Tenant Participation Strategy

2013 – 2016
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Introduction

Tenant Participation – Our Definition

Tenant Participation is about tenants taking part in decision making and influencing decisions about:

- our policies that affect them
- housing conditions
- the services we provide
- issues that affect the wider community

It is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and services.

Our Commitment

We are committed to tenant participation. We aim to meet the needs and aspirations of tenants by providing opportunities for them to access all levels of the decision making process.

A lot of good work has been done since the last review of our Strategy in 2008. Some of our successes include:

- Tenants being actively involved in the development and review of our services and policies. No significant changes have been made without prior consultation with tenants.
- The development of a range of new information leaflets, including a new tenant participation leaflet providing tenants with a menu of options for being involved
- Completion of a large scale tenant satisfaction survey and implementation of an Action Plan to make changes where necessary
- The introduction of Estate Inspections involving tenants and improvements to estates made as a result.
- TP awareness training has been delivered to all staff
- Tenant Events in Musselburgh and Osborne Court have taken place to promote participation
- Use of our website and on-line office has grown
- Launching our own Facebook page
- Recognising tenants for their community spirit through the introduction of Good Neighbour Awards
- Improved partnership working with ELC and other RSL’s, sharing ideas and best practice and identifying areas for joint working
- Excellent feedback on our methods of tenant participation from the Scottish Housing Regulator following inspection in 2011
- Achieving TPAS Accreditation in 2012
Approved by Housing and Property Services
Sub-Committee 29/11/12

This strategy sets out our plans over the next three years, for involving our tenants in making decisions and influencing policies and procedures about the houses they live in and the services they receive.

It outlines our commitment to working with our tenants to improve the services that we provide, encouraging them to influence decisions about their homes and their communities, and providing them with the means to do so. The strategy gives details of how we hope this process will be developed, by whom, and how tenants will play a bigger part in our activities in the future.

This strategy is linked to our key aim which is:–

“To promote balanced communities by providing locally managed quality homes and services which meet the needs and aspirations of local people.”

We will review the progress of the strategy regularly to identify and examine the issues that matter to and affect our tenants, and to make sure that we manage and maintain the services we provide for our tenants to achieve high levels of satisfaction.

We are committed to delivering a high quality, regularly reviewed tenant participation process that shows tenants we are doing what we say we will do and allows our tenants to be involved at the heart of all of our work.

Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Scottish Social Housing Charter was introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 and came into force on 1 April 2012. It sets out the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities and offers tenants a new way to get involved and participate with us.

The Charter replaces the Performance Standards set out in the guidance issued under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 but it does not replace any legal duties under this Act.

The Scottish Housing Regulator is responsible for monitoring, assessing and reporting on how well landlords achieve the outcomes. The results of their findings will be reported annually through an Annual Report on the Charter (ARC). This report and how tenants can be involved in the self assessment of their landlord is still in development and the first ARC is expected to be produced in the summer of 2014. We have already produced a leaflet for tenants providing information about our performance across a range of activities and plan to refine this based on tenant feedback. We have begun to consider how tenants can become involved in assessing our performance and over the period of this strategy we aim to further develop this aspect of participation.
Benefits of Tenant Participation

We recognise the potential benefits of tenant participation in the delivery and development of our services. These include:

- Improving our services and achieving better value for money
- Improving overall tenant satisfaction with their home, community and the services that we provide
- Better communication between staff and tenants
- Chances for people to develop new knowledge and skills

We acknowledge that it may take time to achieve these benefits and that tenant participation has to be developed at a pace tenants are comfortable with.

By involving tenants and supporting their involvement in deciding policies and procedures, we will continue to develop new and practical ways to improve the communities in which our tenants live.

Our Key Principles

We have adopted the following key principles:

- Successful tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, committee members, and staff at all levels, working together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.

- Tenant participation in practice is a continuous process where information and ideas are shared, common understanding of problems is sought and solutions are achieved.

- Effective tenant participation allows all partners to contribute to the agenda. All participants must have the full and detailed information they need to consider issues properly; information must be clear, timely and accessible and take account of equal opportunities.

- How the decision making process works should be open, clear and accountable.

