



**Tenant Participation
Strategy
2018 – 2021**

What is tenant participation?

Tenant participation is an integral part of how we operate at Castlehill. Our tenants have the opportunity to comment on and influence decisions we make that may affect their tenancy or the services we deliver.

In fact, our tenants are at the heart of everything we do.

Tenant participation is key to our aim of providing high quality affordable housing and an efficient, responsive and personal housing management and property service.

Why does tenant participation matter?

Castlehill, like all Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) have a legal duty to have a tenant participation strategy, consult with our tenants and Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) on significant changes to housing services and rent changes, and keep a register of RTOs. These requirements were introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, which sets out a framework for tenant participation and how this is carried out.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter was introduced with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. RSLs must meet the Charter standards and outcomes, and the Scottish Housing Regulator monitors how landlords do this.

The Charter was first published in 2012. It was reviewed and a revised charter was published in April 2017. The Scottish Government took into account the views of tenants and other interested parties when reviewing the charter. Castlehill tenants were encouraged and supported to take part in this consultation and had the opportunity to comment and discuss the Charter with the Scottish Government and tenants from other landlords.

The outcomes within the charter that relate to this are:

Outcome 2 – Communication

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

Tenants and other tenants find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

This outcome covers all aspects of landlords' communication with tenants and other tenants. This could include making use of new technologies such as web-based tenancy management systems and smart -phone applications. It is not just about how clearly and effectively a landlord gives information to those who want it. It also covers making it easy for tenants and other tenants to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback. It does not require landlords to provide legally protected, personal or commercial information.

Outcome 3 - Participation

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

Tenants and other tenants find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

This outcome describes what landlords should achieve by meeting their statutory duties on tenant participation. It covers how social landlords give opportunities to gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants, other tenants and bodies representing them such as registered tenants organisations; how they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help tenants, other tenants and bodies representing them such as registered tenants organisations to become more capable of participation - this could include supporting them to scrutinise landlord services.

Copies of the Scottish Social Housing Charter are available from our office or online at www.gov.scot

Aims of our strategy

The aim of this strategy is to set out how we will continue to encourage and support our tenants to become involved in making decisions and influencing policies and procedures that affect the homes they live in and the services they receive.

It outlines our commitment to working with our tenants to improve the services we provide, encouraging them to influence decisions about their homes and providing them with the means to do so.

Our main objective is to have tenants' views at the heart of our decisions.

This strategy will explain how the Association, with the continued help of its tenants, plans to build on our successes and continues to raise awareness of the opportunities for our tenants.

In particular we aim to:

- Raise awareness of tenant participation through improving promotion
- Increase opportunities for tenants to influence decisions relating to housing
- Ensure tenant participation is integral to the delivery of all Castlehill services
- Support tenants to be at the heart of our decision-making process

How we developed this strategy

This strategy builds upon the 2013-2016 Tenant Participation Strategy, which was co-produced with Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS Scotland). The content has been agreed with tenants, staff and the Management Committee.

The strategy has been written in line with the National Standards for Community Engagement. You can find more information about the National Standards for Community Engagement at:

www.scdc.org.uk/national-standards-community-engagement

Tenant Participation with Castlehill – the story so far

Our main aim from the 2013 - 2016 strategy was to improve the opportunities for our tenants to become involved with the work of the Association. Since the implementation of that strategy, there has been a marked rise in tenant participation. There was a 10% increase in the amount of tenants who were satisfied with the opportunities to participate in our decision-making process, from 61% in 2015 to 71% in 2017.

To move forward, it is key to document what has been achieved and how that helps us to continue with making it easier and interesting for our tenants to participate.

