

## LISTER HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE LTD -

### **LISTER'S TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY**

#### *INTRODUCTION*

1. Lister welcomes participation from tenants and as a housing co-operative, tenant involvement is at the core of our activities. This strategy is to inform tenants of our approach, to get their comments and involvement, and to help plan out future tenant participation.
2. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gave tenants the right to be consulted by the landlord on certain issues. All councils and registered social landlords (such as housing associations and co-ops) are now duty bound to consult tenants on proposed changes to housing services and proposed rent reviews. Decision-making processes will have to be clear, open and accountable to enable tenants to influence outcomes properly. The Act also requires landlords to establish a register of tenants organisations based on criteria laid down by Scottish Ministers.

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3. Lister aims to improve continuously its services to tenants and customers. One of the ways to do this is through improved decision-making which results from meaningful and effective tenant participation.
4. We aim to promote opportunities for our tenants and customers to contribute to our housing service, based on the principles of openness, mutual trust and a culture of respect. We wish to give tenants the opportunities and the resources to be able to contribute, and encourage them to become more informed.
5. Our objective is have ongoing active tenant participation, with tenants at the core of our service delivery.

#### HOW THE STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED AND WHO WAS INVOLVED

6. The Strategy was developed by the Lister staff and Management Committee (who are all Lister tenants) and has been the subject of consultation with our tenants. There has also been an open 'Gathering' evening that looked at a range of issues of concern to Lister tenants. The strategy is a 'live' document that can be developed further and amended to reflect further input and involvement with tenants.
7. For more information contact Mark Stolarek, Housing Officer or Alistair Cant, Director.

#### THE REASONS FOR THE STRATEGY AND THE BENEFITS OF TENANT PARTICIPATION

8. Lister wishes to set out in a clear strategy how it plans to develop tenant participation further. There are many benefits from tenant participation, including a better success rate for projects, greater awareness by tenants and customers and benefits from feedback improving the housing service.

## PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

9. Lister aims to meet the Performance Standards set out by the Scottish Housing Regulator (formerly called Communities Scotland) and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. The relevant standard in relation to tenant participation (GS 2.2) states:

"We have published and are implementing a sound strategy for encouraging and supporting tenants, residents and service users to participate actively in all areas of our work. We support tenants who take an active interest in managing their homes."

## LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES

10. Lister works closely with other housing associations, co-ops, the Council and the Scottish Housing Regulator, through various forums, working groups and liaison groups. We share knowledge and experience on tenant participation and different strategies. Lister also aims to integrate tenant participation across all its services, projects and strategies, to place it at the core of our operation.

## HOW LISTER KEEPS TENANTS INFORMED

11. The current ways that Lister involves tenants and carries out tenant participation include:
- a. Tenants run the Committee and can stand at the Annual General Meeting to go onto the Committee.
  - b. Regular newsletters, which sometimes produces feedback.
  - c. Specific newsletters or leaflets, e.g. on the Scottish Secure Tenancy, new site back green initiatives, etc. These can be for all tenants or just for some.
  - d. Letters addressed to specific tenants or all tenants in stairs where there is an issue.
  - e. There have been public meetings about big issues, e.g. the RIE site; funding repairs.
  - f. An annual report which also includes much performance and target information.
  - g. The Committee can consider petitions, delegations or representations from tenants.
  - h. Lister conducts a range of surveys including satisfaction surveys associated with major improvements, e.g. central heating or kitchens; all tenant surveys; and tailored surveys where appropriate. We ensure there is feedback to tenants too on the survey results.

## FUTURE CONSULTATION

12. There will be continuing consultations arising out of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, such as on rent reviews. In general it is suggested that the Committee and staff continue to use a range of methods, as outlined above, to consult with and involve tenants. It is agreed to offer a crèche (subject to pre-booking) for all significant tenant meetings approved by Lister.
13. Information should aim to be sent out at least one week before a meeting and at least 2 weeks in advance where written responses are sought. At least a brief note of the essential elements in newsletters circulated to all tenants should be translated into Urdu or other languages as required.
14. Lister aims in the future to use its website as a usual means of communication and giving feedback.

