

North Ayrshire Housing Services' Customer Participation Strategy

2022-2027



DRAFT

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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce our Housing Services' Customer Participation Strategy 2022-2027.

Since the introduction of our first Strategy in 2003, we have continued to make great steps forward and have developed a Tenant Participation service that makes sure our customers are involved in decision making and are empowered to influence how we deliver our Housing service. We believe that by giving people a range of different ways of engaging with us, listening to what they say, setting up real partnerships and providing high quality information, we can continue to provide excellent housing services for our customers.

The Scottish Government published its strategic roadmap for housing - Housing to 2040 in March 2021. The strategy sets out a vision for housing in Scotland and aims to ensure that everyone has a safe, good quality and affordable home that meets their needs in the place they want to be. North Ayrshire Council will ensure delivery on the ambitions within the strategy and ensure all policy making decisions support the national housing approach and develop a structure to implement resultant actions.

We will work with our customers to ensure they continue to have a voice and are at the centre of the work we do.

Putting our customers at the heart of our service delivery resulted in our 2019 'Gold Reaccreditation for embracing the Social Housing Charter commitment. In addition, 'Gold Reaccreditation' was awarded for our approach to customer involvement and scrutiny in 2021. Both external accreditations recognise our commitment to placing our customers at the heart of our organisation, ensuring customers are influencing decisions and scrutinising our service areas.

We are delighted that our commitment to our customers has been recognised, however we are not complacent; we will continue to challenge ourselves and encourage our customers to challenge us, so that we can continually strive to improve performance and service delivery.

I would like to formally recognise the contribution that our tenants' and residents' groups make, and to thank those who are part of the North Ayrshire Network, Inspection Panel and Service Improvement Groups.

Finally, thank you to all our customers for your feedback to our various consultation exercises. We hope you continue to take part, be heard and make a difference to our communities.

Councillor Scott Davidson

Cabinet Member for Place



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Introduction

Working in partnership with tenants and customers is key to delivering excellent housing services to the people of North Ayrshire. We have worked closely with tenants and other customers to produce this Strategy, which sets out our commitments and how we will develop our approach to tenant participation over the next five years.

This is the sixth Customer Participation Strategy for North Ayrshire Housing Services, developed in consultation with a range of partners and stakeholders. We have made significant progress in engaging with and involving our customers through our previous strategies and have developed a range of tools and services to enable and empower participation in North Ayrshire.

Over the lifetime of our 2017-2022 strategy some of our key achievements include:

- **‘Excellence in Tenant Participation’ - Gold level reaccreditation from Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS Scotland)**
- **‘Excellence in scrutiny and charter performance’ - Gold level reaccreditation from Tenant Information Service (TIS Scotland)**
- **Reconfiguration of our Tenant Participation service in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020**
- **Welfare calls to vulnerable tenants, including those living in sheltered housing throughout the pandemic**
- **The introduction and development of digital participation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which transformed our approach to tenant participation and enabled us to offer multiple engagement opportunities**
- **An increased in tenant involvement at a strategic level through our Housing Services Business Plan Group**
- **Further embedding of tenant consultation across Housing Services**
- **Transformation of the Tenants’ newsletter into a Tenants’ Chat e-newsletter**
- **Hosting of three successful Annual Fun Days**
- **An increase in our social media platforms**

The 2017-22 Strategy was underpinned by a recognition and commitment to working with and listening to tenants, to continue to provide excellent services that met our customers’ needs.

Background

National Context

Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced a legal requirement for landlords to actively develop and support tenant participation. As part of this we must have a strategy to enable continuous improvement in performance to support and empower tenants to participate.

Under this legislation, landlords are required to consult with registered tenant organisations and individual tenants on a range of housing and related issues which may affect them, including:

- Our Customer Participation Strategy
- Changes to rent and service charges
- Some changes to policy which are likely to have a significant impact on tenants, residents, and service users
- Our standards of service in housing management, repairs, and maintenance

Housing Services has well established methods of consultation and feedback. More information on this is provided in the Consultation and Feedback section.

Housing (Scotland) Act 2010

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 created two fundamental influences in the social housing sector in Scotland. Which are:

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is an independent regulator, directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament. Its statutory objective is to safeguard and promote the interests of current and future tenants, homeless people and others who use the services provided by social landlords. The Regulator assesses and reports on how social landlords are performing their housing services through the **Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC)**. The Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities. The Charter was revised in 2017. Tenant scrutiny and landlord self-assessment are key priorities on the national agenda for customer engagement.

Together, they have created a new environment in which the Council and our customers must work in partnership to achieve positive outcomes for communities.

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 focuses on promoting real engagement and participation, to facilitate communities to achieve greater influence and control in decisions and circumstances that affect them. The National Standards for Community Engagement set out the values that provide the basis for successful community engagement. The standards act as a good practice guideline, and a means to benchmark our performance. They were reviewed and re-launched in 2016 in response to the Community Empowerment Act, building upon established good practice.



