

Tenant Participation performance report 2020/21

Headline news is that we all had to embrace digital!



Introduction

Our Tenant Participation Strategy 'Involving You' sets out how we support and promote tenant involvement in West Dunbartonshire. This report is to outline progress made in the last year and highlight the input tenants have had in decisions and service improvements.

The global COVID 19 pandemic changed the world we were used to. It was a worrying time initially for everyone but housing like many other council services are essential and had to carry on. All staff started working from home from around the 18/3/20 and in the Housing Development team we were able to secure laptops and quickly adapted to home working.

Our TP mobile number was well known and well used and was an important way to keep in touch with people. Initially just to make sure everyone was ok but by May discussions started about how we could keep the work of the various tenants groups going and to ensure that tenants still had opportunities to raise issues with housing managers and the Housing Convener at such a critical time.

TP purchased a Zoom account to facilitate online meetings and following some practice sessions our first WDC/WDTRO Liaison meeting took place on 25 June. The Scrutiny Panel meetings restarted 23 June, the Joint Rent Group 20 August, the Pre-HACC Forum on 31 August and have carried on ever since on Zoom.

A number of TRA's have also managed to have regular zoom committee meetings (the WDTRO, Tullichewan, CATRA and N&S Drumry) and some are using their Facebook pages to keep in touch and help spread useful community information.

New additions



Hanne Thijs joined Tenant Participation in April and all induction and training had to be done via phone and virtually. So a difficult way to start to a new job but Hanne's resourcefulness and good communication helped her hit the ground running and she has been supporting tenants and groups ever since. She has also been promoting the Tenant Priority Budget and keeping our TP Facebook page updated.

Key highlights,

1. Massive increase in tenant involvement in rent setting consultation

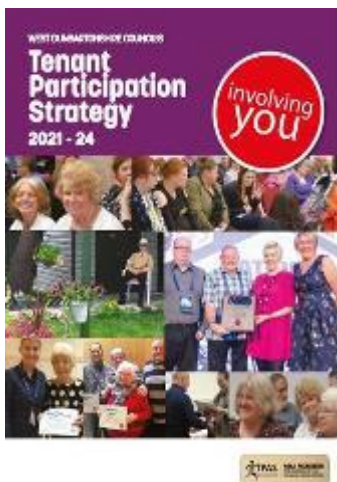


We saw another massive increase in the number of tenants having their say on rent setting. 1344 voted for their preferred rent option as part of the consultation (up from 845 last year). This year it all had to be done virtually but a range of voting options were offered to make it as easy as possible for all tenants. A public meeting and presentation was still carried out but done at a virtual meeting.

All tenants were encouraged to vote for their preferred rent option with a direct mailing to them and a range of voting methods offered– free-post voting card, online survey, texting and email options. The information provided was presented in as clear and understandable way as possible and made available online too for any tenant to refer to. The Tenant Participation Officer contact details were also provided for tenants to ask any questions and a number of tenants got in touch. Due to the pandemic and working from home restrictions, face to face encouragement and engagement was not possible but all other means of contact were maximized.

Over previous years our Joint Rent Group have worked to make the rent consultation information clearer and as understandable as possible to encourage tenants to get involved and influence this vital decision so this continued increase is brilliant to see and a clear signal that tenants do want to have their say and how important rent issues are for so many people.

2. Review of our Tenant Participation Strategy.



To review our existing TP Strategy, we started by asking TPAS to carry out a review and critically assess our strategy against good practice. An online survey was developed and promoted by email to all TRA members with known email addresses and through the WDTR0, TP Facebook page and summer TP update. Paper copies of the survey were made available and tenants offered phone contact to assist with the survey or to give comments direct. The Council's website was used to advertise the consultation as well as social media.

2 virtual discussions group were also arranged after the survey closed to further explore issues identified in the survey. 1 session was at 7pm and the other at 10:30am to offer options to suit more people.

From the consultation one of the key things for tenants who were already involved in tenant groups was that their involvement needs to make a difference and that helps make it personally rewarding as well as improving housing services for all tenants. For housing services this means that involvement needs to be meaningful and that they feedback to tenants to ensure they know their views have been heard.

