



HOME STUDY FOR TENANTS

A FREE Service for Tenants

Course Description

TENANT PARTICIPATION PART ONE

Version: for all tenants

Aim: The aim of this course is to help you understand what tenant participation means and what its main features are.

What You Will Learn in this Course

- ❑ Who makes the decisions affecting your housing
- ❑ How "Tenant Participation" is defined
- ❑ What the main principles behind tenant participation are
- ❑ What main features are present when tenant participation works well

Who This Course is For

This course is designed for tenants' representatives

- ❑ Who may be fairly new to taking part in tenants association activity, or
- ❑ Who are unsure about the key features of tenant participation, or
- ❑ Who are wanting to see improvements to tenant participation practice with their landlord.

It is the first of three courses on the subject of tenant participation.



HOME STUDY FOR TENANTS Tenant Participation Part One

Workbook

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Version: *for all tenants*

What You Will Learn in this Workbook

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- How "Tenant Participation" is defined
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How to Use This Workbook

Go through it at your own pace. Stop for a break whenever you want. When you start up again, look back at what you had just completed.

As you go through the workbook, you are sometimes asked to carry out tasks. Sometimes you read short passages of text.

DO NOT look ahead in the book for answers. These are given in the correct place in the workbook. You will come to them at the correct stage.

If you get stuck on something, try the following:

- Leave aside and try again later
- Turn back pages in the workbook looking for clues / ideas.
- Phone TIS for help [freephone or reverse charges]
- DO NOT look ahead in the workbook for answers. It is important to do the tasks and reading in the order given.

SECTION 1

Who Makes the Decisions?

Activity 1

Look at this list of aspects of your housing situation.

1. You were offered your house to rent
2. You signed an agreement called a lease or tenancy agreement before you moved in
3. Part of that agreement was the rent you have to pay
4. Perhaps certain repairs were carried out before you moved in
5. You arranged to have the electricity supply reconnected
6. Unless the decoration happened to be in very good condition, you will have decorated some rooms
7. If it has a gas heating system, perhaps a safety check was made on the gas installation
8. Perhaps you fitted some extra shelving
9. You might even have made a few alterations (for example some tenants fit an extra internal door near the outside door to make a draught lobby)
10. A little time after you moved in, perhaps you noticed that there was some disrepair (for example a broken window catch). Can you get this repaired?
11. Perhaps you also enquired about the condition of the decoration of the stairwell leading to your flat, and were advised that it is scheduled for redecoration in 3 to 4 years time
12. Perhaps you were also told that the houses in your street were due to be rewired, but that the queue for this was long and it would take at least another 5 years before it was the turn of your street.

Okay, it was different for you. But you might recognise some familiar things about moving in, from that list.

The actions in that list were all the result of decisions taken by someone or a group of people. For example, who decided that you should be offered the house you were? Who decided what repairs were to be done? Who decided about the wording of the tenancy agreement? Who decided what decoration was required inside? Who decided that rewiring was to be programmed at least 5 years into the future? And possibly the most important decision of all, who decided what rent you would have to pay?

WHO MADE ALL OF THESE DECISIONS? Mainly it was NOT you. Go through the list and check this. Of the topics touched on in the list, which are open for the tenant to make the decisions about, and which the landlord? Put the topic numbers in the correct box here: *two examples have been given to get you started*

Tenant	Landlord
2	1

Most of the decisions were made by your landlord. Many different people are involved in making decisions and carrying out tasks within your landlord's operation.

Activity 2

Your landlord may be a council or a housing association. Both types of landlord employ a similar range of housing staff. Can you match the following list of housing staff with the jumbled list of duties?

