

Rural Stirling Housing Association

Customer Engagement, Participation & Scrutiny Strategy

2021 - 2024

DRAFT

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Mark Griffiths. Chair Rural Stirling Group

Get Involved with Rural Stirling Housing Association

I am delighted to present our Customer Engagement strategy for 2020 - 2023, I hope you like it. Our strategy is ambitious, we aim to ensure that we make engaging with you an integral part of our culture.

The strategy was developed during the COVID -19 pandemic, this may impact on our timescales but our commitment to engagement remains strong and very important to us.

Rural Stirling is a small Association which operates across a large geographic area. Our vision is **Strong and attractive rural communities**. Our vision highlights the geographical area in which we operate: we do not serve one local community, but many communities spread throughout a large rural area.

We are totally committed to working in partnership with you, it is an integral part of what we do. We want to make sure we provide the opportunities and services that you want. We also want to engage with others who use our services such as applicants, shared and factored owners.

We want to deliver excellent services to you and achieve meaningful participation and opportunities for you to scrutinise our services. This is emphasised and outlined in our Rural Stirling Group Strategic Plan. We want to make sure there are opportunities for you to participate with us in a way that suits you and increase our customers satisfaction with the services we provide.

This strategy outlines what you can get involved in, and how can get involved with us from sitting in your armchair to attending events and meetings.

We think all the important information you will need to get involved is in the short GET INVOLVED leaflet that accompanies this strategy. If you want to find out more about all the different ways you can get involved with us and have your say.

- ✓ go to www.rsha.org.uk
- ✓ phone 01768 841101

1. Introduction to the Customer Engagement Strategy

1.1 Rural Stirling Housing Association are committed to ensuring all our tenants and service users are at the heart of everything we do.

“Achieving meaningful customer scrutiny and participation” is one of our strategic objectives and is included in the Rural Stirling Group Strategic Plan 2020-2023.

1.2 In 2020 we held several workshops with tenants, staff, and Board members to obtain their feedback on how to improve our communication and engagement methods.

Feedback from the workshops formed the framework of the strategy and action plan.

What the workshops told us:

- We need to improve the range of options for customers to engage and communicate with us, embracing traditional and digital options.
- We need to “go local” to ensure our customers have opportunities to engage in their communities.
- We need to consistently feedback and keep our customers well informed.
- We need to embed engagement into our culture, all staff are responsible for customer engagement.

1.3 The COVID 19 pandemic had a huge impact on all of our lives. We had to adapt very quickly to new ways of working remotely from home and providing our services online. The pandemic highlighted the importance of digital technology as a method of communicating and engaging with tenants and service users and the need to modernise our existing engagement strategy.

2. Our objectives

Objective 1 Engagement

- We will provide a range of options to ensure all our tenants and service users can engage with us in a way that suits them.
- We will work in partnership with our tenants and service users to ensure we are making the right decisions.
- Ensuring we use methods of engagement that suit all, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religious belief, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, gender reassignment or being pregnant.
- “Our success in achieving this objective will be evident through, higher levels of satisfaction in our Tenant Satisfaction Survey and the Annual Return of the Charter Indicator “Percentage of tenants satisfied with the opportunities given to them to participate in their landlord’s decision-making processes.”

Objective 2 – Scrutinising performance

- We will work in partnership with our tenants and service users to help us monitor and improve our performance through scrutiny.
- We will work in partnership with our tenants and service users to provide services in a way that meet the needs and preferences of our tenants and service users.
- We will support our tenants and service users to scrutinise our services through a range of informal and formal methods and jointly agree the topics for scrutiny.

Our success in achieving this objective will be evident through, higher levels of satisfaction in our Tenant Satisfaction Survey and Improved quality, choice and range of services, increased opportunities to participate and get involved, increased satisfaction with performance and fewer complaints.

Objective 3 – Communicating with our tenants and service users.

- We will communicate with our tenants and service users in a way that suits their needs and preferences, including face to face and digital methods.

- We will provide information in a variety of ways to suit the needs of all our tenants and service users.
- We will ensure that there are easy and efficient methods available for tenants and service users to communicate with staff and give feedback.

Our success in achieving this objective will be evident through, higher levels of satisfaction in our Tenant Satisfaction Survey and the Annual Return of the Charter Indicator “Percentage of tenants who feel their landlord is good at keeping them informed about their services and decisions.”

