

Midlothian Council
Tenant Participation and Customer
Engagement Strategy
2017 – 2020



Communicating Loud and Clear

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Körler için kabartma yazılar, kaset ve büyük nüshalar da dahil olmak üzere, istenilen bilgileri sağlamak ve tercüme etmekten memnuniyet duyarız.

اگر آپ چاہیں تو ہم خوشی سے آپ کو ترجمہ فراہم کر سکتے ہیں اور معلومات اور دستاویزات دیگر شکلوں میں مثلاً بریل (ناہینا افراد کے لیے ابھرے ہوئے حروف کی لکھائی) میں، ٹیپ پر یا بڑے حروف کی لکھائی میں فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔

Contact 0131 270 7500 or
email: enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk

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1. Introduction

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires local authorities to have a Tenant Participation Strategy for promoting the participation of their tenants in the development of proposals relating to housing management and services.

Tenant Participation is about tenants taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions. Tenant participation requires a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, councillors and housing officers working towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.

All participants require to have all the information needed to consider the issues properly; that information requires to be clear, timely and accessible and to take account of equal opportunities concerns.

It is also recognised that it is important to involve all service users in the way we engage and consult on our services. Who we should consider as part of our plans includes:

- People who are already tenants.
- Applicants on our Housing List.
- Homeless People.
- People who use the housing service such as gypsy/travellers.

Tenants and other service users should be involved in:

- Housing policies which have an impact on tenants.
- Housing conditions
- How housing and related services are delivered to tenants.
- Sharing of information, ideas and decisions.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter which sets standards and outcomes that all social landlords (including Councils) should aim to achieve when performing housing activities. The Charter states that:

“Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord’s decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.”

The Scottish Housing Regulator monitors the performance of landlords against the Charter Outcomes and has set indicators that will be used to monitor that performance.

2. Outcomes of the Strategy

There are three key outcomes that we want this Strategy to have achieved by 2020:

Promotion, Participation and Performance.

- Information on the housing service and ways to get involved with the Housing Service has been **promoted** to tenants and service users.
- The Housing Service has ensured the **participation** of Tenants and Service Users in the decision making and operation of the Service.
- The Housing Service listens to the views of tenants and service users to improve the **performance** of the services being provided.

We have considered activities which will enable us to achieve these key aims:

- Providing a range of different options for tenants to get involved.
- Involving tenants at all levels of decision making.
- Working with tenant groups.
- Involving individual tenants.
- Involving under-represented service users.
- Providing good information and feedback to tenants.
- Removing barriers to participation.
- Providing support and resources for tenant scrutiny.

We intend to work with our tenants and service users so that the new Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy continues to build on the successes of the previous strategy.

3. Midlothian Customer Service Charter

We care about our customers and endeavour to get things right first time. We have standards in place which set the level of service customers can expect to receive, as we want to make contact with us a positive experience.

We will keep tenants informed about day to day services. This information will be provided using leaflets, posters, newsletters, the council's web page, information packs and tenant's handbooks issued to new tenants at tenancy agreement signings. We treat our customers with respect and expect to be treated the same way in return.

If you contact us by phone we will:

- Endeavour to answer your call within 5 rings.
- Identify ourselves by name and the service we work in.
- Help you with your enquiry there and then if we can.
- If we can't help you we will direct you to someone that can or arrange for the relevant staff member to call you back.
- Support you with form filling and/or navigation of the Midlothian Council website for online applications etc

If you contact us by email/letter we will:

- Use plain English in responses and avoid the use of jargon. If requested we will respond in your preferred language, large print or Braille.
- Respond to you within 10 working days.

Sometimes we will need longer than 10 working days to gather information. If this is the case we will contact you and keep you updated.

If you visit our offices we will:

- Provide welcoming offices with clean and tidy reception areas.
- Wear identity badges.
- Have clear signs on buildings that provide customer service, including opening times.
- Make our offices accessible for everyone.

- Provide areas where private conversations can take place.
- Help you fill in forms or use our self service options.

