

# Midlothian Council

## Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy 2020-2023



Midlothian Council recognises that involving tenants and service users is an essential part of our decision making process. We are committed to making sure there are opportunities for all tenants and service users to participate in design and delivery of our housing services.

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## **Foreword from Councillor Stephen Curran - Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing**

“The Council’s Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy sets out what we plan to do, in co-operation with council tenants and service users, working together towards a common aim of better housing and related housing services.

I would like to thank all tenants and service users for their continued commitment and support over the last few years. Their valuable input has helped us immensely and I would encourage all tenants and service users to get involved and have their say on housing policies. By working together over the next three years we would hope to achieve the aims of this Strategy.”

This report is our Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy 2020-2023. If you would like this document in a different format such as large print or translated text we can provide this to you. Please contact [tenant.participation@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@midlothian.gov.uk)

## **Legal Framework**

### **Background**

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires social landlords to “consult tenants on proposals that affect them, and take account of their views”. Tenants groups can register with their landlord to strengthen their rights to information and to take part.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter requires social landlords to ensure that tenants and other groups find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord’s decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

The Scottish Housing Regulator promotes tenant participation and the importance of tenants and social landlords scrutinising services together to improve performance and ensure value for money.

We want to hear the views of tenants about this strategy and hear if you agree to our proposed changes to reach our strategy goals. We aim to place your views at the centre of decisions about your Housing Service, and we understand we need to provide a variety of different ways to enable you to do this. Please contact us with any comments on 0131 271 3629 or via email: [tenant.participation@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@midlothian.gov.uk).

## Participation

Tenant Participation is a two way process, which involves sharing ideas and information also influencing decision making processes to improve housing services. All local authorities need to have a Tenant Participation Strategy highlighting how tenants can become involved and improve their landlord's services.

### **This is Midlothian Council's Tenant Participation Strategy for 2020-2023.**

Midlothian Council is committed to focussing on the needs of our tenants and service users whilst being transparent and accountable. We want to be inclusive and provide opportunities for all tenants to get involved, while making best use of the resources available to us. This strategy is designed to reflect values and encourage you to become involved in a way that suits each individual.

Who we should consider as part of our plans includes:

- People who are already tenants.
- Applicants on our Housing List.
- Homeless people.
- People who use the housing service such as gypsy/travellers.



Tenants and guests in Penicuik enjoying a Christmas Carol Concert

## Keeping our tenants and service users informed

When it comes to keeping our tenants and service users informed, we will provide meaningful information, ensuring it's easy to understand so that you are well informed and able to participate in influencing housing policies or helping making choices. Midlothian Council realise there are many tenants and service users who have digital media and we hope to use this system if possible - but will communicate using appropriate means to us as follows:

- **Social media:** Midlothian Council are continually developing our use of social media as a tool to communicate with our tenants and local community such as our E-Newsletter which is offered to all tenants offering useful information regards housing issues.
- **Email:** we continue to communicate with some of our tenants by email and are actively encouraging new tenants at sign up to give us access to their email addresses whilst helping save environment and cost involved with mailing letters.
- **Holding local tenant participation meetings:** have venues that are accessible to all tenants and are within easy reach for the local tenants attending at appropriate times.
- **Registered Tenant Organisations (RTO's):** we currently have one RTO group and hold regular group meetings and inform the group of any upcoming changes within housing services.
- **Posters/Flyers:** we will continue to advertise local walkabouts and tenants meetings to encourage as many tenants to get involved with their community as possible.
- **Local newspaper/Local Radio:** we will use local newspapers on rare occasions if necessary due to the decline in this medium but will also use local community radio covering the whole of the Midlothian Council area.

In our previous Strategy we heavily promoted our three aims of Promotion, Participation and Performance and we are keen to expand these past aims to further develop these goals going forward into future years ahead within tenant participation.

## **Aims of the Strategy**

The Council's aim is to have our tenant's and service user's views at the centre of our Housing Service, to reach this aim we need various ways to achieve this goal:

- Use resources to support tenant participation = Our Tenants' Views
- Letting our tenants and service users actively review our policies = Our Tenants' View
- Consult, listen and act on what our tenants tell us = Our Tenants' View
- Offer a range of opportunities for tenants to be involved= Our Tenants' View
- Make our communities a better place to live = Our Tenants' View
- Help build networks between tenants in Midlothian = Our Tenants' View
- At tenants sign up for a new house, mention Tenant Participation in Handbook = Our Tenants' View

## **Midlothian Tenant Panel**

The Tenant Panel has been established for many years and Midlothian Council try to actively encourage our Tenant Panel members to discuss a variety of housing topics::

