

A photograph of two women, one on the left and one on the right, both wearing white lab coats. They are looking towards the camera with neutral expressions. Their hands are positioned to hold a small, detailed model of a two-story brick house with a white door and windows. The background is a plain, light color.

Code of Practice for Tenant Participation in Rural Areas

A National Strategy for Tenant Participation 



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Making it work together

Code of Practice

for Tenant Participation in
Rural Areas



“Participation is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and service.”

(National Strategy for Tenant Participation)

This code has been produced to assist landlords and tenants in rural areas consider how best the aim of the National Tenant Participation strategy might be realised.

In rural areas, much of the good practice outlined in the other codes as part of this series will apply. However, in developing appropriate rural solutions, landlords and tenants must agree a framework, which takes account of the areas illustrated by this Code.

Promoting effective tenant participation in rural areas

1 Transport

Many rural communities are dispersed and remote from the centres of population. Public transport is scarce and where it does exist is expensive. There is a lack of services that are readily available in towns.

Tenant participation in rural areas should be encouraged by:

- Providing transport to meetings
- Using new communications technology to link people together
- Holding meetings locally, senior staff and/or elected committees/councillors should attend when requested
- Using volunteers in the local community to act as village voices or tenant information volunteers (pay expenses and provide training)
- Providing crèche facilities or care expenses
- Timing meetings to allow for tenants and staff coming distances and to coincide with public transport or whatever means of reasonable transport is available
- Encouraging car/boat sharing
- Allowing extra time for consultations to allow groups who meet infrequently to have their say and offer an informed opinion

2 Information

It can be difficult for rural tenants to get information. There should be a flexible approach to distributing information, which may include:

- Opening local offices with opening times to suit tenants needs
- Newsletters/leaflets with added local information
- Press releases in the local newspaper or community newsletter
- Using new technology (eg the internet, video conferencing, e-mail)
- Individual home visits
- Personal letters
- Regular public meetings, roadshows, housing surgeries, councillors' surgeries
- Radio broadcasts
- Local noticeboards
- Use freephone number to connect tenants to staff
- Information should be provided for those not interested in participating further
- Use organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau to give information and make referrals

Special consideration should be given to the information provided:

- Any consultations should involve a named member of staff who is familiar with the local area and issues and feedback should be given quickly
- There should be equal access to information for all minority groups and those with disabilities and learning difficulties
- Tenants may be unfamiliar with basic housing jargon, use plain English, keep information simple, if people have problems with reading and writing there may be no help available locally
- Long documents should have a one page summary

3 Getting People Together

Landlords should support and encourage the formation of tenants associations. Where the formation of an association is not possible because of distance, community resources, skills base or age, landlords should be encouraged to:

- Target under represented groups
- Issue personal invitations to meetings
- Invite members of existing tenant groups to show the benefits of participating
- Put out agendas and documents well in advance of meetings, to be received at least 7 days beforehand
- Staff support should be available to tenants
- Include community or environmental issues, housing alone may not be enough to sustain groups. Use these issues to promote interest in broader participation
- Use different groups to spread the message or ask for time during other groups meetings eg community councils or community associations
- Link in with community planning exercises to develop services
- Consider involving owners and sharing owners

4 Meeting up

In many communities there is a lack of suitable meeting places:

- Village schools, school halls, churches, community halls and houses, pubs are suitable venues
- Ensure where possible that there is disabled access, where such facilities are not available personal visits to individual's homes may be an alternative
- A tenant may be willing to hold a meeting in their home
- Encourage, support and train tenants in communication and computer skills

5 Small Communities

Populations are sometimes too small for viable tenant groups.

- Carry out surveys and use reply paid envelopes
- Continuous representation may not be possible – consider issue-based groups and support for restarting groups
- In small communities consider informal groups for all tenants rather than trying to establish more formal groups
- Consider holding tenants panels or focus groups
- Equal weight should be given to the needs and views of rural tenants as those in the centres of population
- Consider joint meetings with other landlords tenants
- Encourage individuals to take up membership and join the boards of local housing associations
- Encourage computer linking between tenants in smaller communities via the Worldwide Internet

6 Resources and Training

Unemployment in rural areas tends to be higher than in towns, as does the cost of living. Wages however, tend to be lower.

- Landlords need to budget adequately to set aside sufficient resources to allow tenants groups to function effectively
- Pay reasonable travel and subsistence expenses
- Give incentives for attending meetings – allowances and refreshments
- Pay tenants group costs, recognising these may be higher in rural areas
- A range of training options should be developed with tenants which would allow them to acquire the skills necessary to enable them to participate as equal partners.
- Training can be carried out jointly with other community groups on common issues, eg managing meetings
- Support national and local community skills building programmes, particularly those offering basic computing/communications technology training
- Give help with photocopying, there may be nowhere locally to get this done
- Rural Housing Associations tend to be smaller and have fewer resources so may need help from Central Government

7 Staffing issues

Staffing levels can be quite small leading to low staff turnover and conservative management.

- Regular training on tenant participation should be given to staff, elected members and tenants together. Landlords should ensure that the principles of tenant participation are reflected in all appropriate internal and external contracts and the criteria for approved contractors
- All job descriptions for staff should include requirements on tenant participation
- Staff should have responsibility for all areas of the housing service and should be familiar with local communities
- Where there is a lack of tenant organisations, specially dedicated staff can help to enable good liaison between all parties
- Where possible, smaller authorities and RSLs in partnership with tenants, should pool resources to finance a development/participation officer to cover areas of joint housing responsibility

8 Independent Advice on Housing Matters

Access to external advice may be difficult.

- Provide information about advice agencies to tenants
- Provide resources to tenants to enable them to have access to independent advice
- Encourage advice agencies to share resources (eg community bus, roadshows)

The Way Forward

Landlords and tenants should work together to agree how to take forward tenant participation.

Landlords should actively promote participation in all areas of their service and should make a continuing effort to include as many tenants as possible. Not all tenants will wish to participate but there should be a variety of opportunities for them to become involved at whatever level they feel is appropriate to themselves. This should include formal and informal ways of participating, providing comprehensive coverage of the landlord's area.

Structures and initiatives should take account of local circumstances and objectives. Any consultations should have sufficient timescales built into them to enable those in remote areas to have their say. There should be equality of opportunity to participate regardless of tenants' geographical location.

Many efforts to encourage tenant participation will be necessarily short lived, which means that Landlords will need to be continually restarting the process using different approaches, and giving continuous support. It may be necessary to consider housing together with other related services to make participation viable in rural areas, and to include at some level other groups such as neighbouring residents or community councils.



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