- Progression from Tenants Panel to CaRTO (Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation), an independent and autonomous tenant group who work in partnership with the Association.
- Tenant-led budget for specific elements of our tenant participation budget
- Know Your Landlord
- Study trips to the Scottish Government, East Ayrshire Tenants and Residents Federation and a flagship assisted-living development in Dundee
- Hosted study visits to share knowledge and experience with tenants from other parts of Scotland
- Attendance by tenants at training and information sessions on Spotlight on Social Housing provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, After the Act - Implementing the Housing Scotland Act (2014), Value for Money, Changes to the Charter, Stepping Up to Scrutiny, Extending Scrutiny to Involvement in Procurement Processes, Participatory Budgeting, Confident Communication, Negotiating Skills
- Attendance and participation by tenants at national conferences
- Participation in national consultations e.g. Review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, Consultation on Fire Safety in the wake of Grenfell, Consultation on the Extension to the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act, Consultation on the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing post-2020 (EESH2).
- Completion of a tenant-led extensive scrutiny exercise on vacant sheltered properties.
- A Castlehill tenant was shortlisted as a finalist in a national Tenant Participation excellence award
- An increase in Castlehill tenants' participation with NETRALT (North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together)
- Excellent representation at NETRALT with several tenants regularly attending meetings and events. A Castlehill staff member is Secretary and a tenant is the Vice-Secretary.
- Winner of TPAS youth participation award (NETRALT) for a community radio show involving a younger Castlehill tenant (under 25), other young people, and staff
- Collaboration with other landlords' tenants to carry out an entirely tenant-led mystery shopping exercise, making recommendations that were taken on board by Castlehill

- Organised and participated in NETRALT open days to promote tenant participation
- CaRTO, with the support of Castlehill, have created the Alan Morrison “Above and Beyond Award” in memory of the late Chair of CaRTO and Management Committee member.
- An increase in tenants joining the Association
- An increase in tenants joining the Management Committee
- As a result of encouraging tenants to explore tenant participation at a national level (Regional Networks) and national policy consultations, a Castlehill tenant is now a member of the Regional Network group.
- Reintroduced the sheltered magazine by tenants request
- A community gardening project is now underway at an Aberdeenshire scheme, undertaken by tenants and supported by Castlehill

How we will promote tenant participation

- We will produce a range of flyers and leaflets designed to promote tenant participation.
- We will work with CaRTO to produce a welcome pack suitable for tenants who are thinking about becoming involved.
- We will promote successes and ways of getting involved in order to inspire and share experiences with other tenants. We will do this via our newsletters, our website and by staff promoting participation when speaking with tenants.
- We will provide each new tenant with a brief guide to tenant participation prior to their post-allocation visit. This will enable new tenants to become familiar with the ways they can get involved.
- Following on from the guide, we will explain tenant participation and ways of getting involved to every new tenant at their post-allocation visit (general needs)
- We will contact Castlehill sheltered tenants within Aberdeen directly in order to let them know about how they can be involved.
- Our Tenant Participation Officer will visit any tenant wishing to get involved at any level to have an informal chat about the opportunities available and the best method of participation to suit that the individual.
- We will offer a CaRTO induction for new members, including providing information about Castlehill and how Registered Social Landlord's work.
- We will encourage and support our tenants to form their own groups and help them to become a Registered Tenants Organisation.
- We will have a presence at appropriate open days and meetings
- Over the next three years we will develop our use of technology to help even more tenants become involved, especially those who may be unable to attend events in person. We have signed up to Scotland's Digital Participation Charter (<http://digitalparticipation.scot/>) and have made a commitment to embracing the ways in which our tenants may choose to get involved using technology.
- We would like to increase participation by continuing to use Basecamp with CaRTO and other tenants (<http://basecamp.com/2>), use video conferencing technology to help tenants take part in meetings and build on boosting engagement on our website.
- We will support CaRTO with their initiative to help connect our tenants with the internet and embrace digital participation.

Increase opportunities for tenants to influence decisions

Building on the success of our last strategy, which resulted in a 10% increase in the number of tenants who were happy with the opportunities to be part of the decision making process, we will offer a comprehensive menu of participation to enable all tenants to choose a method/methods of participation that suits them and their lifestyle. These are many different ways to become involved with Castlehill. By supporting different types of participation we hope it will help more tenants to be involved at the level they want.

Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation (CaRTO)

CaRTO became a registered tenants' organisation (RTO) in 2017, following a natural progression from the initial Tenants Panel. CaRTO are an independent, autonomous group who work in partnership with Castlehill and they meet every month to discuss and influence housing and housing services. Becoming an RTO gave them a recognised role in our decision-making process.

We will support CaRTO to develop, expand its membership and be an automatic part of the process when introducing and reviewing significant changes to housing services.

Readers Panel

We will continue to encourage our Readers Panel to take part in consultations and surveys via email, online, post or phone.

Scrutiny Panel

We will encourage and support tenants to scrutinise our services. The Scrutiny Panel's role is to challenge our services standards and performance, assess our performance against the Charter outcomes and make recommendations for improvement and change.