Housing staff

1. Clerk of Works (sometimes called an inspector, or maintenance officer)
2. Allocations Officer
3. Rent Office Counter Staff
(more on the next page)
4. Area Housing Manager

5. Investment Programme Co-ordinator
6. Head of Allocations
7. Director of Housing
8. Finance officer

List of Duties

1. Advises tenant about her rent account balance
2. Selects an applicant from the waiting list to be offered a house just vacated
3. Makes recommendation to director of housing that the letting regulations need adjusted because of the increased number of single person households applying to join the waiting list
4. Inspects vacant houses to check what repairs are needed before they are relet
5. Helps the Clerk of Works deal with a complaint about some repairs not carried out properly
6. Draws up a plan setting the order for a window replacement programme
7. Produces a statement showing that there is an overspend in the repairs budget
8. Recommends a new policy to the landlord's governing body for dealing with anti-social behaviour, in the light of new laws recently past.

Now match the list of officers and their duties in this table: *two examples are given to get you started*

Housing Staff	Duties
Clerk of works	
Allocations officer	
Rent office counter staff	
Area housing manager	5
Investment programme co-ordinator	
Head of allocations	3
Director of housing	
Finance officer	

You can check your answers when you come to the end of this workbook. For now, the key thing to notice is that different staff have different duties and most of them make decisions.

The staff you normally see when receiving a service from your landlord are called *front line staff*. Any decisions they make are within guidelines set by more senior people.

In the list of staff above, people like directors of housing, head of allocations and investment co-ordinator will make many important decisions. However, they must seek decisions about the main policies from the landlord's governing body. They may make recommendations to that body, but it is the governing body that takes the policy decisions. Here is a list of examples of policy decisions:

- ❑ Setting how much the average rent will go up next year
- ❑ The wording of tenancy agreements
- ❑ The rules used for allocating houses (sometimes called the letting regulations)
- ❑ The priorities for investing in major works of maintenance and improvement
- ❑ Whether to have local offices as well as a head office, and in which locations they will sited.

Activity 3

Do you know what the governing body of your landlord is called?

Is it any of the following? _____

- The Housing Committee
- The Management Committee
- The Board of Management

If your landlord is a council, it may have a housing committee, or a housing and social work committee. In one or two Scottish councils, housing is run by a community services committee. Whatever the name, the important point is that it makes the BIG decisions relating to housing. Not all councillors sit on every committee. Because councils are involved in so many different services, different councillors will be elected onto different committees.

The full council meetings delegate some decision making to these committees. Sometimes also, the full council meetings have the final say.

If your landlord is a housing association, the governing body is likely to be called the management committee or board of management. It will take all the important policy decisions. It may delegate some decisions to a sub-committee, for example a finance sub-committee.

Perhaps this is a good time to take a break. When you start again, have a quick look back over activity 3 before going on to activity 4.

SECTION 2

Tenants Having a Say

Activity 4

From the previous section, you will see that many people take decisions which affect your housing - where you live, what you pay, what repairs and improvements will get done, how anti-social neighbours will be dealt with, and so on. These are of course all very important matters to you and other tenants.

Should you and other tenants have a chance to influence these important decisions? Tenant participation is about having just such a chance.

Can you see some problems with tenants having a say on housing issues? List any problems you see:

It makes a lot of sense that tenants should have a say about important matters affecting your housing conditions and services. After all, you are paying for your house and housing service when you pay your rent. Your

landlord will have many tenants. Should they all be entitled to a say? Will they all agree about everything? How can their point of view be found out and expressed? Is there any guarantee the landlord will listen to tenant opinion?

When you consider these questions the challenge of tenants having a say becomes clearer. Tenant participation is a name for the processes by which tenants can often have a say. You will also come across a phrase, *tenant consultation*. This is not quite the same thing as tenant participation.

Activity 5

Here are two paragraphs, each describing a process. Which do you think is an example of tenant participation and which tenant consultation?

Paragraph 1

The landlord has reviewed the target times for carrying out urgent and routine repairs and thinks urgent repairs should be done within 5 working days and routine repairs within 15 working days. Before finalising these targets, tenants were asked for views.

