

Local Tenant Participation Strategies (LTPS)

- Guide and illustrative Model Action Plan

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1. The Approach and Priorities

A strategy is a plan that sets out the purpose of an organisation, what it plans to achieve, and what must be done to get there. Knowing where you want to get to is essential but so is knowing where you are starting from, so part of the strategy process has to map out the current position. A Local Tenant Participation Strategy (LTPS) should have a strategy explaining in broad terms the purposes, objectives and directions to achieve them, and a more detailed Action Plan with targets/milestones.

The actions needed to achieve the organisation's objectives will depend on how far your current practice and expertise in participation is from the intended objectives. It's likely that you may have to include research and investigation in your plan to explore with tenants, staff and Board Members/Councillors what their ideas and preferences are before you are able to set out the final intended objectives. In other words you may need an interim strategy and action plan in order to gather the knowledge to be able to produce your final strategy and plan.

Into the future the strategy and action plan will need to be reviewed on a regular basis as a cycle:

- set out changes intended;
- measure and report back on achievements;
- identify lessons and problems;
- amend strategy and action for changes intended.

It may be useful to include some sections of background, assessment of current participation practice, or description of how the strategy was produced. However, these should be included as appendices so that the main strategy and action plan are kept simple and as the main focus of attention – what you are trying to achieve; how you are going to do it.

Writing the strategy plan document is not the most important part of the exercise. Most important is the long term development of participation both through the process of discussion and development of the strategy as well as its implementation.

2. Structure of the LTPS

The National Tenant Participation Strategy (NTPS) sets out key expectations for a LTPS under 5 headings:

- Aims and objectives
- Scope of Participation
- Participation Options
- Delivery
- Monitoring and review

This is a useful structure for the LTPS with the first 3 headings covering the strategy intentions in broad terms and the last 2 sections constituting the Action Plan with its monitoring elements.

3. The Strategy Plan

3.1 Aims and Objectives

An Aim should be a single, very broad purpose stating the intended end point impact of the whole initiative. For a LTPS it could be something like:

“To improve the quality and delivery of services for housing management and wider community development by improving the participation of tenants (and residents) in the planning and operation of *the social landlord's* systems and services.”

There are 2 elements within this aim:

- ‘to improve quality and delivery of services’ which is about change in external provision;
- ‘by improving the participation of tenants (and residents)’ which is about processes of involvement rather than external change resulting from them.

It is easier to monitor and evidence greater participation of tenants than it is to monitor changes in external services and to attribute them as being a result of increased participation.

For a Supported Housing Provider the aim of a LTPS could be:

“To improve support services to foster independent living by improving the participation of service users in the planning and operation of *the support provider's* systems and services.”

Objectives are ‘sub-aims’ – a breakdown of the broad aim into more specific intentions which if achieved will all contribute to achieving the aim.

Objectives of a LTPS could be:

1. To improve housing management services through greater involvement by tenants.
2. To develop a culture of participation within *the social landlord* so that all planning, decision making and review processes are open to tenant input.
3. To increase the involvement of all sections of tenants (and residents) by ensuring appropriate opportunities for involvement, necessary skills and confidence, and adequate resources.

4. To improve the wider environment and community through collaboration with tenants and residents, and other partners and agencies.

Monitoring and measurement of success in achieving these objectives must be by identifying outcomes, ie. external changes that improve people's lives. The focus must be on what is changed and achieved, not on what activities have been done. If tenants, landlords and communities only identify processes and levels of activity they will work hard without ever knowing whether they have achieved anything. Unless tenants and residents can see how an activity made life better it will be difficult to motivate their involvement.

Actions in the action plan should be grouped under the appropriate objective so that there is structure to the plan with actions linked to the purpose they are intended to serve. This is a crucial purpose of the framework of the action plan that objectives are clearly identified with linked actions to achieve them so that it can be seen whether the actions listed are sufficient and appropriate to achieve each objective.