Local Context

The North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership's (CPP) Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) describes how all partners will work together to provide better services with the aim of making sure the people and communities of North Ayrshire are working, healthier, safe, and secure. The CPP's Community Engagement Network facilitates partnership working to share good practice, experience, and opportunities in North Ayrshire, and contribute to the Partnership's Community Engagement Strategy.

The **Council Plan** sets out the ambitions and priorities in North Ayrshire over a five-year period. One of these priorities is 'working together to develop stronger communities. The Council continues to help people and communities to get involved in local decisions and to reach their full potential.

The **Locality Planning Approach** is key to improving outcomes for local communities. It ensures public sector resources are targeted at those local areas most in need in North Ayrshire. The approach is based around six locality planning areas: Arran; Irvine; Kilwinning; Three Towns; Garnock Valley and the North Coast.

Housing Services' approach to tenant participation supports these strategic priorities. This Strategy has been developed to ensure working with tenants and customers remains a core part of our business. It also underpins the approach to customer involvement in developing plans, such as the **Local Housing Strategy (LHS)**, the **Safer North Ayrshire Strategy** and the **Council's Digital Strategy**.



North Ayrshire
Community Planning Partnership

Inclusive Involvement

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced responsibilities for landlords relating to equal opportunities and tenant participation/customer involvement. Specifically, landlords are required to:

- Consider the needs of equalities groups, proactively involving seldom heard groups and those who may feel digitally excluded
- Ensure any barriers to participation are taken into consideration
- Ensure Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) promote equal opportunities, and the criterion for registration makes it accessible to all tenants (see page 30 for information on RTOs and the current Register of Tenant Organisations in North Ayrshire)

There is also a requirement for RTOs to promote equal opportunities in their communities and pursue the involvement of excluded groups. This should be reflected in their constitution.

Housing Services is committed to treating people respectfully, fairly, and equally across all areas of our business, and tackling discrimination and harassment in all our activities. Inclusive involvement underpins the objectives within the strategy and engaging with hard-to-reach groups; including homeless people, continues to be a priority within the service. Housing Services embed the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics firmly in service delivery.

The Scottish Housing Regulator requires social landlords in Scotland to collect equality data as part of their commitment to mainstream equality objectives throughout organisational services. The data that we are required to collect relates to the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

An equality impact assessment and equality and children's rights impact assessment have been completed for this Strategy in consultation with tenant representatives on North Ayrshire Network. No adverse impact or affect was identified on particular group(s) or people.

Involving all customers

Some groups of tenants and other customers are often under-represented in community involvement, including:

- Digitally excluded customers
- Young people
- New Scots & ethnic minority groups
- Gypsy/Travellers
- People with accessibility needs
- LGBTQ+ gender diversity and inclusion
- Homeless service users
- Care experienced young people
- Individuals with care responsibilities
- Private rented sector tenants

We already have great examples of how we are involving under-represented groups:

Redburn Grove Working Group

North Ayrshire Council has a dedicated Gypsy/Traveller Coordinator based at our Redburn Grove Traveller Site who provides support, advice and assistance for the tenants and site visitors.

In June 2022, a Tenants Working Group was established on site at Redburn Grove along with staff from the Tenant Participation Team and the Gypsy/Traveller Coordinator. This group gives tenants the opportunity to have their say on the current and future development needs of the site. North Ayrshire Council will continue to consult and engage with the members of this Tenants Working group.

“This is a great way for us to have a voice and for our community to be heard”

Redburn Grove Working Group member

Engaging with Homeless People

Housing Services regularly seek the views of Homeless Service customers. The Hostel Manager hosts regular events to gauge their views.

Engaging New Scots

In 2015, North Ayrshire Council made a humanitarian commitment to support the resettlement and integration of refugees into local communities as part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme. This commitment was met early and further families fleeing conflict were welcomed to North Ayrshire.

North Ayrshire Council is also committed to providing sanctuary and support to those displaced by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Since the conflict commenced in April 2022, a significant number of individuals and families have been welcomed into North Ayrshire's communities.

We provide support to our tenants' and residents' groups to embrace all New Scots, helping to integrate them into local communities and offering opportunities for involvement.

Housing Services offer all tenants the opportunity to become involved. We are committed to removing barriers to involvement, and we will:

- ✓ ensure all information is provided in accordance with our accessibility policy to ensure that complex statistical information does not lead to non-participation
- ✓ provide documents in other languages and formats
- ✓ print documents on request
- ✓ provide interpreting facilities on request, and hearing loops are available in several local housing offices
- ✓ provide Council contact numbers, either free or charged at local rates
- ✓ offer the Scottish Government's Connecting Scotland initiative to assist with digital inclusion within communities who may be digitally excluded
- ✓ offer a blended approach to participation and involvement (either online/virtual meetings or face to face)
- ✓ provide a range of opportunities to take part virtually online as well as face to face meetings
- ✓ dial out by telephone to tenants when holding virtual meetings to prevent any charges

