



Tenant Participation Report

2023-2024



West 
Dunbartonshire
COUNCIL

1. Introduction

Our ‘**Involving You**’ Tenant Participation Strategy 2021-24 sets out how we support and promote tenant involvement in West Dunbartonshire. This report is to outline progress made in the last year and to highlight the input tenants have had in decisions made and to service improvements. Our TP Strategy will be reviewed this year and a new Strategy will be created for 2025-28.

The commitment of tenants and tenant groups continues to be strong and without them, our TP Strategy wouldn’t work and we need their involvement to ensure that we improve services for tenants. A key driver for getting people involved is that they can see that they make a difference, which makes it so important that we review their impact and ensure that it can be evidenced.



2. Rent Setting Consultation

We were able to fulfill our commitment to including tenants early in the rent setting process and held a series of meetings in October to develop the options being put forward for voting. Despite the financial issues that had to be addressed these meetings were very productive and informed the options put out for voting.

The key priority for tenants was to keep any rent increase as low as possible, so no additional spending options were included, and 2 options were consulted on. The consultation was launched at a public meeting on 15/11/23 and information on the options were sent out with the winter edition of the Housing News.

Option 1

1310
votes



Option 2

414
votes



Voting was made as easy as possible and could be done using a free-post voting card, online, by phone, by text or email. Our response rate was particularly boosted by more email and text reminders sent via our housing system QL to tenants with contact details. Public reassurances were also given that the survey results would be considered as part of the Council's committee decision-making process when setting rents for 2024/25 to help encourage people to give their views.

A total of **1,724 tenants** voted for their preferred option which equates to a response rate of 17.3%. This is a healthy increase from the 1173 who voted last year. The results were **76%** (1310) supported Option 1 (a 6.7% increase) and **24%** (414) supported Option 2 (a 7.2% increase). The survey results were considered at the Council meeting on 6 March and the **6.7% rent increase** was agreed..

3. Annual Tenant event

We were delighted to be able to host a tenant event on the 16th of May at Clydebank Town Hall and 33 tenants attended. This was the first since COVID-19 and was planned jointly with the WDTRO. The main focus was on Climate change, de-carbonisation and what that will mean for tenants' homes and Stephen Connor from TIS was the guest speaker.



Figure 1. Tenants at the 2023 Event



Figure 2. Presentation by Emily Dorrian

There was a presentation on the Multi-storey Enhanced Living Strategy and what that would mean over the next 5 years. The vital role tenants play was also celebrated with a presentation to Isobel Rankin for 30 years of service to Dalmuir TRA and an award given to the West Dunbartonshire Tenants and Residents Organisation (WDTRO) for their tireless campaigning on behalf of all tenants.

There was many discussions throughout the tenant event and several challenges were outlined. They focused mainly on the cost of living crisis, new heating systems and ensuring tenant voices were heard.

The challenges were discussed and the key conclusions were,

- The **cost-of-living crisis** was already a priority and majority of tenants concerned that decarbonisation of social housing would make this worse by driving up rents and potentially increasing heating costs if **switching away from gas**.
- Improved communication around **decarbonisation of social housing** needed. Could ensure tenants have the facts and would dispel rumours, fears, or worries – e.g what will the effect of any heating system changes be on tenant's bills.
- Agreement that Council should focus on ensuring that homes are **well insulated and affordable to heat**.
- Important that **tenant voices were heard** on this matter as has major consequences for current and future tenants in terms of housing conditions and costs.

4. Tenant Priority Budget

This is an annual budget of £800,000, 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.

Only £10,805.72 was spent in 2023/24 on 4 projects which included creating a community garden at Inler Gate, security lighting and a living Christmas tree for the community garden at Mill Road sheltered housing. Costs also included a feasibility study of the proposal for a canopy at Kilbowie Court which will be progressed in the coming year.