There is a huge number of actions which a landlord, staff and tenants can take to achieve these objectives; the strategy and action plan should not include all of them but focus on main areas of action. The detail of all actions will carry through to individual staff work plans. The action plan outline that follows illustrates actions that could be in your action plan, but:

- You will need to explore with tenants and staff first what their ideas and preferences are before deciding on actions.
- You may need to select some of the possible actions on a priority basis because it isn't possible to do all of them starting from your current practice and expertise in participation (but timetable further development in the future).

3.2 Scope of Participation

This section should set out the strategic intentions of the LTPS in terms of the scope of participation, bearing in mind tenants' needs and wishes. The NTPS requires that:

- The scope of involvements should be what tenants want and suited to their needs
- Participation should be integrated across all landlord staff and operations
- Methods of involving tenants should include direct mechanisms as well as traditional representation of tenants through Associations
- All groups of tenants should be included through suitable methods and convenient access
- Community issues are addressed as well as housing issues
- Participation should be maintained through regular review of LTPS and by linking with mechanisms for continuous improvement.

Landlords could set out their commitment to meeting these requirements by expressing a series of main strategic commitments for LTPS:

- **Tenants' needs and wishes**

The social landlord will regularly survey tenants' preferences about ways to be involved and develop structures and methods to accord with those preferences.

It is likely that if tenants' experience to date of participation is a poor one, then tenants' won't express much interest or preference for any methods of involvement. With positive experience of participation achieving things for the better and seeing benefit for their involvement, then tenants' preferences could change. So it's worth keeping methods and structures under review as participation practice improves.

- **Integrate/mainstream participation**

The social landlord will ensure understanding of and commitment to good practice in participation throughout the organisation, with all staff and Board Members/Councillors taking responsibility for involving tenants in services improvement and operation

Tenant participation can't be a marginal thing that's the responsibility of 1 or 2 staff – all staff and the managers and Board/Committee members have to be committed and engaged. Participation is not about tenants and what tenants do, it's about the whole organisation, all the staff, and default thinking that automatically asks: 'how will tenants be involved in that'.

- **Representation and direct involvement**

The social landlord will support ways for tenants to organise themselves and express an independent voice, alongside a range of direct methods to seek tenants' views and to involve tenants in decision making.

The NTPS uses the terms 'formal' and 'informal' instead of 'representation' and 'direct'. TPAS Cymru feels that survey questionnaires, focus groups or working groups of tenants and staff etc are all formal methods of involvement rather than 'informal'. We feel it is clearer to use representation and direct to describe different categories of methods of involvement, and to keep informal to describe social and informal type of activities which also aim to gather views or to inform.

- **Involvement and access by all groups of tenants**

The social landlord will enable all groups of tenants to participate in services review and improvement across the profile of their tenants and their geographic location. Appropriate methods and support to enable access will be provided to ensure a match between the profile of tenants and their distribution and the profile of those involved.

It is not acceptable for the active, honourable few only to be involved. Landlords need to plan for how to include all elements of tenants and make participation opportunities accessible to them; and to evidence whether this is happening.

- **Community issues**

The social landlord will enable and support tenants to engage in wider issues concerning their community and environment, including maintaining appropriate links and partnerships with other organisations.

NTPS acknowledges that residents who are not tenants will need to be involved in the wider scope of participation in community issues but states that tenants' rents should not be used to fund participation costs for non-tenants.

- **Sustainability in the future**

The social landlord will involve tenants in regular review of the participation strategy and in the mechanisms for continuous improvement for the organisation.

3.3 Participation Options

This section of the LTPS should set out the landlord's commitments in terms of providing:

- Different levels of participation
 - A range of methods of involvement - but not a scattergun
 - Range of formats and languages
- **Different levels of participation**
The social landlord is committed to supporting the full range of levels of tenant involvement including:
 - clear, high quality information to tenants on all relevant issues and developments in services and the organisation;
 - opportunities to express views and be consulted on decisions and developments;
 - opportunities to influence priorities and developments from early in the process and to contribute to decision making;
 - opportunities to take control of some landlord functions where tenants wish to.