Scheme walkabouts

We will continue to hold 6-monthly scheme walkabouts at each general needs and amenity scheme. Our staff will be on-site, making it easy for tenants to provide feedback and identify any concerns, maintenance or management issues.

Association Membership

We have a strong Management Committee, with members committed to our objectives, especially the provision of high quality housing and support work for more vulnerable members of the community.

Our Committee has a diverse range of skills, expertise and perspective, which is essential as the work of housing associations becomes increasingly complex. Our knowledge base has been enhanced by three of our tenants taking the opportunity to get involved at Committee level.

New consultation process for rent review

We will review how we currently do this and get feedback from tenants on what would help them to become more involved in this process.

Consultations

We will continue to consult with individual tenants on matters that may affect them, as well as any Registered Tenants Organisations. We will review how we currently do this in order to increase participation levels.

Meetings

Meetings may be held where appropriate to discuss, provide and gather information. We will aim to hold these in suitable and varied locations to give maximum opportunities for participation.

National consultations

We will publicise relevant national consultations and support tenants to take part.

Tenant satisfaction surveys (every three years)

We will continue to conduct a tenant satisfaction survey every three years in order to gauge tenant opinion and meet our reporting obligations. We will continue to keep tenants informed, publicise the outcomes and invite tenants to learn more about the data gathered.

Learning and sharing knowledge

Castlehill Registered Tenants Organisation (CaRTO)

We are very fortunate to have a knowledgeable and experienced group of tenants from CaRTO acting as ambassadors for tenant participation at Castlehill. We encourage members of CaRTO to take part in activities, such as meetings, events, training, study visits, conferences and partnership working with other organisations. This enables our tenants to interact with tenants from other landlords, compare experiences, share knowledge and discuss various topics relating to housing and housing services.

The Association is a member of a number of groups and organisations with tenant participation at its heart. These organisations provide the opportunity to learn from each other, take part in joint training and events. Working together in this way is an effective way of raising the profile of tenant participation.

North East Tenants, Residents and Landlords Together (NETRALT)

NETRALT is an award-winning collective of tenants and their registered social landlords, with the aim of promoting tenant participation in our area. It provides a platform to share best practice, to get best value and encourage tenants and staff to work together more effectively. We are proud to be part of NETRALT and encourage our tenants to join.

<https://netralt.org.uk>

Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland (TPAS Scotland)

TPAS Scotland promote good practice in tenant participation throughout Scotland and provide independent support to both tenants and landlords on all aspects of tenant participation. TPAS often provide information sessions and training courses for tenants and staff and we encourage tenants to take part.

<https://tpasscotland.org.uk/>

Tenants Information Service (TIS)

CaRTO is a member of TIS , who also promote good practice in tenant participation, provide independent support to tenants and landlords and offer training and conferences.

<https://tis.co.uk>

Regional Networks

Regional Networks were set up to help Registered Tenants' Organisations engage with the Scottish Government on issues of national policy. Castlehill's properties fall under Group 1 and we are pleased to support any tenants who wish to become involved.

Communicating with our tenants

In 2017, 86% of our tenants rated us as being good at keeping them informed. We will build upon our existing methods of communication and aim to increase that figure.

We will ensure that communication is clear and understandable. We will use plain English and endeavour to avoid using jargon. We will make sure we explain any housing terms and acronyms. We will offer a translation service and provide publications in different languages or formats on request. A hearing loop is available at Carden Place office.

Our website

Tenants have been involved in creating our new website, and will continue to feed back and comment on the usability, content and design as we develop it.

Our website is a source of useful information where tenants are able to find out answers to their questions, report repairs, find out how to pay their rent, find out who their housing/maintenance officers are and access any of our publications. Our website has a clear design, is user-friendly and uses plain English.

There will be a focus on the Tenant Participation section which will be developed further, by staff continuing to collaborate with CaRTO to achieve a more interactive and engaging section.

We will use the News section to highlight opportunities for participation and promote successes.

Tenant newsletter

The Chain is our twice yearly tenant newsletter. Tenants can submit ideas or articles for inclusion. We will regularly feature CaRTO within the newsletter, share achievements and promote any other opportunities for tenant participation. The Chain can be made available in other languages or formats.

Charter Performance Report

We will produce a Charter Performance Report for tenants in order to highlight our performance and advise tenants on what action we will take to improve our services. This report will continue to be created by working in partnership with CaRTO and will be published in October every year.

Tenant information leaflets

We will build upon our suite of existing tenant information leaflets by asking tenants to review and approve new versions before they are published.