- ✓ provide various training, including digital training, to give tenants, residents, and service users the appropriate knowledge, and provide specialist assistance as required. This training includes awareness of equality issues

- ✓ provide free crèche facilities during face-to-face meetings or making child minding allowances available to enable people to attend participation meetings
- ✓ provide transport for customers to attend events hosted by Housing Services, if required
- ✓ hold meetings in venues that are accessible, convenient, and secure for everyone, including people with mobility issues
- ✓ establish meeting times to take account of the needs and preferences of local communities
- ✓ ensure adequate funds are provided to develop the key issues agreed with tenants, residents, and all service users
- ✓ provide opportunities for all customers and age groups to get involved
- ✓ develop and embed digital opportunities, whilst at the same time still providing exceptional customer service
- ✓ continue the digital journey with the introduction and development of Housing Facebook and Twitter pages, access to rent accounts and payments via the internet, online surveys, and our North Ayrshire Housing Register online application system
- ✓ offer ongoing digital support and training to ensure customers develop and increase their skills and confidence to take part effectively and embed a digital culture
- ✓ host regular 'Teams' meetings of the North Ayrshire Network, North Ayrshire Inspection Panel and Service Improvement groups throughout the pandemic. This way of involvement proved popular for many and will continue to be offered alongside face-to-face meetings to ensure everyone can take part in a way that suits their needs

But we want to do more

We aim to build on our approach to involving under-represented groups to gain their views on services. An example of areas we will focus on during the life of this Strategy is:

Engaging Young People

Whilst we have a range of different methods and levels of participation available in North Ayrshire, the core group of tenants who actively participate regularly have an older age profile. Diversity in the age of our involved tenants will give us a better understanding of their needs and aspirations.

We know most of our young people are digitally skilled and active on social media. Continuing to develop our approach to this will widen the age range of our involved customers.

Care Experienced Young People

We want to design, develop, and implement engagement opportunities and partnership working with care experience young people.

We want to listen to young people who have care experience and ensure they have a voice within the communities they live.

We will **#KeepThePromise** and involve children and young people in the work we do.



Private Rented Sector

The Scottish Government's vision for Housing to 2040 highlights the need for all tenants, whether in private rented or social rented sector housing to have a 'voice' in the services provided by landlords. Developing our tenant participation approach in the private rented sector will enhance partnership working and give private rented sector tenants a say in service delivery.

Homeless people

We will ensure that the needs and aspirations of homeless and potentially homeless people are reflected in our strategic planning processes as we review and update our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. We will utilise the experience of our most vulnerable clients to continue to shape and develop our Housing First programme.

Developing the Strategy

This **2022-2027** Strategy builds on previous tenant involvement strategies and has been developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders, including our tenants. Our strategic development process was as follows:

We reviewed the **2017-2022 Customer Connections Strategy**, considering how we developed our objectives, what we achieved, and what areas were still relevant to take forward.

We researched other landlords' Tenant Participation and Customer Involvement Strategies to determine good practice and learn from their objectives and achievements.

We reviewed the legislation and guidance available from the Scottish Government and other tenant participation organisations, to ensure our strategy was built around these foundations.

We consulted with several stakeholders, including our tenants and residents, staff, other Council services and partner organisations. To do this we made the draft strategy available on our website and held virtual consultations.

We will use the feedback from our various methods of consultation and desktop research to develop our Customer Participation Strategy **2022-27**.

Development of the Strategy, and the various consultations, formed the basis of our Action Plan, which is incorporated in the Strategy in Appendix 1

Customer Connections

Based on the information gathered during the research and consultation phases of developing this Strategy, our customer participation work will be shaped around three key priorities:

Engage and Inform

Ensuring two-way communication with our tenants and customers and providing opportunities for customers to take part in ways that meet their needs.

Empower and Influence

Developing the skills and confidence of our tenants to shape the services we provide.

Evolve and Innovate

Continually improving our services to meet our customers' needs.

This framework seeks to create a balanced approach to involvement, recognising the need to move away from the traditional method of solely consulting with formal tenant and resident associations. Our Customer Connections Circle demonstrates how these priorities link with our established methods of involvement in North Ayrshire. Our Action Plan highlights the timescales for each priority.

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Priority 1: Engage and Inform

Our first priority, 'Engage and Inform,' focuses on communicating with, consulting and including our customers.

Ensuring there is two-way communication with our tenants and customers and providing opportunities for customers to take part in ways that meet their needs.

Our objectives

We effectively engage with and inform our tenants in a way that suits them. To achieve this, we will ensure that:

- customers are well informed and can communicate with us easily
- involvement is accessible and inclusive; and
- there are a range of opportunities to take part

What we know

To participate effectively, communication is essential. Tenants need to have all the information necessary to consider issues properly, within the limits of confidentiality. This includes providing information about our strategies, decision making processes, policies and procedures, tenants' rights, and proposals for change.

Offering different methods and levels of involvement allows tenants to choose how actively they participate to suit their lifestyle and commitments. For some, this may be attending meetings and events, whilst others may prefer to take part from their own home. Providing diversity and opportunity makes participation accessible to a wider range of customers.

