

Tenant Participation Strategy

2012 – 2015



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This is Weslo's second Tenant Participation Strategy and covers the period from 2012 to 2015. The strategy was prepared in consultation with tenants, Weslo's Tenant Participation Committee and staff.

The first strategy laid the foundations and principles that continue to be relevant and this revised document provides a framework for tenant participation in Weslo while setting out its ongoing commitment to developing effective tenant participation.

Strategic Aims

The Tenant Participation Strategy aims to:-

- Ensure tenants are effectively involved in housing management and other related services.
- Provide support to Local Housing Forums and Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs), wherever they might be established.
- Provide opportunities for tenants to become involved at any level they feel is appropriate.
- Identify and provide appropriate resources to ensure effective tenant participation.
- Promote equality of opportunity

Funding Resources & Support

Weslo will provide a range of funding mechanisms for tenant involvement.

Structures for Tenant Participation in Decision Making

It is important that tenants are given an opportunity to be genuinely involved in influencing the decision making process. Weslo's commitment to this is ably demonstrated by the fact that 4 Tenant Directors are democratically elected to serve on Weslo's Board. Weslo will work with tenants in developing structures which allow for effective tenant involvement.

Monitoring & Review

The strategy will continue to be monitored by Weslo's Tenant Participation Committee.

Service standards and performance indicators will be developed to assist with monitoring the effectiveness of the strategy in consultation with tenants.

The strategy will be updated as appropriate with a full review taking place in 2015.

Section 1

Introduction

1.1

Weslo's second Tenant Participation Strategy has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the guidance prepared by the Scottish Executive. Ideas put forward by tenants and staff have been taken on board in the preparation of the strategy.

A key aim of the strategy is to set out how Weslo will consult and communicate with its tenants over the period of the strategy.

1.2

The strategy provides a framework for tenant participation in Weslo's areas of operation; and sets out Weslo's commitment to developing effective tenant participation. The strategy has a mechanism for regular review and updating.

1.3

In November 2006, Weslo's Tenant Participation Working Group (TPWG) was reconstituted to form the Weslo Tenant Participation Committee (TPC). The TPC has been actively involved in the review of the strategy.

1.4

The strategy provides a framework for tenant participation in housing services and demonstrates Weslo's commitment to developing effective tenant participation.

Section 2

Background and Context

2.1

Weslo's stock varies in age and location and is widely dispersed throughout West Lothian, Bo'ness and neighbouring local authority areas following the purchase of additional stock through the Mortgage to Rent Scheme. This diversity requires a flexible framework for tenant participation to take place.

2.2

Since its inception in 1994 Weslo has demonstrated a commitment to ensuring tenants have an input to the development of services. This is demonstrated by the fact that we have 4 Tenant Directors who are democratically elected by Weslo tenants to sit on Weslo's Board. The Tenant Participation Working Group approved a Tenant Participation Policy in 1996 which continues to provide options for tenant involvement at all levels.

This policy has formed the basis for involving tenants in the planning and provision of services.

2.3 Structures for Participation

2.3.1

Prior to the introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, Weslo had established processes to provide support and funding to tenants groups. Weslo is required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to establish a register of tenants' organisations. The aim of this is to give tenant and resident groups that meet the registration criteria, a recognised role in the tenant participation process.

The procedure for registration (Appendix 2) reflects the Scottish Executive guidance and aims to achieve the appropriate balance between ensuring that groups meet the set criteria while encouraging and supporting groups to register. It should be noted that at this time, Weslo does not have any groups that meet this criteria.

2.3.2

Weslo will work with groups who are not registered, either because they have chosen not to register or do not reach the registration criteria. Weslo will work with these groups to support and encourage them to register. The Action Plan (Appendix 3) sets this out as an area for future development.

2.3.3

Weslo will work closely with individual tenants to ensure that their views and concerns are considered.