- Tenants must be given enough time to consider issues properly. If they want to, tenants should have the opportunity to meet, discuss and work out a common view in advance of meeting with us.

- Effective tenant participation requires us, as landlord, to recognise and respect the independence of tenants' organisations.

- Good working relationships evolve gradually and should be flexible to adapt to local circumstances.

- Tenant organisations need adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
Tenant participation in rural areas must be tailored to suit the particular circumstances and needs of tenants in such communities.

Tenant participation must meet the requirements of current housing legislation and best practice and should help to remove barriers caused by age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.
Section 2: Our Management Committee, Membership and the Tenant Information Group

Our Management Committee

East Lothian Housing Association is run by a voluntary Management Committee which is elected by our members at each Annual General Meeting (AGM). Management Committee members can be tenants or other people with a real interest in housing. We have strong community representation on our Management Committee and this helps us to know what issues are important to tenants and others in the communities we work in.

Our Management Committee is made up of 15 members, of whom up to 5 may be co-opted members. They control our business by:

- Setting the policies to be followed by staff
- Making sure that staff are carrying out our legal and financial responsibilities
- Giving authority to staff to carry out the decisions of the Management Committee and to attend to the day to day business

Management Committee members must work within our Rules. They are also accountable to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Becoming a Member

The most direct way of participating in our work is to become a Member of the Association. Membership costs only £1.00 and is for life. We provide full details of how to become a member of the Association to all of our tenants. An information leaflet and application form is available from our office and on our website. Our members may attend the AGM and vote for, or be elected to, our Management Committee.

We believe that promoting membership of the Association, encouraging tenants to become members and attend our Annual General Meetings or other organised meetings is an important area of tenant participation.

For those Members who are elected onto the Management Committee, we will ensure that appropriate training is provided to make sure they can do the job.

Our Tenant Involvement Group (TIG)

We have a Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) made up of tenants who have indicated an interest in getting involved in a variety of ways, for example, focus groups, surveys, via the website or being part of the TIG Panel. The TIG Panel which also includes Management Committee members is responsible for reviewing and implementing our Tenant Participation Strategy, scrutinising performance in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes and for working to increase Tenant Participation in all areas of our work (see Appendix 1 for the Panel’s remit). The Panel generally meets four times each year and works with our staff to develop and review the Tenant Participation Action Plan each year.
Section 3: Information, Consultation and Research

Provision of Information

Individual tenants, Tenants Groups and Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) need accurate and accessible information if they are to make informed choices. We will provide good, clear information, so that tenants, Tenants Groups and RTOs know what is happening. If it is not possible to provide any information requested, we will explain why.

All new tenants are provided with a menu of options for getting involved with the Association’s work and this is discussed at a home visit shortly after the tenancy starts. One of the options available to all of our tenants is joining our Tenant Involvement Group to ensure that they are consulted in the way that they want to be (by post, internet, face to face etc.), and can nominate specific topics in which they have a particular interest. On request, and where it is reasonable to do so, we will take practical steps, such as arranging interpreting and translation (we are members of Happy to Translate), information on CD, in larger print, and in languages other than English, if this is easier for tenants.

We provide tenants with a range of information either by post or through our website including:

- A written tenancy agreement
- A regular Newsletter
- A Tenant Handbook
- An Annual Report
- Information about our Complaints Procedure
- Information about Right to Repair
- Our performance against set targets and standards each year

and on request we will supply:

- Information about our Tenant Participation Strategy
- Information on Housing Management policies such as applying for housing, how we decide who gets vacant properties, transfers and exchanges, our rent setting policy, and repairs and maintenance
- Information leaflets on a range of topics
- Information on how decisions are made

Tenant Consultation

Consultation is when tenants are given the opportunity to comment on services, policies and procedures before they are finally agreed. Proposals for tenants to consider will have been developed before reaching this stage.
We will consult tenants either individually, in informal groups, or as part of a Registered Tenants Organisation (RTO) or a Focus Group, on the following:

- If we want to make changes to policy or service standards relating to housing management or repairs and maintenance, and the change would have a significant impact on tenants
- Our Tenant Participation Strategy
- If we intend to increase rents
- If we were to sell any of our properties that have tenants in them which would result in a change of Landlord or owner
- Local issues