- Service and procedures - repairs, kitchen programmes new cabinets
- Scrutiny and performance - Panel members invited annually to meeting to discuss our Charter return and offer suggestions of their own findings as service users

We engage fully with this group, which helps Midlothian Council to reach decisions which could be right for all our tenants. The Panel monitors and reviews our current policies and assists Midlothian Council to develop new strategies or policies. We encourage all our tenants to join the Tenant's Panel and we widely promote it at various council sites including libraries and sport centres to widen the range of tenants joining each year. We realise that not all tenants can attend the panel meetings we hold but we forward the agenda papers to panel members and take their responses into consideration and pass their views forward at the meetings.

## **Tenant Led Scrutiny/Service Reviews:**

Scrutiny and service reviews involve tenants in the self-assessment of services. The council introduced this to give tenants an enhanced role in scrutiny of performance and also to compare their landlord's performance against others. We provide training to give individuals the tools, skills, and confidence required to carry out this type of activity.

**Walkabouts:** These offer the opportunity for local residents, council staff and other interested community groups to work together to make their neighbourhoods a better place to live. The council have been holding a walkabout once a month and local tenants are sent information a few weeks prior to the event through flyers displayed on lampposts. Local libraries and social media are also used to advertise these walkabouts. We realise that

not all tenants want to or able to attend the walkabout so we offer a text service or telephone number if tenants have concerns before the event and we will contact them with the findings of their complaint .

## **Resident led estate walkabout programme 2020**

These are attended by Housing Officer(s), Tenant Participation Officer and Midlothian residents. Housing Officer(s) confirm inspection area (street names or local estates) at least two weeks in advance of walkabout to enable adequate PR.

Meeting point are usually in inspection area but are confirmed closer to walkabout.

Meeting time is 11am.

**Please note that currently these Walkabouts are cancelled until further notice due to Covid- 19.**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Councillors</b>
Newtongrange	22/01/20	Catherine Johnstone Jim Muirhead Kieran Munro
Dalkeith	19/02/20	Colin Cassidy Stephen Curran Margot Russell
Loanhead	18/03/20	Russell Imrie Kelly Parry Pauline Winchester
Poltonhall	22/04/20	Diane Alexander Janet Lay-Douglas Derek Milligan
Penicuik	20/05/20	Andrew Hardie Debbie McCall Joe Wallace
Gorebridge	17/06/20	Catherine Johnstone Jim Muirhead Kieran Munro
Woodburn	22/07/20	Colin Cassidy Stephen Curran Margot Russell
Bonnyrigg	19/08/20	Diane Alexander Janet Lay-Douglas Derek Milligan
Mayfield	23/09/20	Ken Baird John Hackett Peter Smaill
Penicuik	21/10/20	Andrew Hardie Debbie McCall Joe Wallace
Dalkeith	18/11/20	Colin Cassidy Stephen Curran Margot Russell

Area	Date	Councillors
Rosewell	16/12/20	Russell Imrie Kelly Parry Pauline Winchester

## Other ways we use to achieve tenants involvement

We realise that not all tenants will want or be able to be part of a group or attend regular meetings. The council believe it is important to provide a range of activities to suit everyone. Below are some of the ways tenants can get involved with us:

- Surveys are carried out every two years. The last survey in 2019 picked 700 random tenants to complete a survey which asked their views on subjects including repairs, rent charges level and tenant satisfaction. Interested Individuals Register – people who sign up to this register are given housing news updates.
- Tenants Day - once a year we hold this event whereby we have information stalls, children’s activities and give tenants the opportunity to ask housing staff questions.
- Garden Competition –we hold this event annually and award prizes to winners in various categories including communal gardens section.
- Tenant Panel conference meetings – we engage our panel members requesting their opinions on varied issues such as new house fixtures like kitchen cabinets , rehousing project and new build projects. . Two meetings and three consultations were held in 2019. In 2020 due to Covid19 the Local Housing Strategy Survey was via virtual meetings, paper copies or website survey for feedback, Panel members given draft of Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy 2020-2023.
- Tenants newsletters each tenant receives a copy.
- E-Newsletter this is on our website and tenants can visit their local library to gain access if needed and we also print a few copies and place in council buildings for the public to see if they don’t have access to the internet.
- New Housing Allocation Policy consultations - drop-in sessions organised throughout Midlothian to consult with tenants on new ideas that the council might introduce in future years and to answer general questions regarding housing matters.
- At sign up for a new tenancy a housing officer will highlight the tenant participation section in our handbook to help new tenants who are just moving into the area or first time tenants.