3. Legal and Statutory Requirements

3.1 Since 2001 in Scotland, landlords have been required to support and develop tenant participation by actively encouraging the sharing of information to improve the standard of housing and services.

Other legislation has strengthened tenants’ rights and given landlords duties, for example landlords must:

- Consult tenants on any proposed changes to rents.
- Give tenants information on their tenancy and performance.
- Publish a Customer Engagement strategy, involve tenants in developing the strategy and say how they will resource the strategy.
- Consult on any changes to services provided.
- Consult on standards of service in housing management, repairs, and maintenance.

3.2 Every social landlords’ performance is monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

3.3 The SHR is an independent organisation which reports to the Scottish Parliament. Its role is to protect the interests of tenants and others who use landlords’ services.

3.4 The Scottish Social Housing Charter provides the basis on which the SHR can assess and report on how well landlords are performing. The Charter was created by tenants for tenants, to improve the quality of services for tenants. The Charter has 16 standards that landlords will be measured against, including customer engagement.

3.5 Social housing landlords must meet the standards set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

3.6 Equality of opportunity - We have a duty to ensure that regardless of age, disability, race, gender, religious belief, sexual orientation, or marital status all of our tenants are treated equally, fairly and with respect.

3.7 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, sets out best practice for public bodies to engage with communities via the National Standards of Community Engagement.

4. Our Communication Framework

4.1 We will ensure there are a range of communication methods to suit all tenants and service users.

4.2 Good communication and feedback is the responsibility of all staff and all staff are expected to meet the communication and digital standards which are described below.

4.3 To help all of our tenants and service users become digitally included we have signed up to Scotland's Digital Participation Charter and support our staff to help others to learn essential digital skills. Tenants and service users can contact us to access digital support.

4.4 Our communication standards are focused on the following Key Principles and actions:

- ✓ Staff, management Board members and customers should trust and respect each other, and work in partnership to improve housing services and performance.
 - When we seek customer views, we will ensure adequate time is allowed for customers to consider any information and give an informed decision. We will normally allow 2 weeks when seeking views.

- We will encourage customers to take part in consultations from external agencies such as the Scottish Government or the SHR.
 - We will advertise all consultations on our web site and in our newsletters and other communications.
- ✓ We will make decisions in ways that are, open, clear, accountable and take customers views into account.
 - ✓ We will provide feedback following all consultations on the website and in Rural Matters.
 - ✓ We will always thank you for providing your feedback to us.
- 4.5 We will use a range of methods to communicate with and provide customers with information.
- 4.6 We will always ask customers what their preferred personal communication method is and use that method to communicate with them.
- 4.7 To communicate with you and seek information we have the following options:
- Face to face
 - By phone
 - By post
 - By text
 - By email
 - At meetings and events – digital and face to face
 - Tenant Gathering
 - Walkabouts
 - Local customers events
 - Local notice boards
 - Local press
 - Regular surveys
 - Our AGM
 - Consultations, such as the annual rent consultation & any policy reviews

4.8 Digital communication options

Our website – will include:

- Calendar of events – what is on, what’s coming up
- Significant dates for you such as:
 - Up and coming consultations such as the annual rent consultation.
 - Local walk abouts – when and where they are happening and how to find out more.
 - Local events in your area such as customer gatherings.
- By email
- By text
- APP
- Social media
- Digital meetings

4.9 Communication and Information standards

- ✓ All publications will be approved by our customer information group.
- ✓ We will ensure that all information is.
 - Accurate and up to date
 - In plain language and jargon free
 - Sent out in good time to allow customers time to ask questions and consider the information.
 - Made available in alternative formats and languages on request – such as
 - Translations into community languages
 - Larger print versions
 - Audio versions
- ✓ We are members of Happy to Translate which gives access to translation and interpretation materials.
- ✓ We can offer customers a range of options for printed materials –such as:
 - Large print

- Translated into other languages.
- Translated into Braille.
- In a colour of print and paper that is best for you.

5. Ways to Engage and get involved.

5.1 We want to make sure there are a variety of options to enable everyone to get involved.

5.2 The Charter outcome 3 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.

5.3 The Key to participation is all about:

- How we communicate with you and give you information and feedback.
- Making sure there are a variety of ways and levels you can get involved.
- Ensuring there are a range of ways that your voice and views heard.?
- Making sure you can influence our decisions.
- Working together to improve our homes and services.
- You can get involved face to face or digitally by zoom/TEAMS/Near Me, phone, or text.