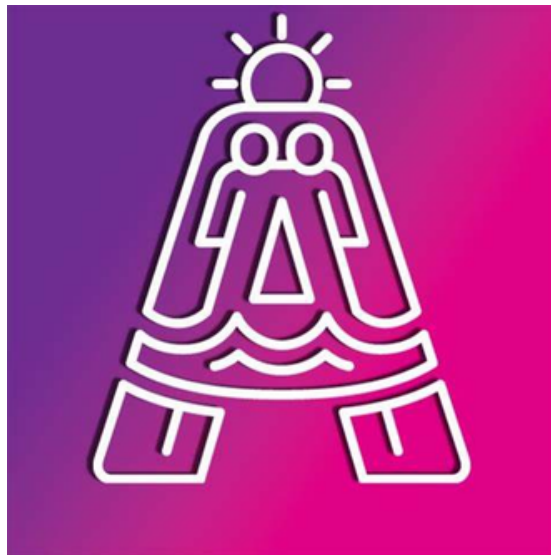


Figure 3 : New Planters

This remains an under-utilised budget and as part of the rent setting discussions this budget is being **reduced for 24/25 to £200k** but will still be sufficient to cover proposals. Speeding up the process remains a priority and we are working closely with Building Services to speed up the process and for resources to be prioritised for the work. We will continue to promote the Tenant Priority Budget as it's a great opportunity for tenants to see improvements being carried out in their area and can be particularly useful for tenant priorities identified on local walkabouts that can't be covered by other budgets.

5. Partnership working

The partnership with Alternatives continues to be developed so that they can set up a community café in Overtoun Court, **Dalmuir TRA's community flat**. Volunteers from **Alternatives** used donated paint and have given the flat a makeover. A donation of flooring via the Social Benefits wish list also helped create a clean and welcoming meeting room.



Alternatives already run a Sweet Success café in Dumbarton and are hoping to open in Overtoun Court soon and it will be good to see Overtoun Court being used more often and will hopefully help create more interest in the TRA there too.

6. Communication

Communication is really important for effective participation and is a vital way to help build trust. 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 living in temporary accommodation. It is also available on the Council's website and the link is sent to Housing staff and Councillors. We try to make the Housing News as interesting as possible for tenants and promote different ways to get involved.

TRAs are also encouraged to use it 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.

In the tenant satisfaction survey carried out in Oct-Nov 2022, of the 600 respondents, 85% said that they read the Housing News to obtain information about Housing Services, so it remains a vital way for us to get tenants involved in what's happening and keep them updated.

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 and Pre HACC Forum so that tenants can get access to this information at a time that suits them.



@WestDunbartonshireCouncilTenantParticipation -

We now have 312 followers on Facebook and post at least 2/3 times a week with community information and updates on ways to get involved locally. Our FB page continues to attract new readers (up from 268 last year) and is a valuable mechanism for sharing information and encouraging engagement.

TRA's also make good use of Facebook and Tullichewan TRA in particular uses it very successfully and has 586 followers. Newer TRA's are also using Facebook to help promote their activities and meetings.

7. Tenant involvement

Our **Joint Rent Group (JRG)** has continued to meet every month. The group includes tenant volunteers, housing and finance staff, as well as the Housing Convener. The group's aim is to improve transparency about the HRA budget setting and assess where tenants could be more involved in these key financial decisions. Following concerns about costs and poor performance, they have been monitoring void performance focusing on the void budget and rent loss. They also monitor the Capital Programme and in particular the enhanced capital programme that came out of the 5% rent increase for 2023/24.

The **Pre-HACC Forum** is another opportunity that tenants have to influence decisions made by the Housing and Community Committee. The Forum takes place two days before the Housing and Communities Committee meets and tenants can meet the Housing Convener and staff who have written the papers that are going to the committee.



Figure 4: Tenants meeting with WDC

The **Housing Convener** then feeds tenants' views into the committee discussions. Paper copies of the committee reports, which can be lengthy and more difficult to read on small devices, are delivered to attendees to assist in discussions and there has been regular tenant attendance throughout the year.

WDC/WDTRO Liaison meetings

Liaison meetings take place every 2 months and continues to be 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. Housing performance is discussed as well as progress on new development plans and new build progress. Minutes are then 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 issues over the last year which has resulted in improvements that all tenants can benefit from, these include:

- Continuing to monitor repair call handling performance to ensure that tenants can get through to Repairs easily.
- Repairs performance is monitored throughout the year, updates are provided on how communication with tenants has been improved and text confirmations and reminders get sent out.
- To try to reduce repair times on fire doors in Multi-storey flats a pilot to have a dedicated internal team had been tried but many of the repairs still needed Martec expertise so hadn't reduced timescales. As an alternative improvement, timescales were discussed with Martec and scheduled inspections initiated instead and response times have reduced.