Best Communal Garden Winners- Tenants at Cowan Court in Penicuik with their prizes

## Tenant Participation Resources

Midlothian Council values the importance of resourcing tenant participation. We are committed to providing resources and facilities as follows:



- Annual Tenants Day and events
- Supporting the registered tenant organisation
- Tenant consultations
- Newsletters
- Venues for meetings
- Supplying refreshments and food at events
- Crèche facilities
- Training for staff and tenants
- Supporting working groups
- Travel expenses for tenants to go to meetings
- General administration- taking minutes, photocopying
- Translation and interpretation services if required

The amount spent each year can fluctuate depending on activities that are taking place and costs of producing and delivering newsletters and surveys. In future years the council is strongly committed in protecting the environment by sending as much information as possible online to tenants via emails, Facebook, Twitter and any other future digital means. The Council realise that all tenants are not able or have the use of a computer device so a small number of paper copies will always be produced to accommodate everyone's needs.

## Equalities

Midlothian Council are committed to promoting equal opportunities throughout our work and we do not discriminate on grounds of ethnic origin, disability, marital status, gender, age, sexuality, political and religious beliefs, or any other form of discrimination.

We will support all tenants to participate while maintaining their right to privacy and confidentiality. The council will try to support and identify sectors of our tenants which are underrepresented.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy**

We will keep reviewing the progress of this Strategy and strive to encourage as many tenants as possible to get involved with the varied methods on offer. We will regularly look at new ways of working with the tenants and interested individuals.

We will:

- Review the full Tenant Participation Strategy every 3 years.
- Ask our tenants and interested individuals for their views on how to improve this service and to raise tenant involvement.
- Review and report on activities and achievements.

Every year we have to provide the Scottish Housing Regulator through the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) with performance information on progressing towards or achieving the Charter outcomes and standards.

### [Annual Assurance Statement](#)

Midlothian Council will report our performance to our tenants using various methods to ensure as many tenants as possible see these important results. We also invite our Tenant Panel members to a meeting with a wide range of staff from our Housing Services.

## **Tenant participation priorities for coming years**

The plan going forward with tenant participation will be to continually review the aims of the strategy and to check that improvements are being met.

### **The priorities of our strategy are to:**

- \* Involve more tenants – by using more social media.
- \* Ensure survey methods provide reflection on the households and equalities groups.
- \* Review and update the Tenant Participation Strategy.
- \* Ensure tenants are involved in reviewing housing services – Tenant Handbook updates.
- \* Support Registered Tenant Organisations (RTO) and other local resident groups.
- \* Consult on the Local Housing Strategy.
- \* Consulting on the [Annual Assurance Statement](#)
- \* Provide relevant training.
- \* Start up senior group for tenants with guest speakers invited along.

\* Produce a Temporary Tenants Housing Newsletter and explore other opportunities to involve homeless service users to ensure that those with a lived experience influence service planning and service delivery.

\* Expand the use of text and email to contact tenants.

\* Encourage new build tenants to join tenants' groups.

Provide new build tenants with welcome packs with local information about their new area.

## **Our Expectations**

Our expectation is to maximise tenant involvement in influencing and scrutinising our housing services. The current strategy recognises that tenant participation is a continually evolving process which has to adapt to changes in demand, service delivery priorities, work practices, interests and perceptions. Over the next few years tenant participation has to continue this progress by offering new and relevant tenant opportunities to all.

## **Future new technology within Tenant Participation**

The council expects that developing information technology in the coming years will heavily impact on our practises engaging with tenants.

The use of video calls will help with many tenants especially in our more rural areas within Midlothian. This will also be more convenient for the busy younger tenants with childcare issues to make use of our services more readily.

Other benefits:

- Encouraging people to participate from their own homes could reduce the need for meetings and help with any travel difficulties for example in poor weather conditions.
- Younger tenants may find video calls easier to fit around their busy lifestyles.
- Video conference could be useful for remote communities.
- Tenants are more at ease in their own surroundings and so could be more open to asking questions.
- Video calls could be an easier option for disabled or elderly tenants especially in poor winter months.
- Reduced costs and more flexibility to tenants.
- More environmentally friendly.
- Easier to organise other departments within the council to engage on video conference.
- Could help tenants who suffer with agoraphobia to feel part of the local community.

Video conferencing could prove to be a useful tool to us in the coming years but we realise that not all tenants will be able to join in. We would still have face to face meetings and in the future would hope to have a system in place for hard of hearing tenants to join in with video conference meetings.