It was also felt that volunteering was a great way to build confidence and to have on your CV. Anyone who volunteers can obtain a character reference for volunteering in a tenants group, Scrutiny Panel or any of our involvement options. Support, training, information and travelling expenses are also offered to help encourage people to participate and these aspects are all emphasised in our new Strategy - [Tenant participation strategy | West Dunbartonshire Council](#)

3. Tenant Priority Budget

This is an annual £800,000 budget, set aside for tenant priorities. There are set criteria on how this Budget can be used and it is tenants who decide what proposals are value for money and should go ahead which is done through public meetings.

Due to lockdown restrictions on the type of work allowed and the reduced number of proposals received only £36,313.71 of this budget was spent in the last financial year. This included new proposals for fencing at Craiguelea Road and repainting parking bays at Littleholm which were agreed at a virtual meeting on 10/2/21. Outstanding work from previous proposals were also completed including 4 planters with seating for Willox Park sheltered housing, renewing a bench at Littleholm, painting of backstairs at Kilbowie Court, painting of railings at Melfort Avenue sheltered housing. Re-flooring of another landing at Littleholm was also done when another owner agreed to pay their share. There are outstanding proposals that are still to be completed once the repair backlog is cleared and this will include the painting of lockup doors at Kilbowie Court, tumble dryers and entrance canopy for Kilbowie Court and laundry facilities at Park Court.

We will continue to promote the Tenant Priority Budget as it's a great opportunity for tenants to see improvements being done in their area. We also want to use it to encourage local walkabouts and focus on tenant priorities identified there.

4. Communication

We have continued to produce **TP updates** for tenant representatives, elected members and staff to maximise awareness of tenant participation activities and encourage them to increase tenant involvement- [Tenant Participation Updates | West Dunbartonshire Council](#)



The Housing News Is produced quarterly and delivered to all tenants, as well as future tenants in temporary accommodation. Housing staff also receive an electronic version. We try to make the Housing News as interesting as possible for tenants and promote different ways to get involved. TRAs are also increasingly using the Housing News to promote their activities and we include as much community news as possible. The chairperson of the WDTRO also has a regular column and uses it to highlight tenant issues and encourage tenant involvement.

We have a regular reader's quiz to encourage people to read the Housing News and use the contact with the winners as an opportunity to get their opinion on the Housing News and see if they want to get more involved.

5. Online and Facebook

We continually review the content of our TP webpages [Tenant participation | West Dunbartonshire Council](#) and update it with meeting notes from the Joint Rent Group, WDC/WDTRO Liaison meetings, Sheltered Housing Forum, Pre HACC Forum, so that tenants can get access to this information at a time that suits them.



@WestDunbartonshireCouncilTenantParticipation - we now have 185 followers on Facebook and post at least 3/4 times a week with information we hope is relevant to tenants. That's an increase from 137 last year and particularly during the coronavirus lockdown our FB page was really useful in sharing important community support information and keeping in touch with tenants.

6. Tenant involvement in shaping and improving Housing Services

Our **Joint Rent Group (JRG)** has continued to meet every month. The group includes tenant volunteers, housing and finance staff, as well the Housing Convener. They have been improving transparency about HRA budget setting and assessing where tenants could be more involved in these key financial decisions. A reassessment of the Council's compliance with Scottish Government HRA Guidance was also completed to highlight the areas that still didn't fully comply so that the JRG can focus on them. Regular updates on the HRA spending and Capital Programme are given to the Housing & Communities Committee and easier to understand version of the reports have been created thanks to the JRG.

The **Pre-HACC Forum** is another opportunity that tenants have to influence decisions made by the Housing & Community Committee. The Forum takes place two days before the Housing & Communities Committee meets and tenants can meet the Housing Convener and staff who have written the papers that are going to committee - the Housing Convener then reports the tenants' views into the committee discussions. These meetings too continued on Zoom and had regular tenant attendance throughout lockdown. Paper copies of the committee reports which can be lengthy and more difficult to read on small devices, were made available to assist discussions.

WDC/WDTRO Liaison meetings continue every 2 months and are a good example of effective partnership working, as the WDTRO and staff can add to the agenda and the WDTRO chairperson and Housing Convener take turns chairing the meetings. Minutes are shared with all TRAs and posted on TP council webpages.

