geographic area, highlighted that they have used roadshows as a way of getting information and consultation to a larger number of tenants, and supporting them to participate.

- 4.2 Based on the responses at Table 1 above, the TPO discussion group were asked to rank by importance a range of methods of support provided to tenants, with the results set out at Table 2:

Table 2 Ranking of Support

Support	Rank
Specialist Tenant Participation Staff	1 st
Tenant Participation Strategy	2 nd
Training	3 rd
Tenant Participation budget	4 th
Incentives	5 th
Mentor	6 th
External Support	7 th

- 4.3 These rankings will be compared with the order in which tenants ranked methods of support at section 5 of this report.
- 4.4 The top three areas of support identified by officers are having specialist staff, a Tenant Participation strategy and training. Mentoring and external support was ranked bottom; however participants note these remain relevant.
- 4.5 Landlord groups highlighted that support provided to facilitate tenant participation and engagement can also support tenants in other aspects of their lives, for example building knowledge and skills through training, attending, or speaking at conferences and building confidence by taking part in group discussions.
- 4.6 Some specific examples of positive impact on individuals when they have taken part in participation events or groups were highlighted:

One tenant representative began their TP journey by getting involved and setting up a local residents group. As they built their skills and knowledge, they got involved with some of the Council's strategic groups, including the Value for Money group looking at the rent setting process and scrutinising the TP budget. As their confidence has grown, they have been involved in driving forward changes for our Tenant forum. **Highland Council**

A young person involved in the youth parliament group was involved in a consultation with landlords working with young people. This person is now part of the scrutiny panel and will feature in an article for International Women’s Day. The Association supported them to complete the TPAS Scotland unique TP certificate. All of this has developed their interpersonal skills as well as increased their knowledge of housing and participation. **Langstane HA**

Discussion Groups- Tenants

- 4.7 Tenant groups were asked to describe the ways through which their landlord supports them to participate and engage, with the results collated at Table 3:

Table 3 Landlords Support to Participate

Training	Vouchers/monetary incentives to take part	Monthly meetings	Teams meetings
Scrutiny Group Officers	Estate walkabouts	Budget for RTO	Expenses
Paperwork with information	TP Officer	Stepping up to Scrutiny Training	TPAS Participation Certificate
Attendance at conferences	Member of scrutiny group	Support for new members	Processes

- 4.8 None of the tenants involved in the discussion groups had access to all of the means of support outlined at Table 3.
- 4.9 All agreed that payment of expenses incurred to take part in participation was essential and if not in place could be a barrier to participation. Hospitality, such as a Christmas lunch, was viewed primarily as a token of appreciation for tenants’ contribution.

Discussion Groups- Scrutiny

- 4.10 During the scrutiny group discussions, participants ranked what they would consider as ‘essential’ support as follows:

Table 4 Ranking of Support

Support	Rank
Training	1 st
Specialist Tenant Participation Staff	2 nd
Tenant Participation Strategy	3 rd
External Support	4 th
Mentoring	5 th

- 4.11 Provision of training was identified as the key method of support, and was regarded as critical to tenants being able to effectively participate, along with having a positive relationship with specialist staff.
- 4.12 Training also included attendance at conferences which the group felt was invaluable for networking, sharing views and increasing their knowledge. Among discussion group participants, newer scrutiny panel members commented on the skills and experience of others at the session with more experienced members offering encouragement to newer members. Tenants encouraging each other to participate- and to continue to participate- is powerful.
- 4.13 Having a Tenant Participation Strategy is essential, but participants highlighted how important it is that this is a living document; regularly reviewed, monitored and reported on to ensure it works.
- 4.14 External support was considered to be helpful and of value as it gave an independent source of information for participants, but was not identified as one of the top priorities.
- 4.15 Scrutiny group and Regional Network members were asked how they progressed in their participation journey with their landlord. A direct approach after showing an interest in being involved, was the most common way of progressing and continuing their journey of participation.

