



LET'S KEEP INVOLVING!

Recent events have taught us how its even more important to communicate and get involved in your community.

TPAS Scotland are here to help you with this.

Now is a good time to reflect on different approaches of involvement; especially when unable to do the face to face meetings with our tenants. Using the internet for online videoing meetings has certainly helped. Whether this be the use of Messenger, FaceTime, Zoom, Teams or Skype. These are all easily downloaded on your laptop, computer, Ipad or smartphone.

These are just some of the ways we can still communicate with each other. For those who are not online or do not own a smart phone this period has been extremely difficult. However, phoning people and just letting them know you are there for advice and support can mean a lot. A letter can also help.

Times are changing and, if anything Covid-19 has really made us all reassess how we communicate and ensure our tenants voices are still heard.

This document brings together some flexible, practical approaches to help you maximise tenant involvement. Now is a good time to reflect on approaches to involvement. Tenants, the people who know your services best, are in the best position to inform future direction and how precious resources should be prioritised.

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF DOING IT?

Effective involvement should create opportunities for tenants to influence decisions and the design and delivery of services. Involvement has the potential to initiate positive benefits for the organisation as well as for the community or individual customers.

These include: Improved services, Developing communities, Landlord openness and accountability, Increasing skills and knowledge of individuals and Value for money.

You need to do what's right for the tenants and the organisation. Involvement methods need to be monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure that they offer value for money and, deliver the outcomes which you had planned! Finding effective ways of capturing outcomes can be a challenge for landlords, but if we want to encourage more involvement with tenants, it's essential that these changes are promoted and shared.

YOU NEED EVERYONE TO BE INVOLVED

Everyone who works for your organisation, including your contractors, should be concerned about delivering excellent services through involving tenants. The improved communication and decision making can help reduce costs and allow for the effective allocation of resources. Involvement will succeed and develop through being embedded within the organisation.

This culture of involvement must come from the top with senior managers/local authority members embracing the concept and ensuring that all consultation is meaningful and acted upon – even if the answer isn't the one expected or wanted by the senior team!

Embedding means that all staff are enabled and encouraged to have the flexibility and permission to consider the needs and priorities of tenants. Teams should be supported and encouraged to communicate with and involve tenants. This can be supported through job descriptions and the appraisal process. Tenant/resident involvement should not be an 'add on' but should be at the very heart of everything the landlord does!

THERE IS AN OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY POLICY/STATEMENT

There is a trusting and honest relationship with tenants with an open conversation. The organisation is open to acting on information/feedback they may not want to hear. Tenants feel valued and know the difference that their contribution makes. i.e. the organisation routinely feeds back to them in a transparent way. Effective Scrutiny of the performance and decisions made is encouraged.

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY – LISTEN AND ACT

Trust and an appreciation of each other's perspectives is an important element of the involvement process. Openness and transparency make it easier for customers to understand what decisions are being made and the influence they have had. Involvement with tenants will work if there is a relationship with the landlord built on trust and a culture of positivity.

As a landlord, you need to be consistent in your approach and must let tenants know that you are listening to them and hearing what they say!

Consider using social media, video etc for AGMs; events such as 'Meeting the management Team' or involving senior managers in estate walkabouts etc. These can be used to begin the process of being more open and transparent with tenants/residents. Is there information available that you currently could or should be sharing with tenants/residents?

Let them know what you've done with their input. E.g. "You said, we did" or "you said, we can't because...." Communication is vital in building a sense of mutual trust and openness. It also enables better involvement in the future as it reassures tenants that their contribution is valued and respected. Timely responses provide credibility and demonstrate an appetite for open conversation.

Involvement enables a trusting relationship to be built between you and your tenants

INVOLVEMENT IN BIG DECISIONS

It is important to provide choice and ask for feedback, there are also much deeper conversations to have.

Tenants who are involved at a strategic level can help to review decisions and streamline services, focusing on what's important. E.g. Rent Policy. Your business plan objectives should reflect the priorities highlighted through involvement.

Informal involvement is needed to reach as many tenants as possible. Therefore, don't limit the involvement in big decision just to tenants who may get involved via more traditional methods. Use every-day contact as a way of consulting with as many different tenants as possible e.g. estate walkabouts, face-to-face contact with front-line staff, on-line surveys.