Keeping Tenants Informed:

We will ensure that tenants have the opportunity to have a say in how the housing service should be delivered. We will also ensure tenants are kept updated on service changes and on how their views have been taken on board.

We have set ourselves standards of service delivery for the provision of information to tenants groups. Our performance against these standards will be measured through our customer satisfaction surveys.

We have also made a number of commitments to ensure that tenants are kept fully informed about proposals or projects which may directly affect their home or local environment.

Should you wish to complain, compliment or comment about any of the services you receive, you can do so by:

- phone 0131 561 5444
- e-mail feedback@midlothian.gov.uk
- online via our Website www.midlothian.gov.uk
- visiting one of our public offices and feedback verbally to a member of staff or request a paper form to complete your feedback.

If you are complaining we will try and resolve your complaint immediately.

If this is not possible we will respond within 5 working days.

More information about the Council's complaints policy is available at www.midlothian.gov.uk

4. How we consult with you and keep you informed

Midlothian Council's regularly consults with tenants in a variety of ways to involve tenants and service users in the decisions taken by the Housing Service and ensure that we know more about what is important to them in order to improve the level of customer satisfaction with our services.

Tenant Satisfaction Surveys

The Council has been undertaking regular tenant satisfaction surveys for all tenants since 2009, with subsequent surveys carried out in 2012, 2014/15 and 2016/17. These Surveys are useful for the following reasons:

- Surveys help us to understand the level of satisfaction with the housing service.
- Identify areas of strength and weakness in relation to specific service areas.
- Provide evidence on performance to the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- Undertake comparative analysis with previous surveys and other local authority landlords.

What do the Surveys tell us?

The most recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey was undertaken during 2016/17, and a sample of 10% of tenants were interviewed for their views on the Housing Service.

Some of the main findings from the Survey included:

- 85% of respondents were satisfied with the overall quality of their home.
- 85% were satisfied with the management of their neighbourhood.
- 82% of respondents were satisfied their rent provided good value for money.
- 81% of respondents were satisfied with the repairs service they receive.
- 80% of respondents were satisfied with the opportunity to participate in the housing services decision-making process.
- 83% of respondents were satisfied with the overall housing service provided.

These results show an increased level of satisfaction with the Housing Service since the Survey last took place in 2014. In addition, the overall level of satisfaction for council landlords in Scotland was exactly the same, at 83%. One element of this

Strategy is to focus on improvements to the Service to increase the level of satisfaction in future years.

Ongoing Service User Surveys

Tenants and other service users are given the opportunity to rate the standard of service they receive for services being provided. This enables staff to have a greater understanding of any weaknesses with the service being provided and ensures our customers can influence the service being provided. Ongoing surveys include:

- Surveys of with tenants recently moved into their new home.
- Surveys of temporary accommodation users.
- Surveys of homeless service users.

Methods of consultation on important issues

In 2015, Midlothian Council needed to consult with tenants and housing applicants on the future rent setting strategy and also to changes to the housing allocation policy. It is really important that the Council considers the views of as many service users as possible when making decisions on both of these important policies.

To do this, the Housing Service encouraged engagement and participation by using the following methods:

- Sending a newsletter to all tenants and housing applicants with detailed information on the rent setting strategy and allocation policy.
- Providing a survey to all tenants and housing applicants asking their opinion on possible changes to the allocation policy.
- Providing a survey to all tenants and housing applicants asking their opinion on options for future rent increases from 2016 to 2019.
- Ensuring respondents could easily submit their views via freepost, the internet, or by text message.
- Hosting 6 drop in events across Midlothian to enable tenants and housing applicants to come and ask questions and find out more.
- Taking into account the views of the tenant panel and tenants and residents groups.
- Publishing a report of the outcome of consultations for both topics.

In future when we have important topics that we want to ensure a high proportion of engagement we will use these methods and look at other ways of increasing tenant scrutiny on the Council's decision making.

How can tenants find out more about how we perform as a Landlord?