Holding the council to account is an important function of tenant participation and it ensures that we can improve services for all tenants. The WDTRO have raised a number of concerns over the last year which has resulted in improvements that all tenants can benefit from e.g.:

- Concerns about getting through to Repairs on the phone continued to be raised and more detailed information about performance was provided and has helped the contact centre focus on improving the service, phasing breaks and having more staff on at peak times.
- Concerns about delays in repairs being carried out in multi-storey flats to fire doors and landings has resulted in the repairs service creating a dedicated team of staff to specialise in the flats to build up expertise as they all have different specifications and some unique features. Additional training will also help reduce reliance on specialist contractors and get repairs done in-house and more quickly. This service will launch soon and is being piloted in Dalmuir and Littleholm.

- A design team has been created to include tenants who will discuss plans for new council properties and ensure they meet tenant expectations as well as meet the Council's technical design standards.
- The WDTR0 have raised concerns over fuel poverty in the past and they have kept pressure on the Council to ensure that District Heating systems are prioritised and incorporated into housing plans. A specific meeting was also held on 25/11/20 to discuss plans for meeting the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) as this is a key priority for the WDTR0 and many other tenants who struggle to heat their homes.

7. Scrutiny Panel progress.



The Scrutiny Panel have been busy throughout the last year and finished off their review of the medical adaptations process remotely. They presented their report and recommendations virtually to Housing Improvement Board on 26/10/20 and all their recommendations were accepted and are being implemented.

After reviewing the Council's and other landlords performance in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter, the Panel decided to look at complaints handling as the Council did not meet timescales and were slow to resolve complaints. The Panel are in the final stages of their review and will be putting their findings into a final report and making recommendations for change.

8. Tenant Participation Budget - £ 75,395 for 2020/21

We spent £ 53,383.13 of our Budget, which was less than anticipated mainly due to reduced expenses and less running costs for tenant groups. However, we have been allowed to keep our full budget allowance to ensure that we can continue to develop tenant participation as well as receiving an additional £40k to help encourage digital engagement.

Our Budget enables us to financially support 10 TRAs, the WDTR0, Sheltered Housing Forum, Pre-HACC Forum and Scrutiny Panel to help them function effectively and as independently as possible.

The cost of producing the Housing News also comes out of our Tenant Participation Budget and this takes up the majority of our communication costs. 4 TRAs have community flats that they operate from and the running costs for these are included in the costs for supporting TRA's, along with annual and top up grants to cover their administration costs to support their functioning. Public liability insurance is also paid for each active TRA.

Due to lockdown we made savings in relation to catering, paying transport costs to and from meetings, as well as reduction in many running costs for TRA's while they remained closed. This year did create some new general costs for us in relation to ensuring that groups had computer and printing equipment as well as our zoom license. We have had a TPAS membership for a number of years and TIS, another national tenant participation organisation, were quick to start running digital sessions so we now have a TIS membership too and will assess which memberships we and tenants get the most out of. Our budget spending compared to the previous year is shown below.