It is not the aim of participation to shift every aspect of tenant involvement up to the level of tenant control – this may not be appropriate and it depends on what influence tenants want. All the different levels are valid for different aspects of landlord services. There can be several different levels of participation happening for the same activity, perhaps with different groups of tenants,. eg. a newsletter could involve: tenant editorial and planning group; a plain language check group; satisfaction survey with all tenants; and distribution of information to all tenants.

- **Range of different methods**

The social landlord will use a wide range of methods of involvement according to the preferences of tenants and the effectiveness of different methods for different purposes.

The NTPS cautions against a scattergun approach which chooses methods randomly from a general menu of methods. Methods to involve tenants need to be chosen according to the purpose of the involvement.

The assumption behind this requirement is that different tenants prefer different methods to give their views and/or different groups of tenants prefer different methods – so a wider range of methods is more effective. It is certainly true there are different preferences but all tenants prefer methods that come to them rather than asking to travel significant distances, are convenient in time as well as place, and don't involve wading through paper and complex information.

Two points are worth bearing in mind:

- Any activity can be carried out at any level of participation. Look for ways to increase tenant influence in each involvement activity, if it's what tenants want, so that there are higher level opportunities and not just information and consultation levels.
- In developing the Action Plan it is a mistake to list the various activities under the heading of different levels of participation ie all the information outputs, then all the consultations etc. This loses the purposeful connection between an objective and the activities intended to achieve that objective as explained in section 3.1. – there will always be a range of different levels of activities needed to meet any objective, so separating activities out by level would destroy the connection between: what we want to change, and what we do to achieve that.
- **Range of formats and languages**
The social landlord will provide information in formats and languages according to the needs of tenants, and will enable involvement of tenants' in activities through support to meet disability or language needs. Tenants' will be involved in assessing information for relevance, plain language and appealing presentation.

4. Action Plan Outline (Delivery & Monitoring and Review)

The draft Guidance for the NTPS (the final Guidance is not yet published at time of writing) required a clear framework for the Action Plan which included a number of factors not included in the charts below. The additional factors which had columns in the guide framework were:

- Purpose – how the action will support the objective
- Who is responsible for taking the action
- What resources are required to make it happen

We have omitted these factors to try to keep the Action Plan charts simpler and easier to understand. The ‘Purpose’ column seemed unnecessary because the example entries in the WAG Guidance example framework were just a restatement of the Objective. Who is responsible and what resources are needed are detailed decisions for each Action Plan and would perhaps be better placed in detailed operational plans for staff, rather than being put in the LTPS which is for wider distribution and needs to be kept at a broader level for tenants to see what commitments are being made and how they will be achieved.

The Action Plan framework that follows is illustrative – it is not comprehensive and it won’t cover every landlord’s context and tenants’ needs. It is intended to give clear illustration of the how to use the objectives identified to identify outcomes and how they can be measured, and to suggest examples of actions which could be undertaken to achieve the objectives. No targets or milestones are suggested because these are so dependent on each landlord’s participation position and aspirations, and will vary so much according to the organisation and context.

The NTPS recognises that the Action Plan “should be aimed at making steady progress in delivering the Strategy” and that the Strategy will not be achieved in one year. As discussed earlier in section 1, many landlords will need to include research and exploration of tenants’ preferences, staff views and capabilities, and appropriate methods of involvement before being able to state definitively what the LTPS aims for and how to go about achieving it. LTPS should develop over time as more experience, better practice in participation, and increased confidence and trust by both tenants and staff, open up wider possibilities for development. In informal discussion with TPAS Cymru staff, WAG officials have acknowledged this approach and said this will be taken into account in assessing the first LTPS to be submitted.