We will use a variety of ways to consult tenants in the way that suits them best. For example:

- Individual letters to tenants with reply slips
- Through our newsletter
- Door to door surveys
- On our website
- Facebook
- As part of an RTO or tenant group

We have set a minimum standard for all consultations with tenants. Every year we will:

- Advise tenants about the topics we propose to consult them on for the following year
- Provide a timetable of main events including time for responses by the tenants
- Explain what information we will make available to individual tenants to help them take an informed and effective part in the consultation

At the time of consultation we will provide the following details:

- How the proposal may affect tenants
- A clear indication of what can be changed and clear information about what tenants can expect to see happen as a result of any survey
- How and within what timescale tenants can make their views known to us
- How and when a final decision will be taken
- Details of how tenants will be informed of the results of consultation.
- The staff members dealing with the matter
- Information on how and where to complain if the need arises.

Appendix 2 sets out our procedure for consultation and research.

Community Consultation

There will be times when we will need to consult with the wider community on issues that affect them. For example, we would consult applicants who are registered with us for housing if we want to make changes to our Allocations policy or, if carrying out major work in a mixed tenure estate, we would consult those who may be affected by...
the work. In these circumstances we will follow the same procedure set out at Appendix 2.

Satisfaction Surveys

We will always seek comments from tenants on our maintenance services, through feedback on routine repairs and surveys on maintenance projects such as window, door or kitchen renewals. Tenants will also be given opportunities to comment on the range and standard of all services through regular satisfaction surveys.

Every three years we will carry out a comprehensive, large scale Tenant Satisfaction Survey, and will employ an independent consultant to carry out this work.

The results of surveys will be monitored by the TIG Panel, and our Management Committee and will be reported to tenants in our Newsletters.

On-Line Housing Office

Virtually all of our housing services are accessible via our website (the exception being where we need a person’s signature). Tenants can apply for an available property, order and schedule repairs, view their rent account, pay rent, read our policies or information leaflets, obtain energy advice and make complaints. Every page has a praise or grumble feature which allows tenants to provide us with feedback, good or bad.

Tenants who have registered with our website can sign up for our paper-free service. Correspondence and services requiring a signature will still be sent by conventional mail, but consultation notifications, Newsletters, Annual Reports and other information will be sent by e-mail. This is an opt-in service, and tenants can change their preferences on the website or by contacting us.

The website has been designed to be as accessible as possible, and is set up to be easily navigated by tenants using screen readers or tabbed browsing, and is Browsealoud enabled. Every page of the website includes a link to a pop-up translation tool, which offers a wide range of language options.

The Live Help service is essentially a phone call for people who cannot, or prefer not to, use the phone. The service is open Monday to Friday when tenants and other customers have instant access to an on-line Officer who can provide them with a range of information and advice.

Our recent on-line expansion into social media (Facebook) has had an immediate positive impact on tenant participation. We are now reaching tenants who do not normally engage in traditional Tenant Participation activities and we expect this to grow over the next three years.

These on-line tools are beneficial to everyone and serve to enhance traditional methods of communication and engagement and not to replace them. Every tenant who uses the on-line services saves the Association time and money meaning more resources are available to engage with people through traditional methods of communication who prefer this option. It is also worth noting that working electronically reduces our carbon footprint.
Developing a Tenant Participation Strategy committed to tenants is part of a process that aims to take people from being informed and consulted on options through to making decisions and acting together to make their voices heard. Meaningful and effective participation leads to liaising with, and including, other agencies and groups for wider action projects in our communities, where this is needed and wanted.

Many tenants may be satisfied with the quality of services provided by us but, in trying to further improve our performance, we want to build tenants confidence and skills so that they can decide and act on the things that affect their daily lives.

Working with Registered Tenants’ Organisations

A Registered Tenants’ Organisation (RTO) is an independent organisation set up by tenants to represent their housing and related interests. It will normally have elected office bearers and a formal constitution. These RTOs can represent the views of people from defined, specific areas or about a specific issue. The RTOs will also have a recognised role in the tenant participation process.

