

# TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

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**SERVITE HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD**

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## SERVITE HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

### POLICY STATEMENT: TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

#### Section 1 - Introduction

Servite Housing Association (Servite) provides housing management and maintenance services to over 1500 tenants.

*By tenants we mean customers who rent property from us under any type of agreement and use our factoring service.*

Our housing stock portfolio is diverse including sheltered and very sheltered housing, amenity, general needs and shared ownership developments situated throughout Angus, Dundee, Fife and Perthshire.

Our principal aim is to provide excellent customer services and also to contribute positively to 'Building Better Communities' throughout our areas of operation.

We believe that effective tenant participation is central to achieving this aim along with the continuous improvement of the services aligned to increased tenant satisfaction.

We realise that we need to develop and strengthen our approach to tenant participation and are working closely with the Tenants Information Service (TIS) to develop and implement our tenant participation strategy.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a duty on us to prepare a tenant participation strategy in consultation with tenants and other service users.

This strategy has been produced by partnership working between tenants, staff and members of Servite's management committee. These three groups are represented on the Tenant Participation Working Group (TPWG) which was the key group involved in devising the first strategy for 2007.

The Servite Tenants Forum also considered the strategy independently with support from the Tenants Information Service (TIS). The views of the Forum were fed into the TPWG by the tenants' representatives.

## **Section 2 - Equal Opportunities**

This strategy takes account of our Equal Opportunities policy.

We will encourage and promote active measures to ensure that all tenants have equal access to participation and that no tenant is excluded from the participation process. When we organise events, which involve tenants, we will ensure that consideration is given to the following:

- Location and timing.
- Using barrier free meeting venues.
- Allow carers, family members and/or advocates the opportunity to participate.
- Making information available in appropriate community languages and other forms including (for example, audio tapes, DVD's and Braille) tailored to tenant's needs, interests and lifestyle.

### **Section 3 - Definition of Tenant Participation**

Servite recognises and agrees with the national definition of tenant participation contained within “Partners in Participation” (Scottish Office, 1999):

“Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about:

- housing policies and procedures;
- housing conditions; and
- housing (and related) services.

It 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 services”.

Servite Housing Association believes that tenant participation is the responsibility of the whole organisation, and each department including Housing Services, Business Development, IT, Finance and Corporate Services will ensure that tenants have the chance to influence important decisions that affect them.

We are therefore committed to promoting the involvement of our tenants across all areas of our activity.

We recognise that our tenants may wish varying degrees of involvement and this draft strategy provides a range of options and opportunities for this to happen. These are set out in more detail in section 7.

## **Section 4 - Key Principles & Duties for Tenant Participation**

Our tenant participation strategy recognises the importance of the key principles of tenant participation contained within the National Strategy “Partners in Participation”. These principles are:

- Tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, committee members, and staff at all levels, working together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.
- Tenant participation practice should be seen as a continuous process where information, ideas and power are shared; common understanding of problems is aimed for and a consensus on solutions is worked out.
- Effective tenant participation allows all partners to contribute to the agenda. All participants require access to all the information needed to consider issues properly; that information needs to be clear, timely and accessible and to take account of equal opportunities concerns.
- Processes of decision making should be open, clear and accountable.
- Adequate time should be given to tenant representatives to consider issues properly. Tenants should have the opportunity to work out a common view in advance of meeting landlord representatives.
- Good tenant participation requires the landlord to recognise the independence of tenants’ organisations.
- Good working relationships evolve gradually and are flexible to adapt to regional and local circumstances.
- Tenant organisations require adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
- Tenant participation in rural areas must be tailored to suit the particular circumstances and needs of tenants in such communities.

Our tenant participation strategy also acknowledges the importance of the key duties contained within the National Strategy for Tenant Participation which are:

- Prepare a tenant participation strategy.
- Make arrangements for obtaining and taking account of tenants’ and tenant organisations views.
- Provide information about any issue or proposal being discussed in tenant participation activity.