We already have great examples of how we engage with and inform our customers, as detailed below.

Newsletters

'Tenants Chat' is our quarterly newsletter sent via email to North Ayrshire Council tenants. It is developed by an editorial panel of staff, tenants, and customers. Tenants are encouraged to contribute articles, and the panel oversees the writing of each newsletter to encourage a sense of ownership of the final product. Tenants Chat is used as a method of communicating service developments and changes to tenants, and as a method of consultation on topics such as annual rent increases. It

is also used to provide information on wider issues that may interest or affect tenants. Popular information includes information on our new build council housing, updates from our Welfare Reform Advice Team, and advice from Trading Standards, Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue. Local communities also feature in the newsletter showcasing the work being done in communities and the facilities available in each locality.

An annual newsletter is also produced for applicants of the North Ayrshire Housing Register.

Tenants Panel (online)

We hold registers of interested tenants, applicants, and other customers to allow individuals the opportunity to have their voice heard on topics that are important to or affect them. People can select which subjects they would like to be informed or consulted on and choose to take part when it suits them. The registers are used regularly to consult on a variety of housing issues, policies, and strategies.

Social Media

We have made further advances in our approach to digital engagement, embedding an 'e-participation' strand to our methods for involvement. As part of this we have developed the North Ayrshire social media brand utilising Facebook and Twitter. These platforms have helped us to engage with a wider audience within communities and can deliver and spread key messages and facilitate consultation and feedback faster and more efficiently than ever before.

Our popular methods of engagement include:

- Digital participation including online meetings via Teams
- Tenants Panel
- Social Media
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
- Face to face meetings
- Registered Tenant Organisations
- Sheltered Housing Local Groups
- Satisfaction surveys
- Tenant Satisfaction Survey
- Housing Forum
- Sheltered Connections Facebook
- Youth Matters Facebook
- Consultation Café
- Annual Fun Day
- Text messaging

We regularly inform tenants through various methods including:

- Tenants Chat e-newsletter
- Information on website
- Tenant Handbook
- Sheltered Tenants' Handbook
- TV screens in public areas
- TV screens in sheltered housing
- Applicants' newsletter
- TP Matters newsletter
- Tenant Group Manual
- Tenancy Matters Performance Edition
- Consultation Café
- Redburn Record Newsletter
- Text messaging

But we want to do more

To achieve the strategic objectives under this priority, our areas of development include:

Digital participation

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have developed and reconfigured each service to include digital services and participation where possible.

Within Housing Services, we have made considerable progress in holding our Tenant Participation meetings virtually, hosting digital consultations and events and reconfiguring our Tenant Participation Service. We will continue to offer a range of involvement and consultation opportunities, whilst having a blended approach to engagement and involvement.

We will continue to embed our interactive online communications such as live chats, online polling, Facebook messenger sessions, online meetings, and online conferences. We will continue to promote communication via email and our online rent account.

“Using the Teams online kept us involved with the Council during the pandemic when we could not meet face to face. I was wary at start, but love it and is a terrific way to get involved from my living room”

Interested Tenant

Understanding our customer and their needs

To fully inform tenants and exceed customer expectations, first we need to understand what is important to them and gauge the best form of communicating with them. Our current processes include asking tenants to contribute to publications, such as Tenants Chat and gaining their approval on our strategies, leaflets, and publications.

We would like to develop our approach to this by gauging tenant interest on various areas of our service and providing them with information that matters to them. This can be progressed through the current forums, digital participation and social media. This would provide a more interactive, two-way communication. We can also use this to ensure we have appropriate representation from tenants on the issues most pertinent to them.

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Our actions under the 'Engage and Inform' priority are:

- Provide good quality information that meets the needs of our customers and is clear and easy to understand
- Increase information online to customers
- Provide opportunities for customers to tell us types of information they are interested in receiving
- Develop our range of communication methods including digital participation
- Develop our approach to improve communication digitally, through better use of email, text messaging and smart phone applications
- Develop new methods of engagement and support engagement with seldom heard groups
- Ensure involvement methods are promoted and barriers removed
- Provide varied involvement opportunities and support a blended approach to participation
- Align our work with the Council's Digital Strategy and the Tenant Information Service (TIS) digital service pledge

Timescales and how we will measure progress are detailed within our Action Plan.

Priority 2: Empower and Influence

Our second priority, 'Empower and influence,' focuses on building community capacity, encouraging and supporting customers to take part, and helping them to influence decision making.

Our objectives

We aim to empower and help our communities to influence and shape our services. To achieve this, we will ensure that:

- Customer involvement (including online involvement) impacts service delivery; and
- Customers are supported to build their capacity and confidence

What we know

Service improvement and change is most effective when influenced and driven by its customers. Engagement is essential, to identify and deal with problems, and deliver services that meet customers' needs.