As we continue to develop our tenant participation procedures, we make the following commitments:

- We will provide RTOs with advance notice of how and when decisions will be taken, which affect the management and maintenance of the housing stock. We will make sure that enough time is given to allow for meaningful participation and proper consideration of the tenant’s views

- We will speak to RTOs about how they can be involved in our decision-making processes

- We will provide RTOs with a chance to make representations to our Management Committee, either in writing or in person

- Our policies and procedures will, where appropriate, reflect how we involve tenants and RTOs in the decision-making process

- We will allow flexibility for tenants' representatives to state their views on issues they would like to take forward so that they are not just dealing with issues that we want them to consider

- We will involve RTOs in agreeing on ways for collecting wider tenant opinion

- We will involve RTOs in the development and review of our Tenant Participation Strategy

- We will also normally work with informal groups of tenants who have either not yet registered as a tenants’ organisation or choose not to go down this route

We have agreed a joint policy with East Lothian Council and Homes for Life Housing Partnership for Registering Tenants Organisations which is reviewed every five years. This means that the registration process is the same for any tenants group
in East Lothian, regardless of who their landlord is. To avoid bombarding tenants with information which is of no relevance to them, we consult only with the RTO’s that represent areas in which we own properties.
New Developments and Improvements

We have regularly involved the local community and individual tenants in the planning of new housing developments or the upgrading of existing properties in the following ways:

- Through local councillors and officials involved in determining the overall housing strategy for East Lothian
- Through the consultative process established to discuss the plans for particular areas, including presentations to Community Councils
- Through membership of our Management Committee
- Consultation with our tenants on our delivery plan for the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)
- Where properties are being upgraded, through our tenants being involved in making choices on details for their home
- After each project is completed, through our tenants giving their views on the work carried out as a part of a Tenant Feedback Survey

We will continue to build on these arrangements for involving tenants, prospective tenants and the wider community in future plans through:

- Continuing to work closely with East Lothian Council in the development of the Local Housing Strategy, through the Housing Forum and associated working groups
- Developing stronger links with local groups such as Community Councils
- Providing information to all who need it in clear language and using models, drawings, etc. to help explain our plans
- Whenever possible continuing to offer a range of choices to tenants, while taking into account costs, the need to plan for future maintenance, and our legal responsibilities

Wider Action

Involvement with wider community groups (for example, Community Councils, Area Committees, Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, etc) will also be developed on request and where we can contribute to the enhancement of community life.
Resource provision (including training)

We recognise the need to provide training for both staff and tenants involved in tenant participation. We will provide resources for individual tenants or groups of tenants who get involved to encourage their further participation. This training commitment will be provided by us or by other bodies specialising in training, empowering and assisting the development of tenants (for example groups such as the Tenant Information Service (TIS) or the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)).

Where Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) or informal tenants groups are formed, we will, if necessary, provide training for the tenants involved (for example, in running meetings, minute taking, keeping financial records etc). We have links with organisations that provide advice, information and training to tenants groups and will work with these organisations to help develop tailored training to meet the needs that tenants identify.

We will also consider support to tenant representatives who wish to apply for the Chartered Institute of Housing National Certificate in Tenant Participation by distance learning. Support may include paying all or part of the course fees.

Appropriate training will be provided to our Management Committee members, staff and tenants to ensure that they have the necessary information, skills and self confidence to contribute effectively.

As well as helping to identify training needs and funding courses for tenants, we will provide funding where possible for printing newsletters and other information. Our staff will help arrange and organise meetings and provide administrative support for groups seeking to form tenants’ associations, or evolving into RTOs. Administrative support could include typing, photocopying and posting, computer access and support and help in setting up filing and storage systems. Direct support will also be provided by our Housing Officers.

Importantly, we will make sure that tenants are able to attend meetings at times convenient to them. Meetings with staff will be arranged at times that take account of the needs of the majority of tenants. We will also provide travel and childcare costs where these are relevant to attending training courses, meetings, etc.