- Maintain a register of tenant organisations with set procedures, using criteria set by the Scottish Ministers.
- Conduct an assessment and provide a statement of the resources required to carry out the tenant participation strategy.
- Consult on a range of housing proposals and housing service standards, and give tenants reasonable time to consider draft proposals.
- Provide a written tenancy agreement.
- Tenant participation must meet the requirements of legislation surrounding equal opportunities. Good practice in participation removes barriers to effective participation arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

## **Section 5 - Aims of our Tenant Participation Strategy**

This strategy aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To ensure that tenant participation is an effective, clear and responsive way to improve services.
- To involve tenants in the decision making process through the Tenant Forum, local Area Forum, the Area/Estate Representative Scheme and any other recognised tenant organisation.
- To communicate clearly and effectively in a two-way process between individual tenants, tenants' organisations and staff.
- To promote the benefits of Tenant Participation to tenants, other customers, Committee members and staff.
- To provide training for tenants and staff so that they can review and influence our services.
- To provide a range of flexible opportunities and practical support for tenants who want to get involved.
- To continually develop our approach to ensure equality of access to the rights of participation and consultation.
- To contribute to community development and promote social inclusion.
- To meet all statutory and regulatory requirements and take account of good practice.
- To provide an effective performance evaluation process.

Section 7 describes how we propose to achieve these objectives.

## **Section 6 - Provision of Information**

The provision of good quality information is essential to ensure tenants are able to participate fully. We recognise that tenants need accurate and accessible information and we will provide good clear information in plain English.

We will make sure that information is made available to all of our tenants, in a range of formats, taking account of equal opportunities legislation.

We will provide tenants with a range of information including:

- 4 newsletters per year
- Articles dedicated to tenant participation
- A plain English information leaflet on our decision-making processes and promoting membership
- Information leaflets and application forms that are written in plain English
- Tenants Handbook
- Sharing Owners Handbook
- Housing Support Information Booklet
- Care Commission Inspection Reports (very sheltered/sheltered developments only)
- Annual Report
- Complaints procedure
- Tenant Participation Strategy
- Servite Housing Association Website
- Annual Estate Inspections/Reports
- Regular local tenants meetings
- Annual customer conference
- Changes to Annual Rent and Service Charges
- Individual letters and emails
- A public register of Registered Tenant Organisations

In addition, on request we will provide:

- Information on our housing management, repairs and rent setting policies and procedures.

We will also involve tenants before making any changes, which may significantly affect them to:

- housing management policies;
- repairs and maintenance policies;
- our methods of working practice;
- the introduction of new policies.

When involving tenants we will use a range of methods that suit individual tenants' needs.

## **Section 7 - Proposed Structures for Tenant Participation**

We will empower individual tenants and tenants' organisations to participate and put forward their views on all of the following in accordance with Section 54 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001:

- Our policy, or changes to our policy on rents, housing management, repairs or maintenance where the proposal is likely to significantly affect any tenant.
- The standards of service in relation to housing management, repairs and maintenance which we provide.
- Our Tenant Participation Strategy.

We believe that effective tenant participation improves our decision making processes by ensuring that the decisions we take are made in partnership with our tenants' representatives.

We will also support our tenants to have the opportunity to meaningfully participate at all levels of the organisation. We recognise that tenants may wish to participate in a number of different ways and at different levels and times.

We therefore propose to adopt a flexible structure and range of measures that take account of individual tenant preferences in order to maximise tenant involvement.

These will include:

- The Tenant Participation Working Group has been superseded by the Tenant Forum.
- The Tenant Forum has been established with a formal constitution and nominated membership. This body is now recognised as the principal consultative body for Servite and will meet with senior staff on a regular basis to discuss strategic and service related issues.
- An annual conference for tenants and other customers which will coincide with the Servite Housing Association AGM. This will open up Servite's decision making processes and provide tenants and customers with an opportunity to comment on business priorities for the organisation.
- Promoting, developing and supporting the establishment of local area based tenants' groups in Dundee, Perthshire, Fife and Angus.
- Promoting, developing and supporting the establishment of the Area/Estate Representative Scheme.

- Promoting, developing and supporting the establishment of Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) where there is demand. We will aim to give RTOs, which meet our registration criteria, a recognised role in the tenant participation process.
- Maintaining the procedures for registration developed in partnership with Tenant representatives and TIS in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
- Promoting, developing and supporting the establishment of tenants' groups based in local developments where demand exists and use these as a focus to discuss local issues. While recognising that tenants do not wish to register initially, every effort will be made to assist them to register in the future if they wish to do so.
- Continuing to encourage individual tenants to join as shareholders and we will develop a Plain English information guide for tenants about our membership policy.
- Housing Officers will promote tenant participation to all new tenants at new tenant visits. We will hold new tenant welcome events at all of our new developments and consider extending this format to existing developments where demand exists.
- Continuing to carry out regular tenant meetings in our sheltered and very sheltered developments involving Scheme Managers, Housing and Maintenance Officers.
- Providing opportunities for individual tenants to take part in surveys or by becoming involved on an ad hoc basis either by phone, e-mail or face to face meetings to feedback their views across a range of areas. We will set-up a tenant participation database of interested tenants for this purpose.
- Carrying out a multi tenure survey to review our performance and tenant satisfaction every 5 years.
- Undertaking continuous satisfaction surveys including new tenants visits, exit questionnaires, refusal reasons and post repair surveys.
- Holding quarterly information and advice surgeries in all of our developments attended by local Housing and Maintenance Officers.
- Organising annual estate management inspections with local tenants in all of our housing developments.
- Taking account of the views expressed through our complaints procedure.