What I found helpful is the encouragement to come along with updates and communication. I feel treated as an equal and that there has not been so far a staff hierarchy and so no barriers yet - new scrutiny panel member **Langstane HA**

Smart Survey

4.16 The survey was issued to a random sample of TPAS members and was completed by 25 landlords: 9 local authorities and 16 housing associations.

4.17 Landlords who responded had a range of property types, enabling a degree of comparison between support to engage from general needs organisations and specialist in the conclusions part of the report.

4.18 The breakdown of property types can be seen in table 5.

Table 5 Property Types			Response Percent
1	General		96.00%
2	Sheltered		56.00%
3	Very Sheltered		20.00%
4	Sheltered Wheelchair		16.00%
5	Amenity Housing		52.00%
6	Wheelchair		52.00%
7	Ambulant Disabled		12.00%

4.19 The range of groups undertaking scrutiny activities included tenants' panels and a register of tenant volunteers for specific areas of scrutiny.















4.20 The survey responses echoed the feedback from discussion groups, highlighting similarities in the support landlords provided, including:

- Training;
- Access to a range of staff (not just TPOs);
- Reimbursement of expenses;
- Hospitality;
- Digital support to attend meetings;
- External independent support;
- Admin support to book venues, catering etc.

... relevant training such as committee skills, chairing skills, value for money, cyber security, Scrutiny group members can attend the TPAS annual conference and other events throughout the year such as scrutiny network events facilitated by TPAS. They can reclaim travel expenses and catering is provided for meetings that take place during mealtimes. The scrutiny panel holds its meetings at Link meeting rooms which are booked by staff. Taxis are also provided for any tenants who require them.

Link Group

4.21 Landlords were asked about the support they give to tenants to participate, and the range can be seen in table 6 below. The most common method of support is payment of expenses, followed by attendance at conferences. The least common form of support was formal mentoring. Landlords could select as many options as applicable.

Table 6 Support to Participate			Response Percent
1	Training courses		64.00%
2	Attendance at conferences		76.00%
3	Allocated training budget for tenants		32.00%
4	Childcare provision		20.00%
5	Payment of expenses		88.00%
6	Mentor - Informal		24.00%
7	Mentor - formal		4.00%
8	Observing governance meetings		32.00%
9	Membership of professional organisation		20.00%
10	Certificated course		24.00%
11	Vouchers to attend meetings		24.00%
12	Annual performance review		40.00%
13	Skills audit		20.00%
14	Other (please specify):		20.00%

4.22 In addition to the 16 examples highlighted by the discussion group at table 3, the survey highlighted other means of support from landlords, including refreshments, access to meetings and events and making available care provision if required.

Information in other formats/languages, barrier-free or disability accessible venues, 'roadshow'-type events. **Falkirk Council**

4.23 Most survey respondents stated that they were considering new methods of support, which may include an introduction or expansion of some methods outlined in table 6 above.

4.24 The need for more digital support was a common theme highlighted in both the focus groups and survey; however, in some cases this could be slightly at odds with tenants' preferences as many tenants are keen to see more face-to-face meetings, despite acknowledging that digital tools can enhance access for many tenants- provided they have devices, connectivity and where necessary, support to connect and participate.

Link Housing provides GDPR and ad hoc training to use the equipment they provide. They also provide laptops, a Link email address and Microsoft 365 accounts for scrutiny group members.

We have supplied several Tenants with electronic devices to enable them to engage with us online. We gained a few extra volunteers by doing this. **Albyn HA**

We are looking at widening participation through soft scrutiny opportunities, including looking at opportunities with youth work and young people through youth participation... **Angus Housing Association**

We are reviewing our tenant reward system, looking at a comprehensive package of rewards that could be flexible and individually tailored to the tenant's need. **Elderpark Housing Association**







Staff spent time with tenants to engage using a tablet, staff assisted with set up, demonstration and support throughout the pilot. **Cairn Housing Group**

4.25 Landlords were asked if they offer specific support for 'hard to reach' groups, with 64% of respondents stating they do.

The groups highlighted as 'hard to reach' in this sense include young people, older tenants, disabled tenants, Gypsy/Traveller tenants and tenants for whom English is not their first language.