Communities must have the capacity to take part in the engagement process, to enable them to deal more effectively with services in identifying solutions, opportunities, and improvements. To build this capacity, the provision of support to develop confidence, abilities and skills is fundamental. This includes digital participation.

Establishing that base will enable and empower people to take more ownership, and support and encourage each other to take part.

We already have great examples of how we work with tenants to ensure their voice is heard and can influence service delivery:

Tenant Scrutiny

The North Ayrshire Inspection Panel form an independent function of the participation structure in Housing Services. Members receive ongoing training, initially by an independent organisation, which has been continued and enhanced in-house. An Inspection Panel Toolkit and Scrutiny Framework has been established to identify the skills and techniques used in the scrutiny process.

This method of taking part has developed the knowledge base of the tenants involved and given them the opportunity and confidence to analyse performance and ask relevant questions. Following an inspection, the Panel produce a report

providing a suite of recommendations for improvement, which are used to develop our areas of service.

“Being part of the North Ayrshire Inspection Panel has been an incredible journey for me over the last few years. We have learned so much, inspected a range of services areas and learned new skills and gained confidence to address audiences nationally and share our excellent work”

Inspection Panel Member

National Engagement

Regional Networks were developed across Scotland to build partnerships between the Scottish Government and Registered Tenant Organisations, and to give tenants and customers a voice at national level. North Ayrshire Council is part of the West Strathclyde Region.

We aim to have at least one tenant representing North Ayrshire at the regional network. Training is provided from the Scottish Government to help them effectively take part. Representatives are given the opportunity to provide feedback on national issues to their individual tenant groups, and the wider North Ayrshire Network. Participation and engagement at this level has increased the knowledge and experience of those involved and raises the awareness and support for the communities within North Ayrshire.

“Being part of the Region 3 Network has given me the opportunity to become involved at a national level and have direct links with the Scottish Government.”

Region 3 network member

Estate Based Regeneration – Tenant led budgets

The Estate Based Regeneration Programme aims to invest in North Ayrshire Council's existing housing estates to support the Council's wider goal of regenerating North Ayrshire and improving the quality of life for local people.

This initiative provides an opportunity for tenants to influence how the estate-based regeneration budget is spent in their area. Individuals, Tenant and Residents Associations and Council Services' staff can identify environmental projects.

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But we want to do more

To achieve the strategic objectives under this priority, our areas of development include:

Mystery Shopping

Mystery Shopping is already a well-established method of quality control within Housing Services, providing our customers with the opportunity to evaluate the service we provide. With specialist training and support from the Tenant Participation Team, participants also benefit from developing their organisational and interview skills.

The new continuous approach to mystery shopping will test services on an ongoing basis. Shoppers will record good or bad experiences when they contact any part of the Housing service. This method allows tenants to take part from their own home, at a time that suits their needs and record real life events. Regular testing will give real, meaningful guidelines relating to customer satisfaction and service delivery.

Peer Support – Tenant Talk

With our diverse and varied methods of participation, including online, we have a number of experienced tenants who understand our policies and procedures and are established members on a number of our groups.

Developing our 'peer support' programme continues to promote tenant to tenant communication and engagement. It also removes the formality of exclusively working with housing professionals, which may be a barrier for some people. Individuals may have similar experiences as tenants and are able to give and receive help and information based on shared responsibility and a mutual agreement of what is important and helpful. This can develop everyone's confidence and help to build capacity within our communities to deal with local issues effectively.

An additional part of peer support will feature tenants having a more prominent role in the promotion of consultations.

Our actions under 'Empower and Influence' priority are:

- Measure the impact of participation on service delivery
- Develop our approach to reporting feedback on customer views
- Improve, information on customer feedback and how this has impacted service delivery
- Provide support to tenants to build their capacity
- Develop our training programme for tenants and other customers
- Encourage and support our customers to make the most of digital opportunities

- Develop the digital skills of our local communities
- Support our customers to develop and increase their digital skills and confidence
- Develop our approach to peer support

Timescales and how we will measure progress against actions plans are included within our Action Plan.

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Priority 3: Evolve and Innovate

Our third priority, 'Evolve and Innovate' focuses on the continuous improvement and development of our service to best meet the needs of our customers.

Our objectives

We aim to continually improve on the services we provide, changing and evolving to meet customers' needs in the best way possible. To achieve this, we will ensure that:

- A culture of participation is embedded in Housing Services
- The Service continually adapts to meet changing needs

What we know

Real participation and involvement can only be achieved if it is embedded in the culture of an organisation. Key to this is the empowerment of our tenants, and individuals within our organisation, to identify areas for development. A focus on our customers is key to embedding these behaviours in our organisation.

Our aim is to continue to provide a high performing, value for money service to our customers. To do so, we must focus on making our services easier and faster to access and achieve the outcomes our customers want from us. We need to keep up to date on legislative and policy changes and emerging trends, to ensure our service continues to meet the needs of its users.

We already have great examples of how we are proactive in our approach to developing our service and are early adopters of good practice. We do this to facilitate continuous progression using innovative approaches in the development and delivery of our strategic objectives.