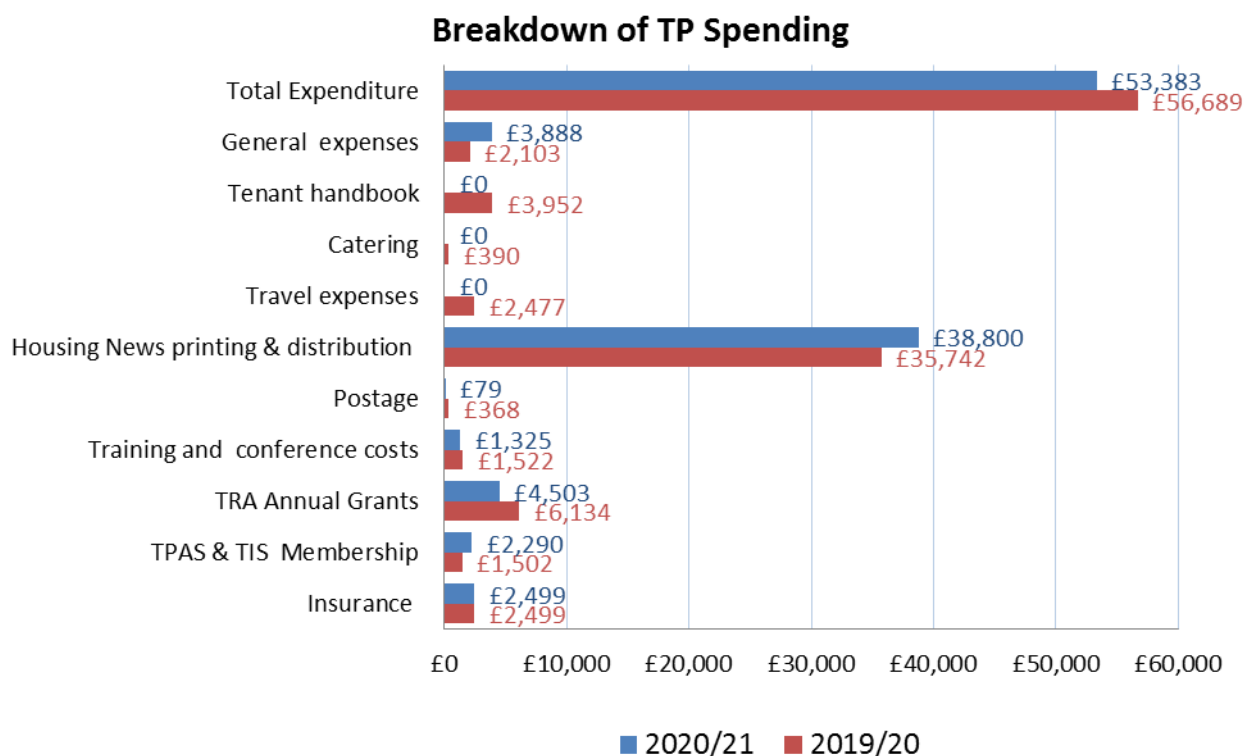


Figure 1 TP Budget spending this year compared to last year

9. Training

Training opportunities were more limited this year but a number of good online events have been attended.

- Speaking up for yourself and others - Jane Cameron from Positively Speaking Training was invited to host a webinar for tenants to help improve confidence and communication skills when speaking about an issue or at a meeting. She gave great practical tips on dealing with nerves, how to ask questions and make your point effectively. 12 tenants attended and follow-up sessions with individual tenants also took place and were very well received so something we will look to do again.
- 3 different online sessions were attended by TP staff on encouraging digital engagement.

10. Volunteering hours

We really value and appreciate the time that tenants give coming to meetings and started to count volunteering hours a few years ago so that we could measure the time that tenants give. The sheltered Forum has been the only group that didn't want to continue meetings on line and are waiting until face to face meetings can restart. Although there was no Liaison meeting in April, no Pre-HACC Forum in May, no Scrutiny Panel meetings in April and May and no Joint Rent Group meetings April, May and June, 192 volunteering hours have been given to meetings with Housing Services throughout 2020/21. Most groups have been affected by some members not wanting to do online meetings or due to other reasons. This is less than previous

years and considering what else was going on still showed a remarkable dedication and numbers attending meetings have continued to increase as the year went on so would hope we can continue this commitment when we get back to face to face meetings and are also hoping to be able to offer the online option as this has certainly suited some people.

Table 1 - number of volunteering hours recorded for each meeting type.

Year	Scrutiny Panel	WDTRO Liaison	Pre-HACC	Other Consultations	Joint Rent Group	Sheltered Forum	Total
2018/19	63	84	69	94	82	58	450
2019/20	69.5	82	58	63	72.5	84	429
2020/21	37.5	54	24	38	39	0	192.5

Thank you to all our tenant volunteers and to housing staff who make tenant participation work.

Please give us your feedback.

We want to continue to improve how we feedback to tenants and so will evolve this annual report over the coming years. Please let us know what you liked, what you didn't and what you want to see included in the future.



Jane Mack – 07983 542993 or Jane.mack@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Hanne Thijs – 07823 664 247 or hanne.thijs@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