Paragraph 2

After complaints from tenants about how long repairs were taking, the landlord agreed to review the target times. It asked for views from tenants. In discussion, it became clear that some repairs depended on having the right spare parts available. It was also highlighted that a contractor may need to employ more tradesmen if very short time targets were set. As against that tenants felt that many types of repairs had to be done quickly to avoid serious disruption to tenants' lives. After a lot of discussion and with tenant support, the landlord decided to go for a 5 day target for urgent repairs and 15 days for routine repairs.

Notice in each of the paragraphs that the decision taken was the same. This just to emphasise for you it is the process of arriving at the decision which

marks out whether it was *consultation* or *participation* which took place in each case.

In paragraph 1, *consultation* took place. The landlord indicated the decision they wanted to make, but checked tenant opinion before a final decision was actually made. In paragraph 2, *participation* took place, because tenant opinion was considered before the landlord arrived at any view.

The usual definition in Scotland of *Tenant Participation* is

Tenant Participation is about tenant taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about:

- Housing policies*
- Housing conditions; and*
- Housing 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 service.

Participation offers a better opportunity for tenants to have real influence.

Certain principles are important for proper tenant participation. Not all landlords are keen to open up their decision making processes. Even those who are keen, may not always work to correct principles. If you know the principles, you could try to see that they are put into practice.

Perhaps this is a good time to take a break. When you start again, have a quick look back over activity 5 before going on to activity 6.

SECTION 3

The Who, What, How and When of Tenant Participation

Activity 6

When there is a housing issue under consideration, it is clearly impractical for the landlord to ask every tenant for a view. Not does every tenant necessarily have the time or skill to take up issues with the landlord. This is where tenants or residents associations and federations come in. Through organisations like these, tenants views and interests can be represented. It is quite common in our society for different groups of people to be represented by organisations. Can you think of any?

List here what you think the main aims of a tenants association should be:

Activity 7

Which of the following phrases in this table do you think applies to a tenants or residents association? _____

	Put YES or NO or MAYBE here
1. Must allow officials of the landlord to attend their meetings	
2. Have a constitution stating who the association represents	
3. Elect a committee each year to run its affairs	
4. Meets when the landlord says it should meet	
5. May call public meetings in its area	
6. Always has the local councillor in attendance	
7. Gets a grant from the landlord for running costs	
9. Raises its own money	
10.	
9. Makes decisions about housing matters in the area it represents	

A key principle for a tenants or residents association is that it should operate *independently* of the landlord. In other words, it should clearly regard itself as a separate and distinct organisation. This means the people represented by the association decide who will serve on its committee and attend its meetings. It also means it will make its own decisions about its activities. Landlords may give grants to tenants or residents associations. They may also require certain criteria to be met, like having and working under a democratic constitution. However, none of these things should allow the association's independence to be compromised.

This does not mean that the relationship between a tenants association and the landlord should be antagonistic. It is far better to aim for a working relationship, where each respects the role and views of the other.

Activity 8

Tenant participation involves a lot of discussion taking place between tenants' representatives and their landlord. As a tenants' representative, with whom in the landlord's operation should you be speaking? Should it be the staff you meet in your area from day to day? Or perhaps it is the staff who are more senior, but still have duties relating mainly to your area? Or perhaps it is more senior staff still? How about the director of housing? Why stop there. Should it be members of the governing body?

The problem you are facing may be relatively minor, in which case, perhaps it could be dealt with by local staff. On the other hand, if the issue is about lack of investment to improve your area, might a more senior person be more appropriate? It is impossible, in a course like this, to tell you who to speak to. Instead, we can offer you a rule of thumb though. Ask yourself, who makes the decisions about the problem in question? When you've answered that question, you are likely to have tracked down the correct person/people to talk to. The most successful tenants associations in Scotland get to know many different housing staff and members of the governing body during the course of their work.

The mark of a landlord who is positive about tenant participation, is one who ensures that you as tenants have good access to the various decision makers.

Activity 9

Issues for discussion between tenants' representatives and the landlord may come up when you raise them on behalf of your association. Your landlord may also seek your views about important housing matters under review.