Service Improvement Groups

We have a number of working groups in operation throughout the Service, some of which include tenant representation, to promote a 'hands on' approach to service development for tenants. We have tenant membership on our:

- Housing Business Plan Group
- Repairs/Major Works Service Improvement Group
- Tenant Editorial Panel
- Tenant Event Working Group

Physical representation on these groups allows customers to impact on service delivery in real time and gain an understanding of our policies and procedures. It provides a strategic dimension to our methods of participation, and the groups we have focus on topics we know are important to our tenants.

Staff Working Groups

Our Rent Arrears, Void and Allocations, Estate Management, Learning and Development, Customer Care and Youth Connections staff Working Groups, which do not have tenant representation, link closely with these groups to ensure tenant involvement in all areas of service improvement.

The working groups are aimed to develop staff ideas, opinions and input within the Housing Sector on all areas of the service and ensure we provide the highest level of service that meets customer expectations. It is an opportunity for staff to review documents and the groups are often responsible for piloting new processes/systems prior to them being rolled out across all offices.

Housing Business Plan Group

The group was formed in May 2010 to work alongside tenant representatives to develop our 30-year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. The remit of the group has since been extended to monitor implementation of the Business Plan. The group provides an opportunity for tenants to discuss issues and provide input at a strategic level. To date, we have had five long standing tenant representatives participating in the group, alongside Council staff and Elected Members.

North Ayrshire Network

North Ayrshire Network (NAN) is a constituted group comprising of tenant representatives from different communities across North Ayrshire. The current role of the Network is to provide an independent examination of the work of Housing Services and to be responsible for ensuring Housing Services continually improves the way it delivers services to tenants and other customers. In respect of new regulatory requirements regarding equalities, the Network will ensure Housing Services undertake the collection of equality data.

There is an inherent understanding across the Service that any areas on which we intend to consult on are taken to the Network for initial comments and approval, before consulting more widely with our tenants and residents. This promotes consistency and ensures the principles of participation are embedded in all sections of service

“I enjoy being part of the North Ayrshire Network. It gives tenants, residents and all service users and excellent opportunity to be involved with strategic issues and decisions”

We currently promote continuous improvement in tenant participation by:

- Developing our relationship with organisations who specialise in tenant participation
- Applying for accreditations and awards, to develop our service through the assessment criteria
- Learning from other landlords and authorities on established good practice methods
- Sharing our good practice with other organisations

But we want to do more

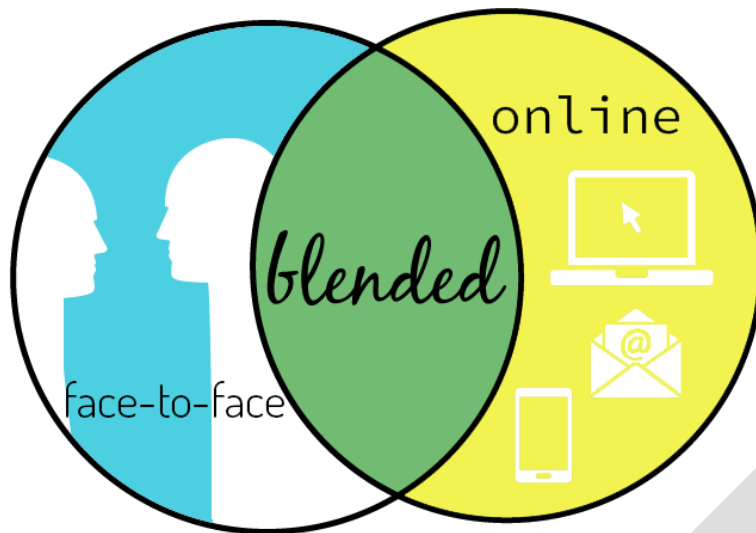
To achieve the key objectives under this priority, our areas of development include:

Process review

To ensure methods of participation remain relevant and fit for purpose, they need to be reviewed and evaluated regularly. This helps focus our efforts on the topics most important to our customers, and ensures opportunities are available for customers to be involved.

Reviewing our approach to tenant participation allows us to ensure services are appropriate, efficient, and effective. It provides benefits for the Council and our customers, such as higher quality service provision, a more systematic approach to understanding customer needs, and a more engaged community.

We want to build on the good work carried out during the pandemic. Tenant participation will be available using a 'blended' approach where both online and face to face opportunities will be offered to enhance engagement and ensure everyone is involved in a way that suits their needs and preferences.



Improved joint working

Our Connected Communities Service has developed a locality approach, including participation and empowerment, which is essential to ensuring that communities play a central role in shaping local priorities. The service plays a key role in the development of community networks to ensure full local participation.

Developing a stronger working relationship will allow both the Connected Communities and Tenant Participation services to learn from the other's good practice and will increase opportunities to engage with established groups in communities. This could help us reach harder to reach groups, such as young people.