All tenants and service users are able to scrutinise the housing service in a variety of ways. Midlothian Council, like all other Registered Social Landlords in Scotland, must publish information on how they perform on an annual basis. This includes a whole range of measures such as customer satisfaction, time taken to relet housing and information on repairs targets. Midlothian Council publishes this information on an annual basis and you can also compare our performance with other Registered Social Landlords in Scotland.

You can request more information on this from us or view information on our website or at www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk

We also publish information about the decisions we take on managing our service and make it easy to find out more about this as all reports we make to the Council's elected members are published on line. Get in touch if you want more information on a specific topic. Members of Tenants Groups and the Tenant Panel regularly discuss issues relating to the management of the housing service.

Newsletters

The Council produces a number of newsletters including our tenant newsletter (Tenants Today), our temporary accommodation newsletter (Temporary Times) and our annual performance newsletter (Annual Return on the Charter - ARC report). One off special editions of Tenants Today are produced for specific consultation issues e.g. rent levels and allocation policy in September 2015. Local newsletters are also produced for tenant and resident groups for particular projects. We also provide a newsletter for households on our Housing List which gives them more information about Council policies and how the allocation policy operates.



Education in Schools

Midlothian Council has worked with all the High Schools to develop a 'Leaving Home' education programme to raise awareness of the issues that young people will face with their housing options and to make them aware of the pitfalls of homelessness and the impact of anti social behaviour. It is intended that including this information on the curriculum for schools will increase young people's ability to consider their housing choices when they leave home and help them to understand what skills they will need to develop in order to live independently.

5. How you can get involved?

Midlothian Council's Tenant Participation Officers works with our tenants and residents in a variety of ways. In the last five years the way we involve tenants and service users with has changed dramatically. We've improved the way we engage and consult with our tenants and are constantly looking for new ways to encourage our customers to get involved with the Housing Service.

To find out more about any of the topics please get in touch:

Telephone: 0131 271 3611

Email: tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk

Post: Tenant Participation
Freepost RLUR-SKBA-EZEC
Midlothian Council
PO BOX 28974
Dalkeith
EH22 1WX

What method of involvement works best for you?

Tenants and residents groups

Midlothian Council supports a number of tenants and residents groups; some are for tenants only, some are for tenants and residents, some are informal and some are more formal with an elected committee. Groups are welcomed by the Council and a member of staff from the Housing Service would be happy to attend, providing advice and support to your Group. Currently the following groups are supported by Midlothian Council:

Name	Area(s) covered	Tenants (T) or Tenants and Residents (T&R)	Frequency of meetings
Bonnyrigg North	Eldindean, Pendreich and Rae's Gardens	T&R	Every two months
Poltonhall	Area surrounding Hawthornden Primary	T&R	Every two months
Cowan Court	Cowan Court	T	Every two months
Dalkeith	Dalkeith	T	Every two months
Esk Place	Esk Place	T	Every six months

Registered Tenants Organisations

Whilst some of our groups are informal, some have chosen to become Registered Tenants Organisations which means that the Council has a legal obligation to consult with them on housing matters. However a group decides to operate, the council will provide support and new members will receive a warm welcome.

You may feel you would like to form your own tenants group. This may be because you want to deal with specific issues that are important to you and you may feel that other tenants would also be interested in participating. For example, you may want to form a tenants group that represents different areas or people or shared interest, such as:

- Tenants in a specific village or town
- Young Tenants
- Elderly Tenants
- Tenants living in new build housing
- Tenants living in Temporary Accommodation
- Tenants from an Ethnic Minority background

Tenants groups have the right to register with the Council and may receive an annual grant to cover the cost of administration costs such as posting letters to their members. The advantage of registering is that that we have a legal duty to consult with Registered Tenant Organisations over proposed changes to housing services. Registered Tenant Organisations are independent of the Council but we are happy to support arranging meetings and promoting your new group to others.

Midlothian Tenant Panel

An alternative option in Midlothian Council's Tenant Participation opportunities is joining the Midlothian Tenant Panel which gives Council tenants more of a say in the running of the Housing Service.

Some tenants are interested in having their views heard and helping to come up with new ideas but might not enjoy speaking in public meetings, or not live near to a tenant group, or be able to regularly give up their time to attend meetings.

