



EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

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Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

ETF response to City of Edinburgh Council Draft Tenant Participation Strategy

1.0 Background

Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) is the umbrella organisation for tenants' and residents' groups in the city of Edinburgh and a Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO). This is the response of ETF Members to the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) Draft Tenant Participation Strategy.

A Federation Meeting was held on Wednesday 28th November 2018 at the Norton Park Conference Centre. There were 21 people in attendance; representing 12 ETF Member Groups with 5 individual tenants present. ETF welcomes the opportunity to respond to CEC's draft Tenant Participation Strategy.

2.0 ETF Members' comments

Individuals and tenant representatives were questioned relating to the draft Tenant Participation Strategy. The responses have been grouped into themes where possible.

2.1 *What would you like to see in CEC's Tenant Participation Strategy?*

Tenant involvement

- More consultation and tenant involvement.
- Tenants need to be informed and involved every step of the way in policy changes.
- Give all tenants an opportunity to give their thoughts – should be able to influence decisions.
- Don't rely on Community Councils to represent areas as they often don't look at areas as a whole.
- CEC often come to the table with one purpose which they have decided well before the meeting. We always seem to get in on the act too late to actually be of some benefit.
- Tenants should be involved at all levels of consultation on aspects which affect their areas, such as:
 - Transparency involving policies (changes);
 - Investments such as Kitchens and Bathrooms;
 - Internal and external works;
 - Universal Credit;
 - Rent;
 - Repairs.
- Tenants should also be involved in discussions on an equal level as Council staff.
- Devolve power to tenants. This will ensure all tenants have a say.

- More focus on attracting new people and participants to become involved in tenant participation.
- Encourage more individual tenants to become involved in tenant participation.
- Look at 'bridging the gap' between RTOs and individuals.

Communication

- Communication between tenants and CEC staff, particularly at local level. CEC staff should be better at following up tenant queries.
- Communication – Tenants need to feel they are being listened to.
- Information should be made widely available and in different formats.
- Use different ways/methods that ensure CEC is listening to tenants.
- Listen to tenants and show results of suggestions from tenants, i.e. you said, we did.
- Tenants need to be informed when CEC decides to change rules and regulations, so there should be more transparency.
- Tenants should be well informed, i.e. 3-4 months in advance about kitchens, bathrooms, internal upgrades in high rise (i.e. doors, windows, landings, stairs, concierge), instead of being left in the dark and having to second guess CEC.
- CEC staff should be better at following up tenant queries.

Monitoring and Evaluating

- More explanation of CEC action plans including how they will ensure that CEC is delivering on improving services for CEC tenants.
- Have a Progress Report on a monthly basis against tenant participation outcomes. There should be a joint approach between CEC and tenants in monitoring and evaluating outcomes.
- CEC must act on the conversations they have with tenants. Lack of action or the lack of honest communication where action is found to be impossible is deeply corrosive to tenant trust.

Funding

- Proper funding in each of the localities for tenants to get involved, i.e. grants for tenants' groups.

Meetings, events and initiatives

- More thanks and incentives for tenants attending various meetings and taking part in various activities.
- Would like to know what loyalty CEC has to long term tenants?
- Meetings in venues such as Community Centres – involve tenants and housing staff.
- Would like more information on the Tenants Panel and how to become involved. The name Tenants Panel is misleading.
- An avenue/route to draw aspects/issues to the attention of locality managers.

Others

- Revival of Area Boards consisting of CEC tenants, Councillors and ETF representatives. Look at problems in the area and devise an action plan to address them.

2.2 What works well?

ETF

- They are a great organisation and very supportive of tenants.

Communication

- Regular newsletters from local Housing/Patch Officers.
- Keeping tenants informed.
- Communicating with tenants via email and post.
- CEC being honest and transparent with tenants and homeowners in mixed tenures.
- CEC has some effective staff in lower management roles.

Tenant involvement

- The involvement our tenants' group has with locality senior officers.
- CEC is good at involving individual tenants in the decision making process.
- Our local committee is democratic in its views and we work well together.

Meetings, events and initiatives

- Tenant Led Inspections (TLIs).
- Tenant Discount Scheme.
- Meeting with CEC decision makers and involve individuals and RTOs.
- Having meetings with Council Officers from your locality.
- Round the table discussions.
- Meetings at realistic times. Taking into account many tenants work during the day. Bear in mind many tenants will not attend evening meetings in the winter.
- An agenda in advance of meetings, so tenants can adequately prepare.
- Monthly meetings with CEC Project Board West Cromwell, Persevere and Citadel Court.
- Managers, Senior Housing and Development Officers and local Officers have three meetings per year in Community Centres such as Carrickvale. This is a great way of getting local tenants involved.
- Getting message out to tenants through local Housing Roadshows in venues such as Area Housing Offices and shopping centres.