## **Newsletter**

Midlothian Council produces a number of newsletters including our regular tenant's newsletter 'Tenants Today' and 'Temporary Times' for our temporary let tenants. We also produce special editions of Tenants Today for specific consultations issues for example Rent Levels and Housing Allocations policy in 2019. If there is any new changes in housing laws coming into force we will highlight all the changes in an article to our tenants and offer advice if they need any further information we will supply relevant contact details. Tenant participation details are always given in the newsletters and we run a short story explaining what all the local groups are involved in lately and when all local future meetings will take place with all necessary details supplied.

We have our Annual Tenants Day and Garden Competition and these events are heavily published in the local areas and other council premises throughout Midlothian to encourage maximum numbers.

Our aim going forward with the newsletters is to ask tenant panel members to assist with content ideas and to write short tenant articles.

## **Survey results from summer 2019**

In the summer of 2019, 700 random selected tenants were contacted and asked a series of questions. This important information was feed back to the individual sections within our council services such as call teams and the repairs service. We find these surveys can be a valuable tool at improving our services for tenants and service users in Midlothian.

## **Our pledges**

We are committed to consulting with tenants and listening to their views before decisions are made. Our pledges for future years include;

1. Tenants and service users will be involved in consultation processes from the beginning.
2. Consultation is a genuine process and not just a tick-box exercise.
3. We will give people reasonable time to consider and give their response.
4. We will listen carefully to what people have to say.
5. Midlothian Council will take feedback into account before a decision is reached.
6. We will keep tenants updated on the result of any consultation.
7. We aim to give tenants up to two months to respond to our housing consultations.

8. Midlothian Council will inform tenants when they can expect changes to be implemented.



Above tenants enjoying a Tenants Day event in 2019

## Feedback

If you have any comments to make on the report or you would like any further information, you can contact us in the following ways:

## Write to us

Tenant Participation Officer  
Buccleuch House  
1 White Hart Street  
Dalkeith  
Midlothian  
EH22 1AE

Telephone: 0131 271 3629

Email: [tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk)

## Other formats

This document can be provided in large print, Braille or translated into other languages. Please use above details for any of these services.

## Links to other Strategies and Plans

The Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy is one strand of Important strategies and plans that the council are involved in developing and implementation. The strategies listed below are of key importance to improving the quality of the lives for tenants in Midlothian:

### Local Housing Strategy

All councils in Scotland are required to develop a Local Housing Strategy which considers housing needs and issues and sets out an action plan to deal with these over a period of time. Key areas of activity include objectives related to:

- Development of affordable housing
- Access to housing
- Assisting homeless households and preventing homelessness
- Improving stock condition
- Ensuring those with particular needs are provided with support

### Customer Service and Housing Safety Service Plan

Service improvement planning is a key element in how the council's Customer Service and Housing Service prioritise activity. Through service planning, the department is able to set objectives and improvement targets over the coming years in order that the council delivers on its goals.

### Single Midlothian Plan

The Single Midlothian Plan is an agreement between partners in Midlothian, including the council, NHS, and Police and sets out outcomes for improving the quality of life for people in Midlothian.

If you would like a copy of any of these documents they can be downloaded from Midlothian Council's website [www.midlothian.gov.uk](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk) or contact the council's Tenant Participation Officer on **0131 271 3629** or via email at [tenant.participation@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:tenant.participation@midlothian.gov.uk)

## Communicating Loud and Clear

We are happy to translate on request and provide information and publications in other formats, including Braille, tape or large print.

如有需要我們樂意提供翻譯本，和其他版本的資訊與刊物，包括盲人點字、錄音帶或大字體。

Zapewnimy tłumaczenie na żądanie oraz dostarczymy informacje i publikacje w innych formatach, w tym Braillem, na kasecie magnetofonowej lub dużym drukiem.

ਅਸੀਂ ਮੰਗ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਨਾਲ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਅਤੇ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ, ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਰੇਲ, ਟੇਪ ਜਾਂ ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹਨ।

Körler için kabartma yazılar, kaset ve büyük nüshalar da dahil olmak üzere, istenilen bilgileri sağlamak ve tercüme etmekten memnuniyet duyarız.

اگر آپ چاہیں تو ہم خوشی سے آپ کو ترجمہ فراہم کر سکتے ہیں اور معلومات اور دستاویزات دیگر شکلوں میں مثلاً بریل (تایینا افراد کے لیے ابھرے ہوئے حروف کی لکھائی) میں، ٹیپ پر یا بڑے حروف کی لکھائی میں فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔

**Contact 0131 270 7500 or  
email: [enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk)**