- Following confirmation that USB sockets were being offered as part of EICR checks, discussions highlighted that should also be done in kitchen renewals and this is now included when doing new installations.
- A lift protocol had been previously developed with tenant representatives to improve communication when lifts were off. This was further improved by texting tenants when lifts were off and then when back on both during and out of working hours. Promotion on noticeboards and via Housing News of keeping contact details up to date so that tenants would receive these messages also resulted from discussions at a Liaison meeting.
- Following inconsistency at walkabouts, the process was tightened up to ensure they were more effective and updates regularly provided. Walkabouts and updates will continue to be monitored as a regular agenda item at Liaison meetings to ensure this improvement continues consistently.

8. Scrutiny Panel

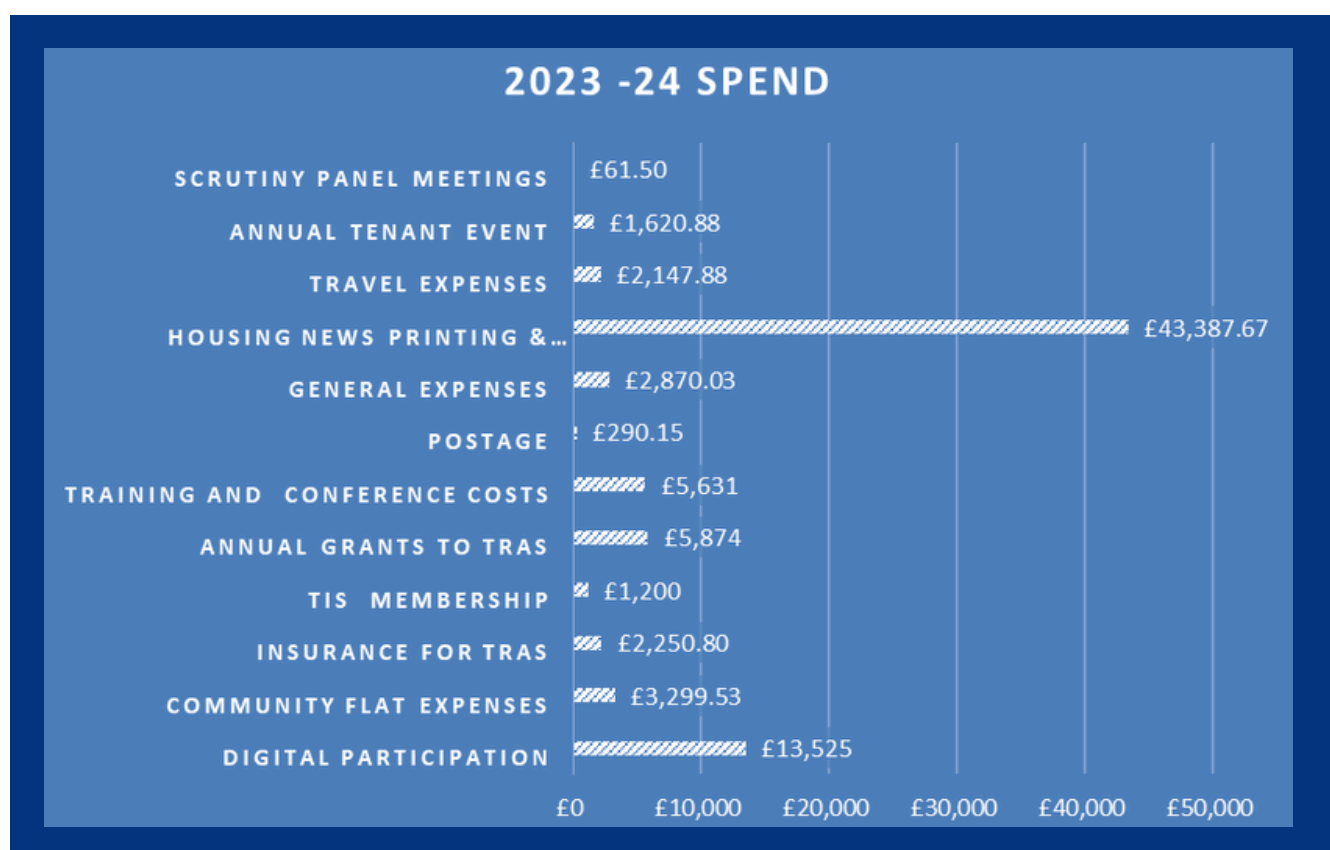
The Scrutiny Panel have regular meetings every month and initially were looking at voids as were concerned about performance but as Housing was carrying out a review of the void process and making their own improvements, they decided to monitor progress to ensure improvements took place.