2.3 What doesn't work?

Communication

- Lack of communications between CEC and tenants.
- Tenants being promised things and it doesn't happen.
- Trying to phone various CEC departments is sometimes impossible.
- CEC needs to listen to the tenants more as they know what is needed in their area.
- Complicated communications from CEC. The information should be in plain English, so it is easy for tenants to understand.
- Follow ups to surveys and information received. Many tenants don't know if a problem has been resolved and/or what the next steps are.
- Being kept in the dark by CEC, so tenants/homeowners don't know who to contact if they need to, i.e. maintenance etc., especially in closes/high rises.

CEC staff

- Some local Housing Officers/Patch Officers don't get involved enough with tenants.
- Some tenants have yet to meet their Housing Officer/Patch Officer.
- CEC staff often don't attend tenants' group meetings and don't submit their apologies in advance of the meeting.
- Front line staff do not show the training and resources to effectively communicate. Instead they are avoidant.
- Tenants are not comfortable with certain CEC members of staff. "Don't trust them."

Events, meetings and initiatives

- Tracking previous TLIs. How do we know CEC is delivering on the previous action plans?
- Abolish 'invisible members' of Tenants Panel in favour of encouraging 'Individual' tenants' forums in areas.

Funding

- Tenants' associations are inadequately funded.

2.4 How would you improve the Strategy?

ETF

- Have ETF develop the whole strategy from start to finish – charge CEC for this work.
- Although ETF is a good organisation, they need to stop being soft with CEC and stand up and represent tenants.

Communication

- Better communication between CEC and tenants.
- Putting up more notices in high rise blocks so tenants can find out where ETF/CEC are having meetings as right now no such thing happens, so tenants/owners are left in the dark.
- Better communication and involve tenants and residents at all levels of participation.
- Involve tenants in the Neighbourhood Environment Project's decisions.
- More information should be included in the *Tenants Courier*.

Tenant involvement

- There should be different levels of participation. What does the tenant need to know?
 - Involved to a great extent?
 - Involved to a certain extent?
 - Those tenants who only want to be involved to a certain extent should not feel excluded compared to those who want to be involved more.
- Tenants being able to realise they can influence decisions.

Meeting, events and initiatives

- Roadshows at local offices with the help of ETF members to speak to tenants as well as to gain trust.
- Walkabouts in local areas with CEC staff, including Patch Officers and tenants.

- Offer more incentives to take part.
- More groups coming together at meetings, i.e. networking and sharing ideas.
- Get more involved in my local area by having meetings.
- Have more meetings with CEC to get feedback, including how they will take forward issues.

CEC staff

- Patch Officers need to make themselves known better to their tenants. They should hold a surgery on a weekly basis to link in with tenants.
- Better support and training for front line staff.

Holding CEC to account

- Conversations must lead to actions.
- Being able to challenge CEC to ensure they are delivering value for money for tenants but not made to feel uncomfortable in the process.

2.5 Other comments

ETF

- ETF does a very good job but CEC is always in charge. They make up their minds and then come to us. It's the tail wagging the dog situation which grinds on the people who are trying to help matters get better.

Tenant involvement

- Ask carers to get involved with tenants who suffer from mental health issues and have disabilities.
- We must strive to get more people on board and keep working together.

Communication

- Tenants need to feel they are being listened to.
- Listen to tenants/residents, they know their respective areas.
- Transparency, involvement, openness with CEC tenants and residents. Just for CEC to be upfront with tenants/residents.
- The Tenant Participation Strategy should not become an excuse to avoid communication with tenants.

CEC

- Tenants in some areas do have a good rapport with CEC staff. This needs to be replicated across all localities.
- The Patch Officers should be involving carers for tenants that have disabilities; where appropriate.
- More information is needed on the Tenants Panel, as there is uncertainty about its role and membership.

Meetings, events and initiatives

- Make Neighbourhood Partnerships more accessible.
- Make meetings more tenant friendly.

Funding

- The Scottish Government should be making more funds available to tenants.
- Tenants having more influence on grants.

Others

- We need to start the process as soon as possible.
- We are happy with some of the improvement works being carried out in our area at the moment.

2.6 Formulating ETF's response

Fourteen tenant representatives are interested in helping to formulate ETF's response to CEC's Tenant Participation Strategy.

3.0 Conclusion

ETF welcomes the chance to contribute to CEC's draft Tenant Participation Strategy and this paper has been shared by the Federation's Executive Committee. ETF will work with CEC representatives to address the issues raised in this paper.

Appendix One: RTOs represented at ETF Meeting on 28th November 2018

Tenants and Residents Groups Represented
Birnies Court Tenants and Residents Association
Edinburgh Registered Social Landlords Residents Network (the representatives from this group offered their opinions as a result of previous discussions with their landlord. They will not be involved in helping to formulate ETF's response
Gateside Tenants and Residents Association
Hailesland Park Neighbourhood Council
Laichfield Community Association
Magdalene Residents Association
Maidencraig Court Residents Association
Moredun Multis and Maisonettes Residents Association
North Sighthill Residents Association
Ratho Station Residents Association
West Cromwell, Persevere & Citadel Court Residents Association
Willowbrae and Duddingston Residents Association
TOTAL: 12