5.4 Why get involved?

- ✓ Help to improve services.
- ✓ Learn new skills and knowledge.
- ✓ Attend conferences and other events.
- ✓ Meet new people.

5.5 We want to make sure there is an engagement option that suits everyone. We have 3 levels of engagement:

Light touch/just a minute

- Become a member of the Association.

- Taking part in a survey.
- Taking part in our consultations.
- Coming along to local informal pop-up sessions.
- Make a compliment, comment, or complaint.

Taking more interest/an hour or so

- Become a member of the Association and attend our AGM.
- Attend a local tenant's event.
- Take part in an estate management walk about.
- Become a Winter Weather Watcher or Landscape Rep.

Get involved/regular engagement.

- Take part in Tenants Gathering meetings.
- Join a scrutiny group.
- Get involved/set up a tenant and residents' group in your area.
- Get involved with one of the working groups – Tenants Tick, procurement, or strategy monitoring group.
- Join our Board.

5.6 In addition to our engagement options we will ask your views on a range of issues, such as:

- ✓ Any changes to housing law proposed by the Scottish Government.
- ✓ Your rents every year.
- ✓ Any proposed changes to our services.
- ✓ Our performance.
- ✓ Our policies and strategies.

5.7 The Tenants Gathering

We meet with tenants three times a year to discuss performance and our plans for your services. The group is friendly and informal but key to how we engage and improve.

5.7.1 The group is supported by training, information, and officer support. It is the umbrella group for all tenant activities.

5.7.2 The Tenants Gathering will be provided with information to ensure members are kept up to date and can knowledgeably influence the following:

- ✓ Any planned consultations e.g., annual rent review
- ✓ Our publications
- ✓ Performance
- ✓ Future projects
- ✓ Customer engagement initiatives

5.6.3 The role of the Tenants Gathering is to ask questions and challenge the Association on its performance. The group will assess performance through a “traffic light” assessment of service areas, each area will be marked as follows:

- Green – performance achieved.
- Amber – performance not fully achieved.
- Red – performance not achieved.

5.7.4 The Tenants Gathering will be involved in agreeing topics for scrutiny from for example service areas performing less well and from tenant suggested topics. Attendees of the Tenants gathering and any other tenants who express an interest can take part in any of our scrutiny working groups.

5.8 Scrutiny Groups

We will work in partnership with tenants to improve services and performance. To do this the Association will support a robust independent scrutiny group.

5.8.1 Scrutiny group members will scrutinise the Associations services and performance, focussing in and investigating a service area and recommending improvements.

5.8.2 We will support customers who want to get involved with scrutiny, with resources, information, and training. Scrutiny members can choose which subjects they wish to get involved in.

5.8.3 Tenant scrutiny means becoming a critical friend of RSHA, closely examining, and observing an area of service, using tenants' own experiences to improve services for example communication or repairs.

5.8.4 The topics to be scrutinised will be decided jointly with the Tenant Gathering, and the Association.

5.8.5 Scrutiny topics will be advertised through our website and newsletter. We will hold a consultation register of interested tenants who have expressed an interest in a particular topic and would like to take part.

5.9 Other Ways to get Involved.

5.9.1 We encourage all tenants to become members of the Association through our newsletters, website and inviting all new tenants to join. As members, tenants are eligible to become members of the Management Board.

5.9.2 All tenants are given the opportunity to give feedback through surveys or specific consultation exercises sent by text or email.

5.9.3 Through social media we will give out information about what is on, such as tenants events, consultations walkabouts etc.

5.9.4 We will go local and hold informal coffee and cake events to gather your views on your home and environment.

5.9.5 We will let you know when there is an estate walkabout in your area and invite you to come along and take part.

5.9.6 Working Groups.

- Tenant Tick– For those interested in our newsletters or other things we publish; you can join our tenant tick working group and make suggestions from the comfort of your own home or by coming along to a meeting.
- Procurement – helping us to procure services, ensuring quality and value for money in for example our repairs service.
- Monitoring the action plan – monitor our action plan, what has been achieved, what is working.