They have started a new scrutiny exercise looking at the process of a tenant reporting a repair to it being completed and will include a reality-checking survey with tenants who have had non-urgent repairs completed recently. They also monitor previous areas that they have scrutinized to ensure performance is sustained including medical adaptations and complaints handling.

9. Tenant Participation Budget

We have a TP budget of £101,297 and spent **£82,158.44 in 2023/24**. Our Budget enables us to financially support 12 TRAs, the WDTRO, Sheltered Housing Forum, Pre-HACC Forum and Scrutiny Panel to help them function effectively and as independently as possible. Public liability insurance is also paid for each active TRA.



The cost of producing the **Housing News** also comes from our Tenant Participation Budget and this takes up most of our communication costs. This also includes the costs for the rent setting communication and the performance inserts. Our Budget also helps fund digital developments to the self-serve tenant portal which helps tenants report repairs and check their rent account. We want to further develop the tenant portal to promote TRAs, consultations and generally improve how Housing Services communicates with tenants. A breakdown of our spending is shown above.

10. Training

Ensuring housing staff have a good knowledge of what tenant participation is, so that they can encourage tenants to get involved, is essential and an online training tool was created for staff to access as an ilearn course and also for new members of staff.



Figure 5. TIS Conference

We also took full advantage of a number of free virtual events this year as well as a free place at the TIS Safe and Sound event which included a focus on fuel poverty and dampness and mould. We also funded 2 tenants to attend the TPAS conference in Clydebank and 2 to the TIS conference in Glasgow. Scrutiny Panel members also attended scrutiny learning sessions.

11. Volunteering hours - measuring the time given is also a recognition of the energy, effort and skills that comes with it.

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 it. Measuring the time given is also a recognition of the **energy**, **effort** and **skills** that comes with it.



Figure 6 WDTRO members receiving their award

There was a slight reduction in some of the meeting attendance with the overall volunteering hours down slightly from **267 to 252.5 hours**. This was mainly due to fewer Scrutiny Panel meetings taking place as they took a short break after completing their scrutiny of the complaint process and lower attendance at the Sheltered Housing Forum. There was an increase in attendance at WDTRO Liaison meetings and at the Pre-HACC Forum. The overall volunteering hours also doesn't count the time at walkabouts or at local TRA meetings so is only a small snapshot of the time tenants are giving to get involved and we appreciate every one of them.

12. The Year Ahead

Recruiting new members for groups is a key priority and we are supporting TRAs to be as visible as possible in their local areas and more social and community events are being organised to help promote their activities. Increasing local numbers will also hopefully attract new members to the WDTRO to help strengthen their numbers.

More local walkabouts have been taking place and we will continue to promote them as they are ideal ways for staff and tenants to assess blocks or areas, make improvements happen and help build trusting relationships. The walkabout process has been tightened up to ensure feedback and updates are provided to tenants attending and we will focus on ensuring that continues.

Our TP Strategy is due to be reviewed and that is a key document to set out how WDC will engage with tenants and how tenants can influence housing service delivery and development. Tenant and staff consultation will be crucial to ensure the Strategy is effective and meaningful.

We need to ensure that any tenant involvement with Housing Services is a positive experience for people and we will continue to support tenants get involved and help make sure participation is effective.

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

Please give us your feedback.

We want to continue to improve how we provide feedback so please review this annual report format and let us know what you liked, what you didn't or what you want to see included in the future – thank you.

Contact Jane Mack on 0798 354 2993 or Jane.mack@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