Our actions under the 'Evolve and Innovate' priority are:

- Develop and embed a 'blended' approach to Tenant Participation
- Develop an in-house training programme on Tenant Participation
- Review consultation undertaken across the service to identify good practice and areas for improvement
- Keep abreast of any legislative or policy changes relating to tenant participation and customer involvement
- Research good practice examples and consider their development in North Ayrshire
- Ensure engagement and consultation with tenants and other customers reviews their needs from the service

Timescales and how we will measure progress against actions are included in our Action Plan.

Consultation and Feedback

Consultation involves asking for peoples' views to consider them before reaching decisions, with time built in for tenants to make decisions, and landlords to consider them, and agree to the outcome together. Effective consultation helps to design and deliver services people want. It is also an effective way to measure service delivery and effectiveness.

Housing Services is committed to improving service delivery and increasing customer satisfaction by making sure that we meet our customers' needs. We have developed a range of options to ensure participation is maximised, supported by an annual calendar of consultation events. We will consult on a number of topics, for some of which we have a statutory duty to do so. We also carry out large scale surveys, such as our tenant satisfaction survey, to gain views on the services we provide.

To continually improve our services, we recognise that we need to regularly collect and use feedback from customers, which can be used to improve service delivery. It is also important that we feedback to those who have participated, so that they know that their views have been listened to and are being acted on. We have a number of methods of doing this, including producing an annual consultation report, and sending information to Registered Tenants' Organisations, and the North Ayrshire Network.

We know from our tenant satisfaction surveys that our quarterly newsletter '**Tenants Chat**' is a popular way of providing feedback to tenants, residents, and all service users, and we will use this forum to highlight how tenant engagement has shaped or improved our service.

We will use a mix of digital and face to face consultation methods where possible, to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to have a say in a way that suits them.

Customer Comments, Compliments and Complaints

If customers have a comment, compliment or complaint about any part of the Housing Service, they can report it easily to any member of staff. North Ayrshire is committed to providing high-quality customer services. We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services. An easy-to-understand leaflet outlining the process on how to complain, comment or compliment a service or staff member is available at all local Council offices, customer contacts centres, online and in local libraries.

Resources and Support

Resources are required to effectively develop our tenant participation approach, and ensure it is embedded throughout the service. These can be financial, physical, or staff support. North Ayrshire Housing Services has the following resources dedicated to involving our tenants:

Financial

An annual budget of **£60k** (excluding staff salaries) from our Housing Revenue Account (our Council landlord account funded through rental income from our housing stock) is allocated to tenant participation. This is reviewed annually in consultation with the North Ayrshire Network. The budget funds activities such as:

- Consultation exercises, such as our tenant satisfaction survey
- Mystery shopping exercises
- Tenant events
- Independent advice and assistance from specialists
- Training and attendance at events, for both staff and tenants
- Administration
- Tenant expenses, such as transport to events
- Field trips and study visits

During each financial year, all eligible Tenants and Residents Associations can apply to the Tenant Participation (TP) Team for an annual grant of £150 to support the development and running of their group. They must provide information with the application, including current audited accounts, a constitution, contact details and minutes of their meetings. The TP Team will support all groups through the grant application process.

The grant can be used to pay for expenses such as postage, stationery, advertising, and travel. Additional funding can be requested and will be considered by the TP Team. External grant funding is also available for Tenant and Resident Associations. More information on this is available through the Tenant Participation Team.

Staffing

The Tenant Participation Team comprises of a manager and two officers. They support and develop tenant participation throughout North Ayrshire. Their functions include:

- Co-ordinating tenant consultation
- Working with other services to enhance involvement
- Providing specialist advice within the service and to tenants
- Training and developing staff and tenants
- Facilitating tenant and resident meetings
- Encouraging participation with underrepresented groups
- Facilitating North Ayrshire Network, North Ayrshire Inspection Panel and Service Improvement Groups
- Working with national organisation to identify and enhance best practice
- Benchmarking with other organisations and housing providers to identify emerging best practice

Aside from this dedicated resource, various parts of the service engage with our customers on a regular basis and consult on a number of topics in their specialist areas. The Tenant Participation Team support them in these activities.

Some quotes from our communities

Source: TIS reaccreditation report 2021

“The team have given us confidence, support and assistance with our scrutiny work.”

“The team have given me the opportunity to feel alive again”

“The team are great at making our meetings interesting and fun”

“The planning and support provided by the Tenant Participation team is second to none” “It is a great team, who have stayed connected with us during lockdown and helped us to get online”

“The team have supported us through this digital transformation – their support has helped our confidence and skills to grow”

Registered Tenants' Organisations

Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs)

Tenants & Residents Associations are groups of people representing tenants and residents living in an area or street. Their aim is to put forward views and concerns about their housing, community, and local areas to the Council, so they can take part in the decision-making processes. We currently provide support to the five TARAs in North Ayrshire.