Objective	Outcome Indicators	Measured By
1. To improve housing management services through greater involvement by tenants.	Repairs services effective in at least X% of cases for promptness and quality. Better equality of access to services across different groups of tenants Quality of housing and facilities ,,, Lettings service ,,,, Voids period kept at less than Y days Information is readily accessible in appropriate formats, languages and clarity	Satisfaction evaluations by tenants for each repair reported. Satisfaction evaluations analysed for different age, location, ethnic background, family circumstances Annual survey of tenant satisfaction

Actions	Target/Milestone
Repairs: ▪ Evaluation of tenant satisfaction for each repair ▪ Log kept of all repairs requests and response; and analysed by tenant groupings and area profile ▪ Repairs visits by appointment ▪ Tenants involved in regular review group for repairs service. ▪ Tenants involved in contractor review and selection Improvements: Tenants/staff group to agree technical specifications, options, priorities for improvements eg WHQS. Lettings and Voids: Keep a record of reasons for refusing or accepting offers of tenancy; analyse by area and for reasons.	

Information:

- Maintain a profile of tenants needs and preferences for communication formats and languages and provide as appropriate.
- Hold regular liaison meetings with voluntary and community organisations supporting specific groups of tenants eg. BME, single parent, elderly, young tenants about tenants needs.
- Produce clear, concise information in a range of media on all aspects of housing services.
- Operate tenants editorial group(s) to advise on information content and presentation.
- Advice and support available at hours convenient for tenants, including by appointment.

Objective	Outcome Indicators	Measured By
2. To develop a culture of participation within <i>the social landlord</i> so that all planning, decision making and review processes are open to tenant input.	All staff are aware of their responsibility for participation and the benefits of participation in their area of work Staff are confident about their skills and knowledge of methods of involvement Tenants are fully aware of the opportunities to participate and of the influence of tenant involvement Corporate objectives and priorities and major operational decisions are influenced by tenant participation Increased transparency of decision making More effective tenant scrutiny of performance	Collation of annual staff appraisal assessments, and annual survey of staff awareness by tenants Survey of staff attitudes and views Survey of tenant knowledge of options for participation and examples of tenant influence Evidence record of tenants views obtained, action or explanation in response, and feed back to tenants Survey of tenants' knowledge of decisions made and their reasoning Evidence record of scrutiny by tenants, decisions made and outcomes.

Actions	Target/Milestone
Governance: ▪ Tenants are eligible to become shareholders of the landlord ▪ Tenants form 1/3 of managing body of the landlord ▪ Tenant representatives from TRAs or Tenant Panel/Forum sit as observers (non-voting) at the managing body ▪ Minutes of all governing body meetings are available on the landlord's website and on request to tenants ▪ Tenant and other Board Members attend regularly and report to TRAs and/or Tenants Panel ▪ Board Members attend discussion meetings or events with tenants Staffing: ▪ Chief executive and senior managers consistently promote the importance of tenant participation ▪ All staff job descriptions identify responsibility for tenant participation within the job ▪ Involve tenants in selection of a range of posts in the organisation. ▪ All staff inductions include a session on tenant participation's importance and benefits given by the chief executive or senior manager. ▪ Staff appraisals assess performance in tenant participation aspects and identify training and support needs for all staff to perform effectively. ▪ Set up a structure of Participation Champions in every department, led by a senior manager, which meets regularly to foster participation and exchange experience. ▪ Participation Champions take responsibility for ensuring participation is considered at all team meetings and is built into department objectives and programme of work. ▪ Mechanisms should be developed to record all tenant comments and suggestions including informal ones, and a system to analyse and respond to these ▪ Staff attend and contribute to TRA meetings on a regular basis Strategy and Policy: ▪ Tenants are an integral part of discussions to identify strategic issues, priorities and action (through eg. The Westlea HA tenants business plan approach) ▪ The timing cycle of planning and budget setting is set to include tenant input at timely	