CURRENT AND RELEVANT

Involvement should look at local as well as wider issues, e.g. climate change and the need for more sustainable homes or, health concerns, including Covid-19. Tenants will want to discuss issues that are relevant and current in their lives, homes and communities.

As we have all recently experienced, local and national events can impact on all our lives. These events also set the scene for the environment in which your organisation operates. Tenants have local knowledge relating to their homes and communities which can provide invaluable information for the landlord. Utilising this knowledge can help landlords make informed decisions based on this input which can provide Value for Money.

Consider whether you can work with other agencies in these communities. Their knowledge, experience and contacts can help support you in communicating and dealing with these communities.

Tenants and residents may also have ideas about what can be done to minimise the impacts of current issues, E.g. charging points for electric cars; projects to increase the re-cycling of plastic; development of eco homes.

COMMITMENT FOR INVOLVEMENT

We're keen for landlords to consider involvement as a real opportunity – 'an investment not a cost'! Discussions with tenants can provide real value for money by informing decisions and ensuring that money and resources are being spent where they are needed most. Involvement makes business sense!!

Landlords should consider wider initiatives to raise confidence with staff as well as tenants, develop skills and build capacity that can bring longer-term results for the community. Investing in the people, resources and assets within these communities can lead to greater collaboration, community ownership and project sustainability for residents. These in turn, can benefit the landlord! Evidence has shown that there is a link between Tenant Involvement and satisfaction rates.

PROMOTION!

Effective marketing and publicity about involvement opportunities is almost as important as the activities themselves. It doesn't matter how well you've thought through arrangements for an involvement activity, if people don't know about it, it won't succeed!

You should think about a multi-method approach to spread the word as widely as possible. A lot can be done online through social media and web-based promotion, but you need to consider who won't be able to see this! Do you need to think about maintaining some of the more traditional approaches to promotion such as flyers and posters? Could events be advertised face to face through front-line staff? Can you use existing groups and networks to get involved with your tenants?

Accessibility is wider than ramps for wheelchair users and loop systems for deaf people. Also reflect on what people need to know for them to be encouraged to attend. Tell them what's involved, what support is available e.g. it will be an informal, drop-in event, times and places, activities for kids, tea and coffee provided, will expenses be reimbursed? The more you can tell them, the better.

The word on how to get involved is spread widely across your customers and communities.

GETTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

Tenants will have different preferences and abilities to take part and not everyone will want to get involved all the time. Do you know your community profile so that you can be as inclusive as possible? A wider menu of involvement choices will ensure a more balanced and diverse representation of community views and help provide value for money.

Social activities such as fun days or 'coffee and chat' events can have a wider reach than more formal events. Digital involvement may be best for those with little time to commit or for some younger people but may alienate the older generation. Live streams or short Youtube videos can also be useful;

especially during lockdown! Accept that some people may just want to complete surveys or get involved in certain areas – this is okay!

The more methods used the greater the chance of getting more people involved.

Consider the profile of your communities and tenants. Any potential barriers for different groups should be identified and addressed e.g. using the written word can exclude a surprising number of tenants and residents. Other potential barriers could include language e.g. the need for plain language, cultural and religious sensitivities or accessibility.

HOW CAN TPAS SCOTLAND HELP?

TPAS Scotland has expert knowledge of the issues that affect tenants in the Scottish housing sector.

For 40 years, we have positively changed tenant participation techniques and best practice through training, support, projects, consultancy and policy development.

Talk to us about how we can provide in-house support to you: from training to consultancy services.

Have a chat with us about issues or ideas arising from this document.

Ask us about how we can tailor our support to suit your organisation.



For more information contact Lesley Baird on:
Lesley.baird@tpasscotland.org.uk or 07768 583 885 or
Elaine Scoular on: elaine.scoular@tpasscotland.org.uk

TPAS Scotland. Room 2, 3rd floor Erskine House,
1 North Avenue, CLYDEBANK G81 2DR



tenant
participation
advisory service

*Scotland's participation experts
40 years of member excellence support*