Section 3 Strategic Aims

3.1

The strategy is based on the definition of tenant participation outlined in the National Strategy for Tenant Participation entitled “Partners in Participation” which states that:-

“Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decision-making processes and influencing decisions about :

- Housing policies
- Housing conditions; and
- Housing (and related) services

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

3.2

The strategy is consistent with key principles of good tenant participation outlined in the national strategy. These principles are:-

- Tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants and Weslo working together towards a common goal.
- Tenant participation should be seen as a continuous process where information, ideas and power are shared, common understandings of problems are strived for and a consensus on solutions is worked out.
- Good tenant participation allows all parties to contribute to the agenda. All participants require to have all the information needed to consider issues properly; that information requires to be clear, timely and accessible and to take account of equal opportunities concerns.
- Processes of decision making should be open, clear and accountable.
- Adequate time should be given to tenant representatives to consider the issues properly. Tenants should have the opportunity to work out a common view in advance of meeting Weslo.
- Good tenant participation requires the landlord to recognise the independence of tenants’ organisations.
- Good working relationships evolve gradually and are flexible to adapt to local circumstances.
- Tenants’ organisations require adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
- Tenant participation in outlying areas must be tailored to suit the particular circumstances and needs of tenants in such communities.
- Tenant participation must meet the requirements of the legislation surrounding equal opportunities.

3.3

The strategic aims are to:-

- Ensure tenants are effectively involved in housing management and other related services. It is important those tenants' views are listened to, and that they can influence the services they receive.
 - Provide support to Local Housing Forums and RTOs to allow them to operate effectively.
 - Provide a variety of opportunities for tenants to become involved at whatever level they feel appropriate to themselves.
 - Support and resource the framework for tenant participation and to develop this framework in partnership with Local Housing Forums, RTOs and individual tenants.
 - Ensure that structures and initiatives are in place to take account of local circumstances and objectives especially in relation to outlying communities.
 - Allow tenants flexibility in terms of how they wish to organise
- Ensure that all tenants –
- Have access to high quality relevant information about housing services
 - Are provided with access to staff
 - Are encouraged to join and attend representative structures such as Local Housing Forums, RTO's and other tenant organisations.
 - Ensure effective communication between Weslo, tenants and partners.
 - Promote equality of opportunity and specifically to ensure that no tenant is disadvantaged in the participation process owing to disability, age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation or learning ability, etc.

Section 4

Key Issues and Priorities for Action

4.1

Structures for Tenant Participation

Since the development of the Tenant Participation Policy in 1996 Weslo has continued to provide support to ensure tenants in all areas are represented. Staff assistance will be given to promote and support the formation of new groups. In order to take this forward a development plan aimed at increasing capacity is included in the Action Plan (Appendix 3).

4.2

Communication and Information

4.2.1

There is a need for the availability of good quality accurate, up-to-date and easily understood information. The strategy recognises that the provision of such information is an essential pre requisite to ensure tenants are able to participate fully. Weslo currently uses a range of methods to keep tenants informed, for example meetings with the tenant participation committee, newsletters, letters, web site, e-mail and where appropriate public meetings.

4.2.2

The strategy recognises that there is a need to develop a comprehensive Communication Strategy (Action Plan, Appendix 3), which will set out methods and standards for communication with tenants. This will help to ensure that all key information and documentation is provided in an appropriate and consistent format to all tenants. In all instances Weslo will ensure that confidentiality is respected and that the provision of information is consistent with all relevant legal requirements.

4.3

Consultation

4.3.1

Weslo currently consults tenants on a wide range of issues and uses a variety of consultative methods to gauge their opinions and views. Notable examples of these include tenant satisfaction surveys, repair and contract satisfaction cards, office survey panels, Tenant Directors, tenant participation committee and tenant newspaper. It is however recognised that a more formalised consultation process is necessary to ensure that tenants are consulted and informed at the earliest possible stage. This allows tenants to have the opportunity to be involved in the policy making stage rather than the policy implementation stage. The Action Plan (Appendix 3) sets out the need for a Communication Strategy to be developed to ensure that consultation is effective and tenants have an opportunity to express their views.