Sheltered Magazine

We will work with our sheltered and very sheltered tenants to produce an annual magazine showcasing their contributions. We will offer CaRTO an editorial role in the production of the sheltered magazine.

Tenants Handbook

Each tenant receives a handbook at the start of their tenancy. The handbook offers important and useful information about the tenancy agreement, service information and ways for tenants to get involved.

The handbooks were designed in collaboration with tenants, responding to feedback and comments on what they wanted to see included and a user-friendly, clear design. We will continue to work with tenants and listen to their feedback when reviewing the handbook.

Ensure tenant participation is integral to the delivery of all Castlehill services

We want our tenants to be at the forefront of decision making and will give them the means to be involved at whichever level they choose.

- We will ensure that there is tenant representation on all our service reviews.
- We will ensure that we communicate outcomes of our consultations and explain the process behind them.
- Each department will have a representative at a CaRTO meeting at least once per year. This will give an informal opportunity for tenants to raise any questions or concerns, discuss potential projects for scrutiny, develop a more comprehensive understanding of how each department operates and build stronger relationships between tenants and their landlords.
- The Management Committee will have an open invitation to attend any CaRTO meeting. This will help foster a closer relationship between tenants and committee members.
- We will respond to tenants' ideas, comments and feedback, explain any final decision and show how we have incorporated them.
- Our staff promote tenant participation as part of their role, regardless of the specific area of work or team they are based in. This is part of the new staff corporate induction, sheltered staff induction (Aberdeenshire and Moray) and refresher information sessions.
- Tenant participation is a standing item on the 6 weekly Housing Management & Property Services Team meeting agendas so staff are kept up to date with activities and events.
- Tenant participation is a standing item on the Housing Management sub-committee meeting agendas which are quarterly so committee members are kept up to date with progress.

Support from Castlehill

Although tenant participation is integral to Castlehill, and the responsibility of all our employees, we employ a Tenant Participation Officer (TPO) to help us to implement this strategy. Our TPO will promote, encourage and support tenant participation, help establish groups, plan participation and monitor and report progress towards achieving our strategy's aims.

After consultation with CaRTO regarding the Tenant Participation budget, CaRTO now has a devolved budget so that they are empowered to make their own decisions regarding training, attending conferences, choosing venues and have the flexibility to spend this budget on what they deem best value.

There are no barriers preventing any of our diverse range of tenants from being involved at any level. Tenants will be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred as a result of their participation.

- We will ensure that our venues are accessible.
- We will arrange transport or pay reasonable travel expenses to enable tenants to participate.
- We will reimburse childcare costs so tenants can attend activities (registered childcare providers).
- We will provide information in different formats and languages.
- We will provide resources to ensure tenants are supported at meetings, events, training courses and conferences.
- We will act positively when tenants are engaging with us and keep clear, open lines of communication.

Equality & Diversity

We are committed to treating our tenants respectfully, fairly and equally, tackling discrimination and harassment and ensuring our services are accessible to all, irrespective of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

- We will encourage and promote inclusion, actively engaging with our seldom heard tenants to ensure that representation is fully reflected.
- We will provide a range of opportunities and information and explore new ways of engaging with under-represented groups who may be hard to reach.
- We will identify and develop opportunities via partnership working with existing groups and networks.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This strategy and its action plan are working documents subject to continuous review to ensure we are meeting our aims.

We will continue to develop and increase the number of tenants who choose to take part.

We will monitor and evaluate the Tenant Participation Action Plan quarterly with CaRTO to measure the success of this strategy. We will update the Action Plan and publish it online.

We will produce an annual Tenant Participation report to evaluate this strategy and inform our tenants and the Management Committee of our progress.

We will review this strategy with our tenants every three years.

We will work towards a TPAS accreditation to provide an external evaluation of how we involve our tenants.

More information

The Scottish Social Housing Charter is available at <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-april-2017/> or from our office.

Our Strategic Plan and Charter Performance Report are available at castlehillha.co.uk or from our office.

Our Annual Return on the Charter is available at scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk or from our office.

More information on National Standards for Community Engagement is available at scdc.org.uk or from our office.

More information on Scrutiny is available at www.gov.scot, tpasscotland.co.uk, tis.org.uk, cih.org/scotland or from our office.

More information on NETRALT is available at netralt.org.uk or from our office.

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This document can be made available in other languages and formats.