points with sufficient time to allow effective tenant and TRA/Tenant Panel response ▪ All services' planning and review processes include tenants in providing information, analysing and deciding on any actions. ▪ All major policy and procedure decisions and changes will be consulted on with tenants through a range of methods to maximise response. ▪ Tenants are fully involved in planning and development of the LTPS. ▪ All tenant involvement and consultation responses will be recorded, and the response or reason for no action reported back to tenants regularly to demonstrate their influence.	
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Objective	Outcome Indicators	Measured By
3. To increase the involvement of all sections of tenants (and residents) by ensuring appropriate opportunities for involvement, necessary skills and confidence, and adequate resources.	The number of tenants involved in participation activities increases to a target level Tenants involvement increases from all identified groupings within the tenant profile The number of opportunities for tenant participation is maintained or increased Tenants have the skills, knowledge and confidence they feel is necessary to participate Tenants have access to resources and support they feel is necessary to play their role in participation activities.	Recording of tenant attendance at events, work groups, forums etc. Recording as above to include information on tenant background Record of activities Evaluation surveys of tenants following participation activities; sample survey of non-active tenants Comparison of annual assessment of tenant participation resource needs with actual Survey tenants' and staff knowledge of participation resources available

Actions	Target/Milestone
▪ Widespread consultation with tenants about their priorities for the landlord, their interest in involvement, and their preferred method(s) for involvement – using an interesting range of methods. ▪ Co-ordination of surveys and consultations to avoid overload and increase effectiveness across the organisation. ▪ Establish working forum groups of tenants, with staff, on priority topics or services. ▪ Establish social activities/events as a basis for building tenant contact and confidence, and as a channel for informal consultation ▪ Tenants' Forum/Panel established with representation by area or other appropriate grouping. ▪ Develop a range of other methods of involvement such as: - a policy club of tenants willing to respond on different issues; - training tenant inspectors and mystery shoppers to contribute to internal quality assessments; - estate walkabouts; - exchange visits to other projects and tenants groups; - time bank/exchange; - tenant pages on the web site. ▪ Set up a tenants and staff editorial group for the landlord's newsletter; perhaps set up tenants' own newsletter with devolved responsibility and budget. ▪ Promote and support Tenant & Resident Associations (TRAs) on an area basis – utilise TRAs as a link to local tenants and in planning services to their area. ▪ Encourage tenants to assess their needs for training and resources and to submit a bid as part of the Business Plan process. Give clear, transparent information on resources and support available. ▪ Include tenants in corporate training being provided to staff and/or Board Members or Councillors. ▪ Provide resources for training of tenants and conference attendance, TRA operation, administration costs etc. ▪ Set up a tenants' resource centre to provide access to computers, phone, copying, meeting space etc.	

Objective	Outcome Indicators	Measured By
4. To improve the wider environment and community context through collaboration with tenants and residents, and other partners and agencies.	Action taken and improvements made on priority issues for the community. Anti social behaviour problems diminish. Better quality of community life: - Residents make greater use of open space, play areas etc. - Community organisations become more active and effective. Regular active partnerships in place involving residents in area planning and action.	From annual reviews of progress; Observation notes during regular estate walkabouts; residents' satisfaction surveys. Reduction in reports of ASB and in enforcement action taken by landlord From residents' satisfaction surveys. Surveys or facilities use and satisfaction. From local directories and survey of community organisations – range of activities, numbers of community organisations, voluntary support and impact Notes of partnership meetings.

Actions	Target/Milestone
- Develop community profiles for each area of the landlord's operation. - Promote and support community associations or TRAs, including advising and supporting about external funding sources. - Develop area assessments and action plans. - Provide area improvement funds for tenants/residents to develop projects and allocate funding. - Raise awareness of expected standards of behaviour through Neighbourhood Charters or similar methods. - Identify causes of ASB and encourage community solutions to prevent ASB. - Participate in community planning forums and partnerships, and in crime reduction partnerships.	

Monitoring and Review

The NTPS only refers under this heading to the need for annual review of Local Strategies and Action Plans, plus a more fundamental review every 3 years – in which tenants must be involved. It also sets out WAG's intended cycle for review of LTPS and inspection by Wales Audit Office. However, elsewhere in the NTPS and strongly in the draft Guidance there is a strong evidence on the need to provide evidence about progress on outcomes.