4.3.2

In terms of consultation the main route used is through the bi-annual tenant newspaper and quarterly meetings of the tenant participation committee. Examples of items for consultation include Policy reviews, the Tenant Participation Strategy and introduction of new schemes e.g. Bathroom Upgrade proposals.

4.3.3

Weslo and the Tenant Participation Committee have agreed a standard for consultation in accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001:-

- An agreed timetable of consultation will be published.
- All parties will have a minimum of 4 weeks to respond to any request for comment on Weslo proposals.
- All parties will have the opportunity to access relevant information, training and advice on the issues being consulted on. This will include:-
 - managing estates
 - offering housing
 - repairs & maintenance
 - rent charges
 - the environment
 - service standards & performance
 - investment programmes
 - reviewing services

A summary of findings from the consultation process will be made available to all contributing parties by letter. All other parties will be notified by means of the bi-annual newspaper and website.

4.4

Resources

Weslo currently provides a range of mechanisms to support tenant activity however it is recognised that there is a need to consider the adequacy of current resources and those required to ensure the strategy can be implemented and delivered effectively. Chapter 5 provides information on funding, resources and support. A key action will be to carry out an assessment of the current resources and those required for effective tenant involvement. Following the assessment a detailed proposal for funding and resources will be developed.

4.5

Promoting Tenant Participation

A range of methods will be used to promote and inform tenants of the principles and commitment to tenant participation. These include, although not exclusively:-

- Information to tenants when they sign-up for a tenancy
- Newsletters
- Letters
- Leaflets
- House Visits
- Regular scheduled meetings
- Focus Groups
- Consultation Registers
- E-mail Group

The Communication Strategy to be developed over the period of the strategy will ensure that the methods to be used are effective in their promotion of tenant participation.

Section 5

Funding, Resources and Support

5.1

There are funding mechanisms in place to support tenant activity.

5.2

As identified in the Action Plan (Appendix 3), Weslo will carry out a full assessment of resources required and will also review current funding mechanisms. Thereafter a detailed proposal for funding and resources will be established to ensure the strategy can be implemented effectively.

5.3

Weslo will provide the following assistance to tenants groups:-

- Start-up grant for new groups
- Annual grant to groups
- Special grants to help meet the cost of items/events out with the scope of other grants or funding
- Travel and subsistence to facilitate participation
- Access to independent advice
- Assistance to attend national conferences/ seminars
- Information and advice development.

5.4

Additional support will be provided to groups and can include:-

- Assistance with organising events and meetings
- General administration support
- Assistance to apply for funding
- Production of leaflets and posters
- Start up support for new groups

5.5

Weslo will fund groups including RTO's and Forums providing that organisations remain registered and adhere to the criteria outlined in the registration process.

5.6

The strategy recognises that in order for tenant participation to develop it has to be properly resourced and supported and that resources include financial, physical and staff assistance.

5.7

Whilst there are funding mechanisms available at present, Weslo recognises the need to consider the adequacy of current resources and those required to ensure the strategy is implemented and delivered effectively.

Section 6

Structures for Tenant Participation in Decision Making

6.1

It is important that tenants are given an opportunity to be genuinely involved in influencing the decision making process.

6.2

It is also important that Weslo works with tenants and local representative groups to establish community links

6.3

Weslo is committed to the promotion of equality and embrace diversity. Equality and diversity is core to our business and we will ensure that this is reflected in all our policies, practices and services.

6.4

Weslo will:-

- Develop structures which allow for meaningful tenant influence in the decision-making process at a local or wider operational level.
- Provide groups and individuals with advance notice of how and when decisions will be taken which affect the provision, management and maintenance of the housing stock and will ensure adequate time is given to allow for meaningful participation.
- Consider views of groups and individual tenants before it takes decisions on issues which will affect the provision, maintenance and management of its housing stock.
- Provide groups and individual tenants with relevant information at the earliest stage to allow them to fully participate.
- Involve groups in agreeing methods for collecting wider tenant opinion.