Where required, our staff will be available to assist tenants in developing Forums, Panels, etc to maintain tenant involvement in monitoring and reviewing how our services are provided. Tenants will be encouraged to participate in such groups and meetings which will be held at convenient times and venues to encourage maximum attendance, the ultimate aim being for tenants to influence how resources, in monetary and people terms, are best used for the maximum benefit to tenants.
Funding Tenant Groups

As RTOs and Tenants Groups that may remain unregistered develop, they will need funding to allow them to achieve their aims and to meet the requirements of registration.

Our properties are often in areas of mixed tenure and so we will pay grants proportionate to the number of tenancies we have in the area that a group covers.

Allowances payable are detailed in the Authorisations and Standard Allowances & Charges Policy to ensure that they are reviewed annually. At the time of writing this strategy the sums payable are:

Start Up Grant: £200.00 thereafter

Annual Grant: £75.00 plus £1.00 per tenancy

Annual grants will be payable to any group meeting registration conditions set out in our joint policy with ELC & HfLHP on Registering Tenant Organisations. These will be paid into the bank account of the group within one month of a claim being submitted and annually thereafter providing the group remains registered and continues to satisfy the registration criteria.

For any group in the process of getting started, legitimate expenses will be met by us from the start up grant, with any balance being paid into the bank account of the group once it has registered. Each RTO that receives a grant will be required to maintain annual accounts and show their accounts to us each year.

Tenants groups that choose not to register may still apply for funding and will have to specify how much money they need, what it will be used for, and how it will be protected for the use of the group. Such applications will be considered by the TIG Panel who will make a recommendation to the Management Committee as to whether the grant should be paid and any conditions that should be applied.

Section 7 : Partnership Working

We recognise the importance of working in partnership with other agencies that provide and deliver services which affect the communities our tenants live in.

We have been working to develop close working relationships with East Lothian Council and other Registered Social Landlords in East Lothian. We will continue to improve working relations by exploring opportunities for joint working and sharing new ideas and good practice.

We will also continue to network with other Registered Social Landlords, agencies and TP workers outwith East Lothian to promote tenant participation, share good practice and learn from their experiences.
Section 8: Monitoring and Review

This Strategy sets out how we will encourage and develop tenant participation during the next three years. We regularly review the progress of our Tenant Participation Strategy as required by law and the Scottish Housing Regulator. We encourage tenants to join our Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) and want tenants to be involved in monitoring the outcomes of work undertaken; to ensure that our Tenant Participation activity is working well and having a positive impact.

The TIG Panel sets an annual action plan for implementing the strategy which details the work to be carried out each year to ensure effective participation. The Panel is also involved in setting the Tenant Participation budget to maximise tenant involvement in our activities.

With the introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter this year, the TIG Panel will begin scrutinising performance to ensure that the required outcomes of the Charter are met. How this will be done is still to be developed.

Every three years, we engage independent consultants to complete a large scale Tenant Satisfaction survey. This survey provides a large amount of base line information to identify our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and training needs. Having direction and information relating to the services we provide allows us to target what areas we need to consider and invite tenants to engage with us to prioritise these. The TIG Panel will agree and oversee the implementation of an action plan to bring about any improvements.

We have produced a performance monitoring framework (a list of indicators and outputs is detailed at Appendix 3) which will help us to record the quantitative and qualitative measures. Regular quarterly reports are provided to the TIG Panel and the Housing and Property Services Sub-Committee who will monitor Tenant Participation activity such as, (but not limited to):

- Tenant and staff training
- Meetings with Tenant Groups, RTO’s, Focus or Community Groups
- Consultation exercises
- Customer satisfaction
- Use of the website
- Information provided to tenants
- Contacts with external agencies (e.g. East Lothian TP Forum)

An annual Tenant Participation report is provided to the Management Committee as well as a report from the Tenant Involvement Group being presented at the Annual General meeting.