Registered Tenants' Organisations

Registered Tenants' Organisations (RTOs) are key to tenant involvement. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Registration of Tenant Organisations) Order 2002 sets out the criteria for registration as set by Scottish Ministers. As a landlord, we can provide information on the criteria for both registration and de-registration of groups, and how this is implemented in North Ayrshire.

All the TARAs we currently support are registered with us.

Our current Register of Tenant Organisations is as follows:

Registered Tenant Organisations

Blair Residents Association, Dalry, **re-registered December 2019**

Broomlands & Bourtreehill Tenants & Residents Association, Irvine, **re-registered April 2022**

Castlepark & Eglinton Tenants & Residents Group, Irvine, **re-registered December 2019**

Hayocks Tenants & Residents Association, Stevenston, **re-registered March 2022**

Saltcoats High Flats Tenants & Residents Association, Saltcoats, **re-registered December 2019**

Monitoring and Review

Monitoring and review of this Strategy is as important as setting the strategic objectives. It ensures the service is following the direction established during the planning process. Our efforts do not stop with the publishing of this Strategy. We will look to continuously improve and find more imaginative and innovative ways of developing services.

We see this Strategy as being a living document, informing the work we plan to do over the next five years. It is flexible to allow us to adapt to any changes in policy, legislation, or external factors, such as technology changes.

Responsibility for the monitoring and review of this Strategy lies with the Housing Senior Manager (Housing Operations, Tenant and Youth Engagement), with the Action Plan being implemented by the Tenant Participation Team. We will review progress on the action plan quarterly, and ensure this information is communicated to our tenants and the North Ayrshire Network.

For more information on the resources and support available to deliver our Tenant Participation Strategy, see section 'Resources and Support.'

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Useful Contact Numbers

Tenant Participation Team - **01294 324869/324871**

Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Team - **01294 314640**

Benefits Service - **01294 310000**

Repairs Contact Line - **01294 310000**

Tenant Priorities Team, Scottish Government - **0131 244 5568**

Tenants Information Service (TIS) - **0141 248 1242**

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Scotland - **0141 552 3633**

Scottish Housing Regulator - **0141 271 3810**

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman - **0800 377 7330**

Equal Opportunities Commission (Scotland) - **0845 601 5901**

Local Offices

Dalry/Beith Area Office - **01294 836710**

Irvine Area Office - **01294 310150**

Kilbirnie Area Office - **01505 685177**

Kilwinning Area Office - **01294 552261**

Largs Area Office - **01475 687590**

Three Towns Area Office - **01294 310005**

Customer Participation Strategy Action Plan 2022-2027

Progress towards the objectives in this strategy will be reviewed regularly through this action plan and reported to tenants. The action plan will be reviewed quarterly to ensure work undertaken to achieve the objectives in this strategy continues to address changing national and local policies and priorities.

Priority 1: Engage & Inform

Our objectives

We effectively engage with and inform our tenants in a way that suits them. To achieve this, we will ensure that:

| Objective | What we will do | How we will measure it | Timescale | Lead responsibility |
|--|--|------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Customers are well informed and can communicate with us easily | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide good quality information that meets the needs of our customers, is clear and easy to understand• Increase information online to customers• Provide opportunities for customers to tell us types of information they are interested in receiving• Develop our range of communication methods including digital participation | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new methods of engagement and support with seldom heard groups • Ensure involvement methods are promoted and barriers mitigated • Provide varied involvement opportunities and support a blended approach to participation | | | |
| Involvement is accessible and inclusive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align all our work with the Councils Digital Strategy and the Tenant Information Service (TIS) digital service pledge | | | |
| There are a range of opportunities to take part and get feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop our approach to improve communication digitally, through better use of email, text messaging and smart phone apps | | | |

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Priority 2: Empower & Influence

We aim to empower and help our communities to influence shape our services. To achieve this, we will ensure that:

| Objective | Actions | How we will measure it | Timescale | Lead responsibility |
|--|---|------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Customer involvement impacts service delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure the impact of participation on service delivery • Develop our approach to reporting feedback on customer views • Improve information on customer feedback, and how this has impacted service delivery | | | |
| Customers are supported to build their capacity and confidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to tenants to build their capacity • Develop our training programme for tenants and other customers • Develop the digital skills of our local communities • Support our customers to develop and increase their digital skills and confidence • Develop our approach to peer support • Encourage and support customers to make the most of digital opportunities | | | |

Priority 3: Evolve & Innovate

We aim to continually improve on the services we provide, changing and evolving to meet customers' needs in the best way possible. To achieve this, we will ensure that:

| Objective | Actions | How we will measure it | Timescale | Lead responsibility |
|--|---|------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| A culture of participation is embedded in Housing Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and embed the 'blended' approach to Tenant Participation • Develop an in-house training programme on tenant participation • Review consultation undertaken across the service to identify good practice and areas for improvement | | | |
| The Service continually adapts to meet changing needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep abreast of any legislative or policy changes relating to tenant participation and customer involvement • Research good practice examples and consider their development in North Ayrshire • Ensure engagement and consultation with tenants and other customers reviews their needs from the service | | | |