Who decides what issues shall and shall not be the subject of discussion between tenants' representatives and landlords? Should it mainly be the tenants or mainly the landlord?

For tenant participation to work well, both must be able to put forward issues for discussion. Issues you raise may come from problems in your area. Issues landlords raise with tenants may be sparked by a change in Government policy, or the law even. In addition, problems landlords sometimes experience may lead them to consider changing how they go about many tasks. Isn't it better they ask for your views when they decide to review something?

Perhaps this is a good time to take a break. When you start again, have a quick look back over activities 6 to 9 before going on to activity 10.

Activity 10 - Case Study

In this and the next few activities, we will look at an example of how a tenant participation process might work.

Case Description

Tenants in Sandford were experiencing problems with the increasing number of vacant flats in their area. It led to the area having a run down appearance. Break-ins to empty flats forced the council to start boarding up empty flats as soon as it knew about them. Local people began to feel unsafe outdoors in the evening after dark. More and more tenants started moving away. The situation was getting worse by the week.

The council didn't always find out about vacant flats immediately. Some tenants left without notice. It found that extra money had to be spent to prepare flats for relet, but still applicants kept refusing to take lets in Sandford. Some flats took months to relet. The number of vacancies grew so that the council only prepared a few for reletting at a time. It found that it was more difficult to relet a flat where 3 or more of the 8 flats in a close were already empty. It stopped trying to relet flats in these closes. The tenants in these closes began to find living in Sandford intolerable.

Now consider these questions:

1. Clearly a complex problem exists in Sandford. Before trying to think out how it might be resolved, what further information do you think it might be useful to have?

2. Tenants living in Sandford perceive the problem as one of increasing difficulty living in Sandford. The council's staff do not live in Sandford. They carry out housing management functions. How might they describe the problem from a housing management perspective?

3. Is the problem as seen by housing staff exactly the same as it is seen by local tenants?

4. What solutions to the problem might be proposed by local tenants?

5. What solutions to the problem might be proposed by housing staff? (Assume for the time being that the housing staff do NOT discuss the problem with local tenants).

6. Do you think local tenants and the housing staff see the problem in the same way?

Activity 11

Hopefully the case studied in ACTIVITY 10 will have illustrated the following points:

- Reliable information needs to be gathered to understand a problem fully.
- Problems often need to be understood from different angles before suitable solutions can be worked out.
- It is usually easier to find a solution which will work, if tenants and landlord can first share understandings about the problem. This means each must make an effort to understand the other's perspective. If the tenants and the landlord see a problem very differently, they are less likely to agree about the solution.

Activity 12

Look back over the case study in ACTIVITY 10 with these points in mind. These points are so important to tenant participation working well.

Activity 13

We are still working on the Sandford case study. In this case, it would be important for the housing staff to gather information from tenants about

- The nature of their concerns
- What tips the balance to make some tenants want to leave Sandford
- What would change tenants' minds about wanting to leave
- Are there break-ins or attempted break-ins not being reported
- Do tenants think boarding up works, or does it cause more problems than it solves.

It may be important also to learn more about what exactly puts applicants off accepting a flat in Sandford and what it would take to change their mind.

To develop their understanding of the problem more fully, tenants may want to know more about such things as:

- ❑ How quickly the council usually finds out about flats becoming empty
- ❑ The extent of repair work needed compared to actually carried out at the time of reletting
- ❑ What the council's expectation is of tenants who are facing ever increasing empty flats around them
- ❑ The rate that vacancies are increasing and the impact of this continuing
- ❑ The most common types and sizes of household being offered flats in Sandford and why
- ❑ Some budget issues - costs of repairs associated with reletting; costs for boarding up and un-boarding flats; potential costs of some improvements to closes and the area.

Perhaps you have thought of other information that should be shared between tenants and the council to assist productive discussions.

In tenant participation, if any facts are disputed, it pays to settle the facts before going further in the discussions.

This may be a good time to take a break. When you start on ACTIVITY 14, you may find you have to check back to ACTIVITIES 10 to 13 to refresh your memory.