We will provide tenants with regular information about progress against our Strategy, principally through our regular newsletters.
Appendix 1 – Tenant Involvement Group Panel Remit

Membership of the Tenant Involvement Group Panel will be open to all Management Committee members and tenants. The Management Committee delegates the following to the Group:

- To develop and implement our Tenant Participation Strategy and recommend it for approval
- To oversee the Tenant Satisfaction Survey including approval of the brief and appointment of the Consultant, and then discussion and publication of results and agreeing and implementing an action plan
- To seek opportunities to increase Tenant Participation in all areas of our work
- To scrutinise performance to ensure that the outcomes in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter are met.
- To develop and review appropriate policies in relation to Tenant Participation and recommend them for approval
- To report regularly to the Housing & Property Services Sub-Committee
- The Group will appoint its own Convenor
- The Group will meet as required, but not less than four times a year
- Any changes to this remit will require the approval of the full Management Committee
Appendix 2 – Consultation Flow Chart

Subject prepared (or updated) and approved by the Housing Manager and Director of Housing

TIMESCALE 2 MONTHS

Information sent to all Registered Tenants Organisations.
Responsibility: Customer Information Officer (CIO)

Article in Talkback newsletter/website advising of information and asking tenants to contact CIO if interested in being involved in discussion / review.
Responsibility: CIO

Information sent to Tenant Involvement Group members who expressed interest in that specific topic.
Responsibility: CIO

Feedback sought from groups/individuals through method suited to them, i.e meetings, home visits, telephone contact and website.
Responsibility: CIO

Comments come back from all the above and are collated by CIO and reviewed by the Housing Manager. Report regarding feedback and recommendations prepared for Committee.
Responsibility: Housing Manager

Report submitted to Committee.
Responsibility: Director of Housing

Summary for tenants on outcome in Talkback newsletter / website
Responsibility: CIO
Research Flow Chart

CIO produces cover letter and questionnaire for approval by the Housing Manager.

**Responsibility:** CIO

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**TIMESCALE – 6 WEEKS**

- Letter sent to tenants/on line, giving relevant information to enable them to complete questionnaire with time scale for return in pre-paid envelope.
  
  **Responsibility:** CIO

- Time permitting, article in Newsletter advising survey/research will take place in certain area on specific topic.
  
  **Responsibility:** CIO

- For face to face research similar letter sent to tenants advising of date and time of visit. Such research will produce more reliable data.
  
  **Responsibility:** CIO

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A mixture of methods of investigation can be beneficial in order to enhance and validate findings and strengthen conclusion.

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Responses on questionnaires are collated and put on to a spreadsheet for analysis and report written by CIO to be approved by HM or Director of Housing. Decisions are made.

**Responsibility:** Housing Manager

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Letters sent to all tenants who took part in survey advising of decisions taken.

**Responsibility:** CIO

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Summary of research in newsletter/website

**Responsibility:** CIO
Appendix 3 – Tenant Participation Performance Indicators

Indicator

**Tenants & Tenant Groups**

- No. of formal/informal groups formed
- No. of groups dissolved
- No. of RTO’s and % of tenants this represents
- No. of tenants in the TIG
- No. of new tenants signed up to TIG
- Amount of grant funding paid to tenants organisations

**Meetings**

- No. of TIG Panel meetings held during the year
- No. of tenant group meetings attended during the year
- No. of TP liaison group/network meetings attended during the year and any joint work carried out
- No. of estate inspections during the year and % of tenant representation
- Outcomes from the estate inspections
- No. of tenant events and % tenants attending during the year
- Facilities offered to encourage participation and maximise accessibility

**Consultation & Information**

- No. of consultations carried out during the year
- No. of RTO’s consulted during the year
- Methods used for consultation and to maximise accessibility
- Methods used to encourage participation (e.g. Prize draws)
- No. of tenant surveys issued during the year
- Response rate to surveys
- How the results of surveys were fed back to tenants
- No. of newsletters issued during year
- No. of information leaflets introduced during year
- Level of tenant influence

**TP Training and Awareness**

- Staff attendance at training/awareness sessions
- Tenant/Panel member attendance at training/awareness sessions
- No. of training/information sessions provided by Association staff
- Membership of external bodies e.g. TIS or TPAS
Budget

- Amount budgeted for TP and actual amount spent during the year

Outputs

- TIG Panel Report to the AGM
- Annual Tenant Participation report to Management Committee
- Quarterly reports to Housing & Property Services Sub Committee
- Quarterly TIG Panel Minutes
- Tenant Participation Strategy Action Plan
- Consultation & Survey Reports
- Joint RTO Register
- Talkback Newsletter