6.5

Weslo will continue to encourage the Tenant Participation Committee, as a central liaison group, to influence policy. The key objective of that group would be to influence the Tenant Participation agenda and policies of Weslo.

Section 7

Equal Opportunities

7.1

Good practice in Equal Opportunities removes barriers to effective participation arising from ethnicity, geographical location, special needs, language difficulties, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability. This commitment to equality of opportunity must be reflected in the work and involvement of all groups, who should also be seen to involve and represent all sections of the community they are active within.

7.2

Weslo will encourage and promote active measures to ensure that all groups have equal access to participation and that no group is disadvantaged in the participation process owing to disability, age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, etc. When Weslo organise events which involve tenants they will ensure that consideration is given to the following:-

- Location and timing of meetings
- Meeting venues are barrier free
- Availability of information in plain English and other languages and formats where required.

7.3

Consultation structures should involve all of the community. Weslo will therefore ensure that appropriate routes are established to involve representative groups in the process.

Section 8

Monitoring, Review and Continuous Improvement

8.1

Tenant participation in Weslo is continuously developing and evolving. Tenants will have a key role to play in shaping and increasing the level of tenant participation over the coming years. It is important that the strategy is working in practice and to identify from experience any improvements or changes that may be needed. While the strategy sets out the priorities for 3 years it will be monitored through the Tenant Participation Committee.

- Do the formal structures in place achieve their purposes?
- How are examples of the different specific participation methods working out?
- Are the processes for participation adequately planned for and are they considered effective?

8.2

In partnership with tenants, service standards and performance indicators will be developed to assist with monitoring the effectiveness of the strategy and ensure that the strategy is reviewed in 2015.

8.4

The duties outlined in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 should not be seen as an end in themselves but as a baseline for the development of improved services in the future.

[Housing \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#)

8.3

Criteria for monitoring and review will include an analysis of the following:-

- To what extent is tenant participation covering all areas?
- Has the number of active tenants groups increased?
- Are tenants' groups working democratically?
- Are tenant representatives skills, knowledge and information needs being met?
- How well has tenant participation developed its capacity to represent Weslo's tenants.
- Are the recognition criteria working adequately?
- Have decision makers become more accessible and open to influence?
- Are sufficient resources being made available?
- Are the resources efficiently utilised and adequately accounted for?
- Are information needs being adequately addressed?

8.5

To ensure this process is meaningful, it is recognised that tenant groups and individual tenants must be empowered to enable them to become fully involved in discussions from the outset. Such a process, involving a tenant / Weslo working relationship, must ensure that the final decisions taken by Weslo reflect the thoughts and aspirations of Weslo tenants.

8.6

The progress of the strategy will be regularly reported to Weslo's Management Team.

8.7

In addition regular updates will be issued to individual tenants via the Tenant Newspaper, tenant groups (where they exist) and the Tenant Participation Committee.

Section 9

Appendices

Appendix 1

Tenant Participation Committee Membership

Appendix 2

Registration Procedure for Registered Tenants Organisations

Appendix 3

Action Plan

Appendix 4

Summary of Resources Spent on Tenant Participation

Appendix 1

Tenant Participation Committee - Strategy Working Group Membership 2011

Eileen Porter	Tenant Director, Bathgate
Hugh Ruck	Tenant Director, Livingston
Janette Wallace	Tenant Director, Stoneyburn
Evelyn Johnstone	Tenant, Livingston
Graham Lawson	Tenant, Armadale
Glen Mulligan	Tenant, Armadale
Jim Porter	Tenant, Bathgate
Gordon Smith	Tenant, Bo'ness
Kevin Symon	Tenant, Uphall
Colin Torrie	Tenant, East Calder
Sybil Watt	Tenant, Bo'ness
Gillian McAllister	Weslo Housing Management
Jessie McCue	Weslo Housing Management
David McLaren	Weslo Housing Management
Pamela Menzies	Weslo Housing Management
Margaret Walker	Weslo Housing Management

Appendix 2

Registration Procedure for Registered Tenants Organisations

Weslo has established a registration process which aims to be as uncomplicated as possible whilst effectively ensuring that groups achieve the necessary conditions for registration.

