



EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

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Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

City of Edinburgh Council Tenant Participation Strategy – ETF Response

September 2018

1.0 Background

Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) is the umbrella organisation for tenants' and residents' groups in Edinburgh and a Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO). ETF held a Members' Meeting on 3rd September to find out their views on what should be included in the City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC) Tenant Participation Strategy. This response represents the ETF Members' views on the questions most relevant to attendees at the event. ETF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this discussion paper.

2.0 Key outcomes – the results that we want to achieve

2.1 CEC believes that involving tenants should be at the heart of their work and want to ensure that tenants:

- ✓ know the different ways you can become involved;
- ✓ can take part and influence decisions if you want to;
- ✓ have the support and resources you need to take part;
- ✓ can help to develop quality services.

2.2 Tenants were asked if CEC should continue with these outcomes. There were mixed views and this is explained below:

The majority of responses were that **yes**, these outcomes should continue, however there was a strong view / perception that **tenants should be taking the lead more** in tenant participation initiatives, and that there should be **increased accountability** for CEC reporting to tenants on outcomes and activity that responds to tenant influence.

Those who commented 'yes' added these comments:

- Tenants should be able to voice their opinions without fear of reprisal from CEC;
- I have never met my Housing Officer;
- How can you make your feelings known when you never see your Housing Officer? We were told we will only see our Housing Officer once every quarter;
- Does the Council listen to what tenants say?

Those who commented 'no' added these comments:

- True participation means CEC tenants should set the questions for any surveys that are carried out. The current surveys are too confusing;
- We've had these key outcomes before and it's not working. We like the outcomes but how can they be made to work?

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- Maybe change the wording e.g. to really influence decisions and significantly help to develop these outcomes;
- How will the outcomes be measured? e.g. what percentage of tenants know at least three ways they can get involved?
- Make outcomes measurable and transparent and measured by tenants not CEC;
- CEC is too much in charge. There is a difference between influence and control;
- Put tenant participation in the missive and suggest tenants take part in at least one form of tenant participation;
- Not enough tenants know about the Tenant Participation Strategy;
- The Tenant Participation Strategy needs to be the tenants' way of participation and not led by CEC. We want things to be transparent.

2.3 Other comments included:

- Tenants Panel is "like a secret service" – we don't know who's on it;
- CEC formed the Tenants' Panel and no one knows who's on it;
- CEC is too domineering;
- Who's measuring the outcomes?
- We don't know who our Housing Officer is;
- Tenant participation is commanded by CEC – Needs to be more tenant led;
- CEC don't want tenant participation as they see it as a threat to their job;
- Tenant participation should be on an equal level. It's not true participation.

3.0 Working locally

3.1 The City of Edinburgh Council is working with its partners in four localities to deliver the best services possible. Some of the ways tenants can get information or be involved include:

1. An annual conversation with your housing officer to discuss services and ideas for improvement;
2. Regular information sent to you about your locality, including on services and a range of local events;
3. Housing officers working with you to develop a local get together; a 'drop-in'; a local street or stair meeting or a social media discussion;
4. Estate walkabouts continued and promoted, with feedback provided to everyone in the area through a newsletter;
5. Tenant groups meeting with officers to share news, views and ideas for partnership working;
6. Local volunteer ambassadors trained to help new tenants settle in and find their way around.

3.2 Tenants were asked what they think about these ideas and what else could be done. Comments included:

- It needs to be more often than an annual conversation;
- There should be feedback on the results of the annual conversation, including updates on action points agreed between CEC and tenants;
- It would be good to have annual conversations;
- 'Nae notice board/nae information!' How do we get the same information as high rises with notice boards?

- Local volunteer ambassadors is a good idea. However there is some concern that this should be the role of the Housing Officer and not tenants;
- Definitely involve tenants in discussions with Housing Officers;
- CEC should give support to help each of the localities develop services for tenants;
- How do tenants raise their issues to CEC as it is very often unclear how to go about this;
- Digital methods and other routes to share information between tenants should be included;
- There are no follow ups or feedback when we have a walkabout in our area;
- Tenants need to lead on Tenant Participation meetings which means more advertising, so tenants know that this is available for them to join;
- A Patch Officer handling 200 tenants, could spend a lot of time travelling to each tenant's home and not enough time spent with tenants;
- Not enough estate walkabouts have been happening regularly for a few years;
- Housing Officers need to change their whole way of thinking and their attitudes with regards to tenants' respective skills;
- Where can tenants meet with their Housing Officer?
- Talks are working in Stenhouse with officers and the regular information is a very good idea. The Stenhouse officer does regular drop in and takes part in regular walkabouts with the local Councillor;
- Tenant group meetings in community centres are a good idea.

4.0 Keep asking the challenging questions

4.1 CEC believes there are great examples of tenant scrutiny in Edinburgh and these should continue, including:

- ✓ Tenant Led Inspections of services;
- ✓ Tenants checking how their rent is spent;
- ✓ Tenants helping to monitor and improve services;
- ✓ Tenants analysing performance information;
- ✓ Tenants checking their estates with officers, looking out for anything that might make the estate look untidy or unsafe.