The illustrative Action Plan above suggests ways to measure outcomes and these represent for many landlords a much greater effort and workload of recording and collating evidence. The draft WAG Guidance included suggestions of what landlords need to provide evidence of in achieving outcomes, which included:

- Tenants' preferences for involvement acted on?
- Reaching hard to reach groups?
- Tenants' involvement in local participation strategy?
- Tenants' views influenced decisions?
- Tenants informed about decisions influenced?
- Training of tenants; resulting qualifications and feedback?

These are the easier process outcomes to record and evidence, but to record real external change in services, community quality of life will require more thought and effort.

The Housing Corporation in England published a document called Measuring Change¹ which states:

"You cannot overstate the importance of evaluation. There is no getting away from the fact that setting targets and gathering evidence is time consuming. To give up this time will only make sense if you use the evidence that you gather to evaluate how effective you are being.

If evaluation becomes a core part of your working practice it should help you to free up your time and identify priorities. In short it helps to make decisions about what to leave out (or what not to do) as well as what to put in."

1 – Measuring Change: Involvement Impact Assessments, Housing Corporation

5. Main steps for an effective process to develop a Local Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan

The Guide so far has covered what are the aims of a LTPS and what should be covered. This still leaves the question of 'how do we go about it?'. As with the illustrative model, the circumstances of each landlord and area are very different and one model will not fit all. The following steps are an outline guide to the steps you are likely to need to take in developing your LTPS. The process highlights the need to involve all levels of governance and management of the landlord, all staff and departments and the range of different tenant groups, interests and areas. The process of developing the LTPS should be highly participative and accord with the step up in quality of participation intended by the NTPS.

Stage 1 : Plan the process to develop your LTPS

At this stage of kicking off the process it will probably be existing tenants' panel/forum/federation members involved with participation staff.

- Meeting of the Chief Executive with lead tenants and staff – stress the need for corporate leadership and commitment
- Arrange a presentation about LTPS to the Board/Committee
- Agree the outline approach, scope and timetable for the LTPS process – with corporate backing

Stage 2: Establish an information base

- Identify the profile of your tenants and the communities they live in – so you know specific groups or areas to involve.

Stage 3: Setting the strategic objectives

- Consult and involve different groups of tenants and areas – explaining LTPS and asking for their major needs and priorities – identify lead tenants for development of LTPS
- Present and discuss LTPS with team meetings of all departments of the landlord – identify lead contacts for LTPS in each department
- Each department reviews its main functions and the main objectives for how tenants can be involved
- Tenants and staff agree high level objectives and priorities

Stage 4: What's your starting point and areas to improve?

- Audit of existing TP activities – what works, what improvements are needed.
- What is missing, what are the possibilities for participation - use WAO inspection as baseline if your landlord has one, and the TPAS Cymru TP assessment framework
- Any revisions to high level objectives and priorities

Stage 5: Development of Action Plan

- Tenants groups and department teams discuss and agree actions to achieve the objectives, or further investigation and consultation to be able to decide on action, as possible
- Consulting with tenants and staff on proposals to amend and refine
- Deciding how available resources can best be deployed
- Finalise Plan and set targets

Stage 6: Implementation

- Communication of the strategy and action plan to all tenants, staff and Board/Committee members
- Developing strong partnership working across departments and with key agencies
- Developing structures, working groups, recording systems to implement actions and participation
- Identify training and support needs for tenants, staff and Board/Committee members to operate in the new strategy
- Effective management action to achieve results

Every Stage: Recording and Evidence

- Develop mechanisms to record the purpose of activities, who was involved, what was achieved

Stage 7: Evaluation

- Measuring achievements against targets
- Identifying wider impacts
- Diagnosing the reasons for success or failure
- Modifying policies and plans

Beyond the Strategy

Having a strategy is only the beginning of the process to develop and improve tenant participation. Landlords, including Directors, Managers front line staff, elected members and Board of Management members need to include and support tenants to be involved in decision making processes.

The commitments and actions in the strategy and action plan should support the organisation's commitment to have tenant involvement at the heart of its service provision.