Registration Procedure

- Groups wishing to register will be issued with a registration form and letter which will clearly state that in addition to the registration form; they are also required to submit a copy of their written constitution.
- The group will be required to return the registration form and all appropriate additional information within 6 weeks.
- Weslo will acknowledge receipt of the form to the secretary of the group within 5 working days.
- After consideration, and assuming the registration criteria has been met, Weslo will provide a formal written acknowledgement of the groups registered status within 10 working days.

Assistance to Meet Registration Criteria

- The key objective for Weslo is to encourage groups to register and to provide support to ensure that groups are successful in achieving registration.
- Where a group falls short of the criteria for registration Weslo will advise the group in writing.
- The group will be advised of the reasons they have been unsuccessful in their application and further advice, information and assistance will be offered to help the group attain registration.

- Where a group ceases to exist/operate or no longer meets the registration criteria, the details of the group will be removed from the register no less than 5 working days from the date of notification and confirmation of this will be sent to the secretary of the group.

Re-registration

- Re-registration will take place on an annual basis. Weslo will write out to groups inviting them to re-register. A shortened version of the registration form will be sent for groups to complete and return with current details.
- The re-registration process will be carried out at the same time as the group applies for the annual grant. This will allow Weslo to continue its existing funding process while efficiently managing the re-registration process.

Advantages to Registration

Those groups achieving registration will be formally recognised and as such will be:-

- Consulted by Weslo on a range of exercises and issues affecting them.
- Offered support, advice and assistance by Weslo.
- Eligible to apply for funding from Weslo.
- Invited to attend and participate in Local Housing Forums.
- Invited to attend Tenant Information Services (TIS) and Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) conferences.

Appeals

- Weslo will operate a one-stage internal appeal process. The appeal should be made in writing within 10 working days of notification from Weslo that the group has been removed from/not been accepted to the register.
- The appeal will be considered by the Operations Director, and a decision will be made within 10 working days of the appeal being lodged. The secretary of the group will be advised in writing of the outcome of the appeal and the reasons for the decision.
- If a complainant is still not satisfied they can appeal further to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive will advise the secretary of the group in writing the outcome of their appeal within 10 working days
- If the group is not satisfied with the decision of the internal appeal process, under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 it has the right to appeal to Scottish Ministers. The appeal will be considered by the Scottish Housing Regulator on behalf of Scottish Ministers.

Appendix 3 Action Plan

Key Area	Action	Timescale	Responsibility	Activity
1. Commitment to Tenant Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and consult on second draft of TPC Strategy. 	December 2011	Housing Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenant consultation on draft document via web site & Tenant Newspaper in December 2011. Feedback from TPC in November 2011. Record feedback from tenants at large.
2. Taking Tenant Participation Forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore methods of tenant involvement in tenant participation and increase levels of involvement. 	December 2011	Housing Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and increase the number of tenants prepared to be contacted via e-mail address database. Encourage staff to be more pro-active at sign up of new tenants to promote tenant participation.
3. Funding, Resources and Support				
a) Funding & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure adequate funding mechanism in place annually 	February 2012	Housing Manager	Resource requirements for TPAS conference attendance, training etc.
b) Development Support	New groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and encourage formation of new groups Assistance to start-up 	Ongoing	Housing Manager	As appropriate. As appropriate.

Appendix 4 Summary of Anticipated Expenditure on Tenant Participation

Annual grants paid to Tenants & Residents Associations	£ as required
Membership renewal to Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)	£600 p.a. approx.
TPAS Annual Conference	£3,000 p.a.
Production of Housing Newsletter - 2 editions per year	£6,000 p.a.
Forecast Expenditure 2012 - 2015	Total £28,780

* Staff resources have not been included in the above assessment