## TIMING OF CONSULTATION

15. Lister aims to give tenants time to consider consultations, so for example it would aim to give 10-14 days for feedback from articles in the Lister newsletter. It would publicise meetings at

least 7 days in advance. Lister would also ensure that there is good feedback reasonably soon after the relevant matters have been discussed.

#### REGISTERED TENANTS ORGANISATIONS (RTOs)

16. There are no RTOs at present at Lister and it may be that there will not be any RTO due to the small size of Lister and the close contact that already exists between the co-op and the tenants. If there is the possibility of a RTO then Lister would follow the appropriate advice in dealing with any approach. There would be appropriate support to any RTOs at Lister.
17. Lister has a guidance note on the Criteria for registering a RTO. Please ask for a copy if you wish to consider this.

#### RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR TENANTS AND FOR GROUPS THAT ARE NOT RTOs

18. Lister recognises that support may need to be provided to individual tenants or to informal groups who are assisting Lister or its staff. Support could involve training, expenses support, photocopying / fax facilities, providing meeting rooms, etc. It is recommended at the outset that requests of this nature be dealt with on a one off basis.
19. There is potentially a lot of support for a tenant who wishes to consider joining the Committee, as there is induction training and other training provided by Lister and the opportunity to go on outside courses. In addition there will be support for any tenant who is able to represent Lister at meetings of external bodies e.g. Community Councils, etc.

#### TRAINING

20. Lister will aim to support appropriate training for tenants who wish to get involved more and participate in improving the housing service at Lister.

#### EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

21. Lister aims to involve tenants from all ethnic backgrounds and abilities, and will encourage those with specific needs to get involved so as to improve the service even more.

#### OTHER AIMS OF THE HOUSING ACT

22. One aim of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 is for landlords to allow tenants to have reasonable input to 'setting the agenda', not just being consulted on proposals that the landlord has virtually decided upon already. We often take this approach. For some, more mundane issues for example, this may require a special effort to ensure that where a topic is likely to be of interest to tenants, we often elicit views and consult on the 'agenda' before firm proposals are studied by the Committee. There may be a number of potential difficulties as some of the options identified by tenants may not be practically, legally or financially possible, or else would cause problems for Lister with our regulator, the Scottish Housing Regulator. This should not be seen as a reason for not consulting in the first place.
24. Another aim is to ensure tenants have an ongoing input into the way proposals develop. This is important to ensure people are kept involved and informed. Again Lister does try to do this already but it would welcome more thoughts on this from tenants.

#### WIDER ACTION

25. The term wider action is used by the Scottish Government and others to describe activities in which the association or co-operative is involved which are outwith the normal housing

management / estate management / rents / development services. Wider action can encompass a range of ideas, such as rejuvenating a run down community with multi-agency working, to doing employment initiatives to community regeneration. Lister has done some of this in the past, such as taking up issues of traffic, pollution, road safety, planning issues, plus organising community events such as back green parties, summer play events and socials.

26. There are issues in proposing wider action, in that they could be very draining on scarce staff or Committee time and energy, and there could be a financial cost as well. This needs to be carefully considered before the expectations of potential tenant recruits are raised.
27. Lister needs to consider what will happen if a tenant wishes to get more involved and trained up on issues, but does not want to join the Management Committee. To what extent will Lister be able to support and encourage such people ?
28. There are a number of grant awarding bodies, that give out funds to community initiatives and projects. It could be that a group of tenants, with or without Lister's support, could access these funds, for projects that would give some benefit to Lister's tenants or children, for example. We hold some information but we are not experts nor grant application form advisers. The strategy could look at making this sort of information more widely publicised. Again this all takes time and could raise expectations that we may not be able to fulfil.

#### HOW THE STRATEGY WILL BE MONITORED AND REVIEWED

29. Lister will review the strategy regularly, and also present a report to its Management Committee every year on tenant participation and how the strategy is developing. This information will be fed back to tenants.

#### CONCLUSION

30. It has been seen time and time again at Lister that where tenants are informed and involved over a proposal, then the final decision implemented is more likely to be successful than if it is just introduced without warning. This needs to be maintained and built upon at Lister.
31. The Management Committee is keen to hear the views of tenants on this strategy, and any other ideas about involving tenants.

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