## Section 8 - Monitoring and Review Arrangements

Our performance is assessed by Scottish Housing Regulator against the following standard:

*'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' (source - Performance Standard GS2.2 – Tenant Participation).*

The Tenant Forum and the Director of Housing Services will carry out an annual review of our tenant participation strategy and agree on the resources required to support the continued development of Tenant Participation for the following year.

The Tenant Forum will agree with the Director of Housing Services what information needs to be collected to ensure a relevant monitoring and evaluation exercise takes place. This will include:

- The number of tenants' groups established
- The number of RTOs
- The effectiveness of the TPWG
- The success of involving tenants in the Servite Housing Association AGM
- The quality of input tenants have into policy reviews
- The number of individual tenants held on the database
- Sustaining the Tenants Forum
- Evaluating the success of training provided for tenants and staff

The Tenant Forum will be responsible for producing an annual tenant participation supplement to be included with a newsletter that will provide information on:

- the development of the tenant participation strategy
- good practice involving the work of tenants
- the resources available for tenant participation
- participation exercises which have taken place
- a summary of outcomes and achievements

The review process will assess our progress with the strategy and identify areas of success, improvement or weakness taking account of Scottish Housing Regulator good practice guidance.

Progress on the tenant participation strategy will also be monitored by our Management Committee. The Director of Housing Services will provide updates throughout the year at Management Committee meetings.

## **Appendix 1- Servite Housing Association**

### **Procedure for Registration of Tenants' Organisations**

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#### **1. Introduction**

- a. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 states that every local authority and housing association must keep a list of tenants' organisations and keep it open for the public to see at all reasonable times. In the Act, a 'registered tenants' organisation' is a tenants' organisation on the register kept by a council or housing association.
- b. Anyone can inspect the Servite register at our Strathern Road office in Broughty Ferry during normal working hours. The information on the register includes:
  - The name of the tenants' organisation
  - The area it covers
  - A contact address
  - A timetable of meetings

#### **2. Conditions of Becoming Registered**

- a. For a tenants' organisation to become registered it must have a written constitution which is accessible to present and prospective members of the organisation, Servite Housing Association and the general public. The constitution must set out the following:
  - The organisation's aims
  - The geographic area the organisation works in
  - How the constitution can be changed
  - The conditions members must meet and how people become members
  - How the committee works
  - The procedure for electing office-bearers
  - How meetings, including the annual general meeting will be conducted
  - How the organisation reaches decisions
  - How the organisation manages its funds
  - Details of the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities
  - Details of the organisation's commitment to promote tenants' interests relating to housing, the environment and other housing related services

#### **3. The Committee**

- a. Committee members must be prepared to stand down after a period set out in the constitution. The committee must comprise of three members who may bring in other members during the course of the year, in line with procedures set out in the constitution.

#### **4. Membership**

- a. The organisation's constitution must show that all eligible tenants can become members and it must state how members may be actively involved in the organisation's work.

#### **5. Size of Tenants' Organisations**

- a. Any organisation, no matter what size, that meets general conditions set by the Scottish Ministers for registration can become registered.

#### **6. Decisions**

- a. All decisions must be clearly recorded by the tenants' organisation. As an essential part of the registration procedure, the organisation's constitution will state how decisions are reached.

#### **7. Financial Records**

- a. The tenants' organisation must keep open financial records showing its income and expenditure, and a statement of assets and liabilities. The financial records must be examined by an independent person from outside the organisation and presented to members at the AGM. The records must also be shown to Servite HA before funding is given to the organisation annually.

#### **8. Mixed Membership**

- a. Tenants' organisations may have members who have different landlords or who are owner-occupiers or other residents. A mixed group of tenants and residents will be eligible for registration as long as they meet the criteria. However, the organisation would need to have a way of gathering tenants' views through tenant-only surveys or tenant sub-groups.

#### **9. Groups that are not registered**

- a. If an organisation does not want to become registered, tenant representatives who are members of that organisation will still have the right to be consulted.
- b. In line with our equal opportunities policy and as good practice, we will consult unregistered organisations on matters that affect them.