Tenant Participation Officers have supported tenants on Gypsy Traveller sites to form a group in a format that suits their needs (rather than traditional Tenants and Residents Association structure) **Fife Council**

4.26 Landlords were asked if they had succession plans in place for the various groups that they support. Most landlords who responded stated they do not have succession plans in place but where landlords do have these, they are in general for the Governing body and on occasion, for the scrutiny panel. This is an area for consideration and recommendation later in this report.

Table 7 Succession Planning			Response Percent
1	Governing Body		32.00%
2	Scrutiny panel		32.00%
3	Registered Tenant Organisations		16.00%
4	Tenants Groups		24.00%
5	No succession plans in place		40.00%
6	Other (please specify):		8.00%

4.27 It was acknowledged by one landlord that they are finding it difficult to get interest from tenants in their participation activity, therefore they are not in a position to consider a succession plan.

Desktop

4.28 A random sample of 40 landlords' websites were reviewed by TPAS, for information on tenant participation and opportunities to engage.

4.29 Of the 40 websites reviewed, 37 (92%) included a link to their TP strategy.

4.30 It was not always easy, from information published on the websites, to find out what type of opportunities were available for tenants to participate; the easiest way to do this was to use the search function. It would be beneficial to have specific parts of landlords' websites dedicated to tenant participation, including groups available, how to join, a list of RTOs and more general information on the support that is available for tenants to help them participate.

5. Conclusion

5.1 When the ranking of the same six methods of support by tenants and staff is compared, the support of specialist staff comes out as the top means of support identified- reflecting the view of both tenant and officer participants that relationships are the key factor in encouraging initial and continued participation.

Table 8 Comparison of Ranking of Support

Support	Rank Tenants	Rank Officers	Combined
Specialist Tenant Participation Staff	2 nd	1 st	1 st
Training	1 st	3 rd	2 nd
Tenant Participation Strategy	3 rd	2 nd	3 rd
External Support	4 th	4 th	4 th
Mentor	5 th	5 th	5 th

5.2 32% of landlords surveyed had succession plans in place for scrutiny panels and for governing bodies. However, 40% of landlords surveyed had no plans in place. Succession planning is an important element of support to groups as it gives assurance that a group can continue when tenants move on, or in the event a chair or office bearer stands down. One example of succession planning is that tenants actively involved in participation groups could be given training on how to be a successful chair, meaning that the relevant skills are there when needed.

5.3 The level of support given by landlords varies considerably and landlords should develop their approaches to support in partnership with their tenants and groups. Details on this should be

included within landlords' Tenant Participation Strategies, so that all tenants are aware of the support they can expect.

- 5.4 One of the key messages from both tenants and staff was that positive relationships and trust are key to good participation. Tenants also told us that they must feel and see that their contribution is meaningful, valued and can result in change.
- 5.5 Tenant Participation strategies were deemed to be of value, and they should be visible and available to all tenants, either by links on website or copies available from landlords offices or RTO's. The actions within the strategies should be reported on as well as the outcomes and the difference they made.
- 5.6 The case studies show the positive impact of participating and the difference that it can make to other aspects of people's lives, as well as the positive impact on service-delivery, performance and satisfaction levels for landlords.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Landlords should have succession planning arrangements in place for tenant groups and scrutiny panels to ensure that participation continues when tenants move on. To support this, the Scottish Government should consider developing best practice guidance on succession planning for tenant scrutiny panels, RTOs and other tenant groups.
- 6.2 Landlords should discuss and agree with tenants and RTO's the support that they will provide to allow those who want to participate to do so. Details of this should be included within Tenant Participation strategies.
- 6.3 Landlords should consider having a dedicated tenant participation area on their websites which is clearly signposted and easy to find. This would make it easier for tenants to access Tenant Participation strategies plus any other information, documents and contact details relating to tenant participation.
- 6.3 Landlords should report on the progress of their Tenant Participation Strategy, potentially as part of their annual performance report, as contained within the Guide to Successful

Tenant Participation: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guide-successful-tenant-participation/>



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