4.2 Tenants were asked what they think about the work they are already involved and what else can be done. Comments included:

- Tenant Led Inspections (TLIs) should be led by the tenants not CEC;
- A lot of hard work has been carried out with regards to TLIs. However the Inspectors don't know the status of the majority of the recommendations they made. What work has been carried out by CEC on the back of the recommendations?
- Walkabouts needs to be effective. We had one in the Moredun area, they listened to what tenants had to say and acted upon this. This needs to be replicated across the city;
- CEC needs to be honest and transparent about how they spend tenants' rent money;
- In theory it all sounds wonderful. However tenant scrutiny must happen and be implemented with tenants supported to lead on initiatives;

- Tenants could become involved in mystery shopping to inspect CEC housing services;
- This is an opportunity for tenants to become involved in helping to improve CEC services;
- Housing Officers need to get in touch with their tenants as part of the patchworking;
- Training should be available to tenants that want to take part in tenant scrutiny exercises.

5.0 Let's get digital

5.1 Increasingly more is being done online. CEC is committed to providing free Wi-Fi access across Edinburgh. CEC is consulting on the following:

- ✓ How do we help more tenants of all ages to get online, improve their skills and benefit from wider internet services?
- ✓ How can we use technology to increase involvement?
- ✓ How can we provide better access to computer equipment and tablets?
- ✓ How can we use apps, social media, podcasts, and digital TV channels?
- ✓ Would it be useful to train a network of volunteer 'digital champions' to help other tenants who are less familiar with computers?

5.2 Comments included:

- It will be important to bear in mind the people who do not want to and can't use digital devices;
- Many tenants still appreciate the traditional methods of communication such as letters, telephone conversations and face to face contact;
- CEC was spearheading a programme for Wi-Fi to be available for tenants. Is there an update as tenants don't know what is happening?
- Tenants should have access to computers in libraries. Computers could be booked for tenants to learn if they want to. For example block out two mornings per week in libraries across Edinburgh;
- More resources should be given to schools, housing offices, libraries and community centres to increase digital opportunities for tenants;
- Funding is very competitive and opportunities are scarce, so it will be important to make the most of what CEC already has;
- Train a network of volunteer 'digital champions' would be useful.

6.0 Resources

6.1 All social landlords are required to provide resources for their tenants to be able to take part. This can be direct funding, like grants, or indirect funding such as staff, rooms and access to equipment. Tenants' grants are provided to tenants' groups for running costs. But groups and individual tenants often want funding for projects e.g. community cafes, community classes, trips for older residents and other social events.

6.2 Tenants were asked for their ideas on how resources could be used. Comments included:

- Tenants should be involved in making decisions about grants as it involves tenants' rent money;

- RTOs should not be excluded in place of Community Councils as this was very apparent in a number of Neighbourhood Partnership meetings;
- Resources should be spread out equally throughout each of the localities;
- There could be a group in each locality to oversee the projects and funding. Tenants should have involvement in these potential groups in each of the localities.

7.0 Strengthening the Tenants' Panel

7.1 The Tenants' Panel is one way Council tenants can become involved to let CEC know their views to help to improve housing services and standards. Tenants are invited to take part in different ways.

7.2 Tenants were asked for their views on strengthening the Tenants' Panel and comments included:

- Who is the Tenants' Panel, how do they elect people, how does ETF get feedback to give to their groups, how do you contact them?
- I believe the Tenants' Panel has collapsed and I have been unimpressed with it so far;
- Who is the Tenants' Panel aimed at, are there different Panels for each locality?
- There needs to be a sense of transparency with regards to the Tenants' Panel;
- Restructuring, who is your Housing Officer, so many patches, don't know who our Housing Officer is?
- Who are the members of Tenants' Panel and is there a committee? Where do tenants go to get the information? Does the Tenants' Panel feedback on actions? This information needs to be available and made clear to tenants.

8.0 Working with Registered Tenants' Organisations

8.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gives tenants' groups a statutory right to register with their landlord. Registering supports groups' rights to information and consultation. The Scottish Government defines a Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO) as an independent organisation set up mainly to represent tenants' housing and related interests. The Council must notify RTOs of any proposals that affect their members and take account of tenants' and RTOs' views before making decisions.

8.2 What would strengthen joint working with tenants' groups and Edinburgh Tenants' Federation? Comments included:

- Have a sub-committee for each area;
- Information on who's who in the Council, a list would be handy;
- More contact time with RTOs and groups;
- Committee of RTOs in the area/in each locality, Council staff need to attend, shared common issues from the whole area;
- Locality structures are not clear – Community Councils are not useful;
- Contact details for every single staff member in each of the locality areas.

9.0 Is there anything else you want to tell us?

9.1 Comments included:

- The vast majority of people don't know who their Housing Officer is and don't have a direct telephone number to contact them. This is very easy to resolve via a letter sent to all tenants;
- Tenant participation should be on an equal level. This is true participation;
- Have a clear outcome distinct for sheltered housing tenants, focussed to their needs.

Edinburgh Tenants Federation
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