Midlothian Council has established a Tenant Panel which encourages individuals to meet on a one to one basis with council staff to offer their opinions on policies, procedures and ideas. Recent activity has included being invited to compare our performance as a landlord with other councils, and being consulted on future rent setting and the housing allocation policy. We want to increase the number of tenants on our Panel and we would be interested in taking account of Panel member's interests in order that you can talk to us about the issues that are important to you as a tenant. As a Tenant Panel member you could choose to meet in our office or your home, or communicate by email or over the phone – whatever works best for you!

Estate Walkabouts

Estate walkabouts are carried out once a month in a different part of Midlothian and involve local residents and housing staff inspecting an area for issues which are then reported to the appropriate department for action.

Who is involved?

The Tenant Participation Officer and Housing Officers for the area attend and are joined by local residents who can suggest areas which require inspection. Local councillors are also invited.

What happens on an Estate Walkabout?

- before the walkabout, posters are displayed in the area we plan to visit. The posters ask local residents to inform us of any particular issues which require inspection and/or attend the walkabout.
- a tour of the area and specifically the issues reported to us by local residents - residents and officers will walk the estate together looking for anything which may make the estate look unsightly such as untidy gardens, vandalism, dog fouling and fly tipping.
- during the walkabout the Housing Officer and Tenant Participation Officer will make a record of all the issues identified by residents. Once the issues have been reported/resolved, a completed estate walkabout report is published on the

council's website: <http://www.midlothian.gov.uk>. Reports are also sent to the residents who took part in the walkabout.

The Estate Walkabouts have proven to be useful in a variety of ways including helping us to note when a property has been abandoned, when a tenant's garden is not being cared for satisfactorily and when non-housing matters need to be reported to other departments e.g. when roads or pavements need repaired.

The estate walkabout schedule is available online at www.midlothian.gov.uk or you can phone Midlothian Council on 0131 271 3611 if you want to come along or raise issues you want looked at as part of a walkabout in your neighbourhood.

Why get involved in an Estate Walkabout?

During a walkabout in Loanhead, the group was alerted to serious issues of flytipping, vandalism and poor conditions of common areas in McNeill Terrace. Council Officers met with tenants in this street over a period of several months to form an Estate Action Group with residents to talk about what they felt could be done to improve the area. The Council Officers then came up with improvement plans which have now been undertaken which are resulting in a more attractive estate, with tidier gardens and reduction in vandalism and improved safety with new door entry systems and better lighting.

Before and After Pictures, McNeill Terrace, Loanhead



Midlothian Tenants Day and other Events

Every year we host this annual fun event which welcomes all tenants and their families to meet housing staff, take part in consultations and learn more about the housing service. In recent years we have included a one act play, a choir performance, face painting, prize bingo and a choice group of discussions concerning the issues which matter to you. All tenants are warmly invited to come along and join in the fun and to talk to Housing staff about what you think of the service we provide.

Midlothian Tenants Day Poster and Photo



Midlothian Garden Competition

Is our annual garden competition for Midlothian Council tenants. It's a fun and very informal competition with prizes in various categories which we hope encourages all tenants to keep their gardens well maintained.

Tenants can self nominate or nominate other tenants and can enter as few or as many categories as they wish. Judging is carried out by fellow Midlothian Council tenants and takes place in August each year.



Register of Interested Tenants/Register of Interested Prospective Tenants

Not all tenants are interested in coming to public meetings but want to be kept informed and be directly consulted in relation to Council policies, procedures and events that are of interest to them. The Council holds a Register of Interested Tenants who are happy for the council to send them information. We also hold a Register of Interested Prospective Tenants for waiting list applicants. Recent examples of items sent to our registers include our Annual Return on the Scottish Charter (ARC – our performance report), our rent consultation and our allocation policy consultation. If you are currently a Council tenant or a waiting list applicant and would like to join either of these lists then please contact the Council's Tenant Participation Officer on 0131 271 3611 or email: tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk

Please note that we email or text those that we have email addresses and mobile numbers for as this saves postage costs.