## **Appendix 2 – Servite Housing Association**

### **The Registration Process**

This section sets out the procedure tenants' organisations should follow to apply for registration or to be removed from the register of tenants' organisations. The Director of Housing Services will approve applications for registration and any application for removal of an organisation from the register.

#### **1. Procedure for applying for registration**

- a. To apply for registration, a tenants' organisation must use the standard form provided by Servite Housing Association
- b. If an organisation wants to be registered with different landlords within an area, it must apply for registration with each landlord.
- c. Any application for registration must be accompanied by;
  - A copy of the organisation's constitution
  - A list of the people who hold specific positions (office bearers) and the names and contact details of all committee members
  - Details of other landlords the organisation has registered with or is planning to register with
  - A description of the area it covers
  - A statement setting out its arrangements for consulting members and representing their views
- d. If an organisation applying for registration meets the conditions set by the Scottish Ministers, Servite Housing Association will add them to the register of tenants' organisations.
- e. If the organisation's constitution does not meet the conditions set by the Scottish Ministers, the Director of Housing Services can refuse to register it but in this situation staff will support the organisation to help it become registered.
- f. The organisation will be informed in writing of its successful registration and the date from which it is effective.
- g. If an application for registration is refused the organisation will be informed of the reasons in writing.

## **2. Procedure for removing an organisation from the list of registered organisations**

- a. If Servite Housing Association or the registered tenants' organisation find that it is not keeping to the conditions for registration, this may lead to it being removed from the register. A tenants' organisation that does not agree with the decision to remove it, or not to remove it, from the register may appeal to the Scottish Ministers.
- b. If Servite Housing Association decides to take an organisation off the register the organisation will receive written notice. That notice will give the reasons for the decision and the date from which it will be removed.
- c. If Servite Housing Association believes that a registered tenants' organisation no longer exists or has stopped working, it will be sent written notice that it is being removed from the register. The notice will be sent to the last known contact address for the organisation.
- d. A record will be kept of the registered tenants' organisations that have been removed from the register.
- e. A registered tenants' organisation can write to Servite Housing Association requesting removal from the register. Servite Housing Association will write back to the organisation either accepting or refusing their application.

## **3. Right of Appeal**

A tenants' organisation can appeal against the decision to put it on or take it off the register of tenants' organisation. The appeal should be sent to the Chief Executive of Servite Housing Association who will pass it to the Management Committee for their consideration.

If the tenants' organisation is not satisfied with the outcome of their appeal, it can appeal to the Scottish Ministers who will confirm or reverse the decision.

## **4. Equal Opportunities**

When setting up, managing and keeping the register of tenants' organisations Servite Housing Association will not discriminate against any organisation because of race, religion, nationality, sex, sexuality, or disability.

**Appendix 3 – Servite Housing Association**

**Application to Join the List of Registered Tenants' Organisations**

Name of Organisation_____
Area of Operation_____
Contact Name_____
Position Held_____
Contact Address_____
<hr/>
Email Address_____
Consitution Adopted on_____
Timetable of Meetings_____

**Appendix 4 – Servite Housing Association**

**Acceptance/Rejection Form for RTOs**

Was the application	Accepted?	Rejected?
Signature	_____	
Date	_____	
Organisation told decision by	_____	
Date	_____	
Comments	_____	
	_____	
	_____	
	_____	

## Appendix 5 – Servite Housing Association

### Resources

Section 54 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a duty on Servite to carry out an assessment of the resources required for effective tenant participation and to detail the resources that it proposes to make available.

For a culture of tenant participation to develop among our tenants, from a starting point of limited participation, it is necessary to provide sufficient levels of support to tenants who have shown an interest and to implement this tenant participation strategy effectively.

The proposed resources for 2009/10 include the following:

- Staff costs, inc. provision of dedicated TP Officer (part-time)
- TIS Development Support.
- Support for registered and unregistered groups.
- Start up costs for groups.
- Training for staff and tenants to enhance knowledge, confidence and skills.
- Hire of meeting rooms.
- Travel and subsistence expenses.
- Child Care or Carer costs.

In 2009/10 our budget for Tenant Participation will be £23,395.00. This has been allocated to:

• Tenant Forum Expenses	£ 1,000.00
• Tenant Forum Training	£ 1,625.00
• Tenant Participation Support Expenses (TIS)	£ 5,220.00
• Staff time (TPO)	£13,700.00
• Tenant Participation Publications	£ 1,850.00