Activity 14

We have already established that good solutions to problems require them to be seen from different angles. In this case study,

Summarise here what you feel the council should take on board from tenants' experience of the problem:

Now summarise here what you feel tenants' representatives should take on board from the council's experience of the problem:

Would you agree that each has something to learn from the other in this case?

Activity 15

Can you now think of some ideas for how this problem should be tackled?

Note them down here:

Look back over these ideas and consider, in turn how attractive your ideas are likely to be to

- a) the local tenants
- b) the council.

Are some of your ideas likely to have equal appeal to both tenants and council? The best solutions to problems have something to offer all parties.

Activity 16

ACTIVITIES 13, 14 & 15 were designed to illustrate the importance of three ideas introduced first in ACTIVITY 11.

- Reliable information helps provide a common platform for defining the various aspects of a problem.
- There is more chance of finding a solution to a problem to the satisfaction of tenants and landlord, if they try to share a common understanding of the problem.
- Agreement to the nature of the problem takes you more than half way to agreeing a solution.

This may be a good time to take a break. When you start again look back to ACTIVITY 11 and ACTIVITY 16. If these ideas are clear, go on to ACTIVITY 17. If not, either work through ACTIVITIES 10,11, 12, 13, 14, 15 & 16 again, or contact us at TIS.

Activity 17

The most common complaint tenants' representatives make when tenant participation goes wrong is that they were not allowed enough time.

What do tenants' representatives need time for? Note down your thoughts here:

If you were dealing with an issue like the one in our case study, you would be spending time explaining your experiences to housing staff. You would also be gathering information, some of it from them. When you have more information, should your association

- a) start discussing the problem further with housing staff, or
- b) have your own discussions in your own association first?

We hope you think the second option here is the wiser view. This course of action takes time, but time well spent. It may help you develop a rounder view of the issue and prepare you better for discussions with housing staff.

It is also important, as tenants' representatives, to demonstrate that you are reflecting more tenants' views than just your own. Your views are likely to carry more weight if you can do this.

If a big issue is being considered jointly by your association and your landlord, it may be worth listing some of the main steps you will both take and putting an estimated timescale down for carrying them out. This way a dispute can be avoided about the time you need.

SUMMARY

In this workbook, we have covered the following topics:

Section 1

Landlords and the people working for them take many important decisions affecting the lives and housing circumstances of tenants.

Decisions are made by many different staff, as well as the people on your landlord's governing body

Section 2

The meaning of tenant participation was considered - it is about tenants getting an opportunity to INFLUENCE the decisions landlords take.

The difference between tenant participation and tenant consultation was explained.

Section 3

In this section the following important principles behind tenant participation were considered:

- ❑ Tenants being represented by independent tenants' organisations
- ❑ Tenants' representatives have a chance to discuss issues with the people in the landlord's operation who make the decisions tenants want to influence
- ❑ Both tenants and the landlord can put up topics or issues for discussion between them. This is sometimes called the agenda for tenant participation.
- ❑ Information about a problem should be shared and its basis in fact agreed before debating the problem

- It is worth spending time debating and trying to agree jointly the nature of the problem being considered, before considering possible solutions
- Enough time has to be allowed for tenant participation to work well.

Check Up

Here are some answers for many of the ACTIVITIES you have worked on.

ACTIVITY ONE

Tenant	Landlord
2; 5; 6; 8; 9; (9 was a little tricky, since it would be the tenant's decision to do this, but ONLY after getting PERMISSION from the landlord)	1; 3; 4; 7; 10; 11; 12

ACTIVITY 2

Housing Staff	Duties
Clerk of works	4
Allocations officer	2
Rent office counter staff	1
Area housing manager	5
Investment programme co-ordinator	6
Head of allocations	3
Director of housing	8
Finance officer	7

ACTIVITY 4

Some of the problems with tenants having a say are:

- The large numbers of tenants the landlord has
- The difficulty of tenants sometimes getting at the facts
- Tenants knowing who to give their opinions to
- Housing staff and tenants seeing problems differently

- ❑ Tenants opinions may vary; they may not all want the same solution to a problem
- ❑ It takes time and effort to find out what tenants' views are.