5.9.7 Consultation register

All tenants can get involved in whatever aspect of the service is of interest by joining the consultation register. We will then make contact to take part in surveys or working groups for their specific area of interest.

5.9.8 Landscape Representatives and Winter Weather Watchers

For those interested in working with us and our landscapers to improve the environment and green spaces around your home, you can become a Landscape Rep. Similarly, our Winter Weather Watchers let us know if there are any problems in their development when the weather is bad.

5.9.9 Tenants and Resident's Associations

We are keen to support tenants who wish to form a local Resident's Associations. We will help with grant applications and provide support. Groups can be informal or formal. Groups who wish to become a Registered Tenant Organisation must follow procedures laid down by the Scottish Government to become registered, such as having a constitution, and an area of operation.

5.10. Comments, Complaints and Compliments

We take all comments very seriously so that we can learn from them. Information about how to give comments, complaints and compliments is available on the web site or at the office.

5.11 **Route to decisions**

When we have gathered tenant feedback, we write a report for the Board of Management. The report includes tenants' views and staff recommendations on decisions. The final decision lies with the Board of Management. This is a formal process laid down by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

6. Information and feedback for you

6.1 We will provide a range of clear easy to understand good quality information.

6.2 We will give feedback on the results of all consultation events and surveys on the website or in Rural Matters.

6.3 We can give information in alternative formats such as large print and in other languages. We are members of Happy to Translate – a support organisation which provides information in other languages.

6.4 We will ensure everyone has access to:

- ✓ An easy-to-understand Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement
- ✓ A tenant handbook
- ✓ Leaflets on a range of topics
- ✓ Regular newsletters – Rural Matters
- ✓ Our Annual Assurance Statement
- ✓ The Annual Performance Report
- ✓ Topics we want to consult you on or ask for your views such as the annual rent review, or tenant satisfaction survey.
- ✓ Policies and procedures
- ✓ Any events or meetings

6.5 We will provide information to you in a variety of ways.

- ✓ Through our website www.rsha.org.uk
- ✓ Our Calendar of events – update in Rural Matters & on our website
- ✓ Face to face
- ✓ By phone, email, post, and text
- ✓ At meetings and events
- ✓ Local notice boards
- ✓ Local press
- ✓ By phone or post
- ✓ Regular surveys
- ✓ Our AGM

7. Resources to get involved & our Action plan.

7.1 We support the communities we work in through the Community Donation Fund of up to £3,000 per year to help support local communities. For information on the fund please contact us.

7.2 We will support you to engage with us by offering for example:

- ✓ transport costs, mileage, or other transport to get to meetings and events.
- ✓ digital support to access engagement activities – we have signed up to Connecting Scotland’s initiative, Scotland’s Digital Participation Charter.
- ✓ training and information – inhouse or from other organisations such as TPAS or TIS.
- ✓ staff support
 - our staff will all be trained in engagement method and the RSHA way of engaging.
 - we have a team of participation champions representing all parts of RSHA who will be responsible for engagement.
- ✓ grants for tenants and residents’ groups – there is a scheme for funding tenants and residents’ groups.
- ✓ attending conferences and events - we will encourage members of our Tenant Gathering and working group members to attend conferences and events.

7.3 We have an action plan with is attached to the strategy. The action plan was developed jointly by customers, the Tenant Gathering and the Board of management of RSHA.

7.4 The Action plan will be regularly updated and will be available on our website.

8. Monitoring our strategy and Action plan

8.1 Our strategy will be reviewed every three years.

8.2 We will set up a working group of tenants and officers to review and update the Action Plan every year.

8.3 We will report on progress in Rural Matters and on our website. Our Board of Management and staff team will be regularly updated.

8.4 The Action plan is at appendix 1.

8.5 RSHA will use a traffic light system to review our strategy and action plan.

Red – action not taken.

Amber – action taken but not complete.

Green – action complete.

9. Useful contacts

RSHA -for advice and information on how to get involved with us, contact our housing services advisor or housing officer on 01786 841101.

TPAS – national tenant training and support organisation - 0141 552 3633
www.tpasscotland.org.uk

TIS – national tenant training and support organisation – 0141 248 1242

<http://tis.org.uk>

Scottish Housing Regulator - <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/>

Scottish Government tenants' priorities team - <https://www.gov.scot/>