Events in your area

The Housing Service regularly attends community events to talk to residents about the services we provide.

6. Links to other Strategies and Plans

The Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy is one strand of important strategies and plans that the Council are involved in development and implementation. The strategies listed below are of key importance to improving the quality of the lives for tenants in Midlothian.

Local Housing Strategy

All Councils in Scotland are required to develop a Local Housing Strategy which considers housing needs and issues and sets out an action plan to deal with these over a period of time. Key areas of activity include objectives related to:

- Development of Affordable Housing
- Access to Housing
- Assisting Homeless Households and Preventing Homelessness
- Improving Stock Condition
- Ensuring those with particular needs are provided with support

Customer Service and Housing Safety Service Plan

Service improvement planning is a key element in how the Council's Customer Service and Housing Service prioritise activity. Through service planning, the department is able to set objectives and improvement targets over the coming years in order that the Council delivers on its goals.

Single Midlothian Plan

The Single Midlothian Plan is an agreement between partners in Midlothian, including the Council, NHS and Police and sets out outcomes for improving the quality of life for people in Midlothian.

If you would like a copy of any of these documents they can be downloaded from the Councils website www.midlothian.gov.uk or contact the Council's Tenant Participation Officer on 0131 271 3611 or via email at tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk

13. Outcomes and Action Plan

Tenant participation and Customer Engagement Strategy Outcome		Information on the housing service and ways to get involved with the Housing Service has been promoted to tenants and service users.		
Relevant Indicators	Data Frequency/Type/Source	Baseline	Targets	Timescale
Number of Newsletters Published	Annually/Paper or Electronically/Midlothian Council	3	3	Annually
Performance Information	Annually/Paper or Electronically/Midlothian Council	N/A	Increase feedback	Annually
Number of housing service website hits	Annually/ Database/ Midlothian Council	N/A	N/A	Annually
Number of Registered Interested Tenants	Annually/ Database/ Midlothian Council	908	1,000	By 2019
Number of Registered Interested Prospective Tenants	Annually/ Database/ Midlothian Council	612	750	By 2019
Number of estate walkabouts	Annually/ Database/ Midlothian Council	12	12	Ongoing
Key actions and commitment by local partners for this outcome	Key Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree an annual schedule of consultation topics to ensure well planned consultation with tenants and service users. 2. Produce an annual newsletter for all permanent tenants. 3. Produce an annual newsletter for all Housing List applicants. 4. Produce an annual newsletter for all tenants living in temporary accommodation. 5. Produce an annual return on the social housing charter and publicise performance information on the housing service in a variety of formats. 6. Provide up to date information on the Housing Service on the Council website. 7. Publish Tenant Participation Strategy and produce easy read and summary versions. 8. Make use of alternative communication methods such as social networking websites. 9. Publish an annual programme of Estate Walkabouts and publish the reports online. 10. Publicise tenant groups and tenant events in a variety of formats to increase membership. 11. Produce documents and newsletters in plain English, accessible formats and other languages as requested. 12. Produce an annual report on the activities of tenant and resident groups and Midlothian Tenant Panel. 13. Produce a welcome letter to all new tenants giving them information on how they can get involved in tenant participation and scrutiny activity. 14. Engage with tenants on new build estates to foster local tenant groups in these areas. 15. Signpost tenants and service users to opportunities to contribute to national and regional tenants organisations. 			