ACTIVITY 6

The aims of a tenants association should include helping make the neighbourhood a better place in which to live and ensuring that people in power know the views of local tenants.

ACTIVITY 7

	Put YES or NO or MAYBE here
1. Must allow officials of the landlord to attend their meetings	NO
2. Have a constitution stating who the association represents	YES
3. Elect a committee each year to run its affairs	YES
4. Meets when the landlord says it should meet	NO
5. May call public meetings in its area	YES
6. Always has the local councillor in attendance	NO
7. Gets a grant from the landlord for running costs	MAYBE
11. Raises its own money 12.	MAYBE
9. Makes decisions about housing matters in the area it represents	NO

ACTIVITY 14

The council should be willing to take on board points like:

- ❑ *The Sandford area is now difficult to live in*
- ❑ *Action is required by the council, otherwise things will continue to get worse*
- ❑ *Local people have to be able to feel safe in the area*
- ❑ *Local people have to find the area attractive*

- ❑ *A way must be found to get all the flats re-occupied*
 - ❑ *The level of break ins is related to the high numbers of empty flats*
 - ❑ *Boarding up flats can have a detrimental effect on the area*
- Tenants' representatives should be willing to take on board points like
- ❑ There has been a drop off in interest in the area from applicants for rehousing
 - ❑ The council doesn't choose who applies for council housing, but has an obligation to try to find housing for those who do
 - ❑ It would, at least for a time, take extra money to carry out the level of repairs and improvements, which would make the area more attractive to live in and to applicants viewing flats
 - ❑ Housing staff often work under a lot of pressure
 - ❑ If tenants leave without informing the council, it could be difficult for the council to find this out immediately

ACTIVITY 17

Tenants' representatives need time

- ❑ To consider issues fully
- ❑ To gather and discuss the facts
- ❑ To give tenants more widely a chance to contribute their views
- ❑ To organise their point of view
- ❑ To take part in full discussions with the landlord

Taking into account that tenants associations typically work on a monthly cycle of meetings. In other words, democracy takes time!

If any of the answers puzzles you in some way, contact us at TIS to discuss it.

Now, to Round of the Course...

This part of the course gives you a chance to check your understanding of the main points presented. It takes the form of a TRUE/FALSE quiz. All you do is place a tick in the correct column to indicate whether you think each statement is TRUE or FALSE

Statement	TRUE	FALSE
1. In a landlord organisation, the director of housing makes all the important decisions		
2. There is an important difference between tenant consultation and tenant participation		
3. The key word in the definition of tenant participation is the word <i>influence</i>		
4. Tenants associations exist to take over the big decisions affecting their area		
5. Councillors attending tenants association meetings is a matter of choice for each tenants association		
6. When tenants' representatives are considering who to contact in their landlord's organisation, it is worth checking who makes the decisions on the issue in question		
7. Tenant participation is all about the landlord deciding what to seek tenant opinion on, and deciding which tenants to ask for opinions		
8. A shared view of the best solution comes from a shared view of the problem		
9. It takes time for tenant participation to work well		
10. A good working relationship between a tenants association and a landlord is one in which each respects and values the opinions of the other, even when they disagree!		

What Next?

Phone or write to TIS to ask for the Checkback Pack for this course. We'll send it on to you straight away.

In it you will get

- the answers to the TRUE/FALSE quiz
- a list of sources of further information about tenant participation
- information about the second and third parts of this tenant participation course (*You may of course ask us for the next part right away*)
- a list of other courses in TIS' **Home Study for Tenants** series
- a questionnaire to enable you to give use feedback on how well this course worked for you (or how badly)
- a course completion certificate.

For Now....

WELL DONE FOR COMPLETING THIS COURSE. We hope you enjoyed studying this way and will ask for more Home Study course to be sent to you.

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