Tenant participation and Customer Engagement Strategy Outcome		The Housing Service has ensured the participation of Tenants and Service Users in the decision making and operation of the Service.		
Relevant Indicators	Data Frequency/Type/Source	Baseline	Targets	Timescale
Number of Registered Tenants Organisations in Midlothian	Annually/Midlothian Council	1 (2017)	2	By 2019
Number of tenant and residents groups in Midlothian	Annually/Midlothian Council	5 (2017)	6	By 2019
Number of tenants and service users who are members of Midlothian Tenant Panel.	Annually/Midlothian Council	6 (2017)	15	By 2019
Number attending the annual tenants day.	Annually/Midlothian Council	30 (2016)	45	By 2019
Number of scrutiny activities/projects undertaken	Annually/Midlothian Council	2 (2015)	3 per annum	By 2018
Key actions and commitment by local partners for this outcome	<p>Key Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree an annual schedule of consultation topics to ensure well planned consultation with tenants and service users. Key topics during the period is expected to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Housing Strategy - repairs and maintenance service - investment in new and existing housing - housing allocation policy - estate management - homelessness and housing support - performance 2. Produce an annual newsletter for all permanent tenants. 3. Produce an annual newsletter for all Housing List applicants. 4. Involve tenants and service users in the development and monitoring of the Local Housing Strategy. 5. Undertake consultation on the Allocation Policy and letting analysis every two years and provide feedback to tenants and service users of decisions taken. 6. Undertake consultation when developing a rent strategy every 3 years and provide feedback to tenants and service users of decisions taken. 7. Provide opportunities for tenants and service users to engage in decisions being made in the investment in new affordable housing in Midlothian. 8. Ensure there are opportunities for all equalities groups and hard to reach groups to participate in tenant participation activity. 9. Facilitate training and development opportunities for members of Midlothian Tenant Panel, Registered Tenants Organisations and Tenant and Residents Groups. 10. Assess the ability of tenants to participate and scrutinise the Housing Service through self assessment, benchmarking and/or accreditation opportunities. 11. Develop online tenant group options. 12. Organise informal social events to attract tenants to find out more about the Housing Service and tenant participation opportunities. 			

Tenant participation and Customer Engagement Strategy Outcome		The Housing Service listens to the views of tenants and service users to improve the performance of the services being provided.		
Relevant Indicators	Data Frequency/Type/Source	Baseline	Targets	Timescale
Proportion of tenants satisfied with the quality of their home	Every two years/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	85% 2016/17	Increase	By 2020
Proportion of tenants satisfied with the management of their neighbourhood	Every two years/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	85% 2016/17	Increase	By 2020
Proportion of tenants satisfied that their rent provides value for money	Every two years/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	82% 2016/17	Increase	By 2020
Proportion of tenants satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service provided	Every two years/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	81% 2016/17	Increase	By 2020
Proportion of tenants satisfied that the Council is good at keeping them informed about decisions	Every two years/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	84% 2016/17	Increase	By 2020
Proportion of tenants satisfied with opportunities to participate in Midlothian Council's decision making process	Every two years/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	80% 2016/17	Increase	By 2020
Overall satisfaction with housing services provided by Midlothian Council.	Every two years/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	83% 2016/17	Increase	By 2020
Proportion of tenants dissatisfied with the housing services provided by Midlothian Council.	Every two years/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	11% 2016/17	Reduce	By 2020
Overall satisfaction with the quality of temporary or emergency accommodation.	Annually/ Survey/ Midlothian Council	79% 2014/15	Increase	By 2020
Overall satisfaction with the management of the Gypsy/ Traveller Site	Every two years/ Survey/ East and Midlothian Council	71% 2015/16	Increase	By 2020
Number of Complaints Investigated annually	Annually/ Monitoring/ Midlothian Council	64 2015/16	Reduce	By 2020
Key actions and commitment by local partners for this outcome	Key Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake further tenant satisfaction surveys to ensure ongoing monitoring and reporting of tenant satisfaction indicators. 2. Undertake benchmarking of tenant satisfaction with that of other Councils to consider performance. 3. Publicise tenant satisfaction results and provide opportunities for tenants and other service users to provide feedback. 4. Share satisfaction results widely with staff and other services, organisations and groups to consider strengths and weaknesses and identify ways of making improvements. 5. Publish reports on consultation exercises undertaken with tenants and service users. 6. Consider alternative approaches to undertaking satisfaction surveys, such as text surveys and mystery shopping. 7. Ensure survey methods provide an accurate reflection of the households and equalities groups who use the Housing Service. 8. Investigate ways to address tenant satisfaction for specific groups, including younger people and areas where there was a lower than average level of tenant satisfaction. 			