



HOME STUDY FOR TENANTS
A FREE Service for Tenants

Course Description

Tenant Participation Part Two

Version: for all tenants

Aim: The aim of this course is to show how to achieve real tenant participation by developing a constructive working relationship between tenants' organisations and landlords.

What You Will Learn in this Course

- ❑ Different ways to take up issues with your landlord and their advantages and disadvantages
- ❑ How to respond to opportunities from your landlord to give your views on a topic

Who This Course is For

This course is designed for tenants' representatives

- ❑ Who want to understand how the principles of tenant participation work in practice, or
- ❑ Who want to see improvements to tenant participation practice with their landlord.

Tenants Information Service
Freepost SCO 4865, Glasgow, G2 6BR
Tel 0141 248 1242
e-mail ahall@tis.org.uk



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Tenant Participation Part Two

Workbook

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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.

BEFORE YOU START.....

A Quick Reminder of the key points from the Workbook, Tenant Participation Part One

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.

Tenant participation is about tenants getting an opportunity to **INFLUENCE** the decisions landlords take.

Tenant consultation means having a chance to comment on proposals already worked out by the landlord. Tenant participation means taking part in working out the proposals from the outset.

The following are important principles behind tenant participation:

- 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.

SECTION 1

Taking Up Issues with your Landlord

Activity 1

Let's look at an example of an issue concerning a local tenants' association.

The committee of Blackford Tenants Association wants to get something done about the upkeep of closes and stairwells in their area. In many closes, stair cleaning is hardly ever carried out. The problem appears to be compounded by the length of time it takes to relet vacant flats in the closes.

The Association can decide either

- ❑ to write to the housing department,
- ❑ ask for a housing official to attend one of the Association's meetings, or
- ❑ seek a face to face meeting in the housing office.

List what you think are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these three methods. Use the table here to note your answers.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Writing to the housing department		
Asking for a housing official to attend one of the Association's meetings		
Seeking a face to face meeting with housing officials in their office		

Looking over the pros and cons of each option, which option do you think is best?

Activity 2

In the Blackford case, what information might it be worthwhile for the Tenants' Association to collect first before putting a case to the housing department? List this in the box:

Thinking about the issue, it might help you list information if you consider these questions:

- ❑ *How widespread is the problem of the state of the closes? Is it only a few closes, are most closes affected, or what?*
- ❑ *How does the housing department clarify for tenants their responsibilities for stair cleaning?*
- ❑ *What approaches to enforcement do they use?*
- ❑ *How long do vacant flats take to be relet as a rule?*
- ❑ *Under what circumstances would the housing department arrange for stair cleaning to be carried out?*
- ❑ *Does the housing department think there is a problem at all?*

Activity 3

The Blackford Tenants Association is clear it wants something done about the state of the stairs in the closes, but What? Of course, it wants to see stairs being kept clean, but how can this be achieved?

Should the Association first

- a) Gather the information it needs?
- b) Tell the housing department it wants something done?
- c) Tell the housing department what it should be doing?

If you have a view at this stage, tick one of these - a) b) c)

Is the Association well placed, at this stage, to tell the housing department what it should be doing? Perhaps not! It's not a bad idea to think of some possible ways this problem can be approached. However, it may be best to

gather more information first. This is to enable the problem to be better understood.

Alongside this, it may be appropriate to find out how the housing department views the problem. Remember the key principle from Workbook One, that it is worth sharing views on how tenants and landlord see the problem, striving for a shared view as far as possible.

Check back what you ticked earlier in this activity. Are you satyng with that answer, or do you want to change it?

Activity 4

Things have moved on. In discussion with the housing department, Blackford Tenants Association has learned

- That the housing department had not rated the condition of the closes as a serious problem
- That little is done to emphasise to tenants, especially new tenants, what their stair cleaning responsibilities are
- That no policy exists to cover the situation where a tenant is unable to carry out stair cleaning responsibilities through infirmity
- No records are kept of how long it takes to relet a vacant flat. The housing department said it depended on how long the direct labour organisation took to complete repairs and how many applicants refused offers. It was acknowledged by the housing department that refusals were becoming more common.

Does this information help the Tenants Association work out some views about what might be done to deal with the state of the closes? If so, about what?

Activity 5

The Tenants Association formulated its view of the problem as follows:

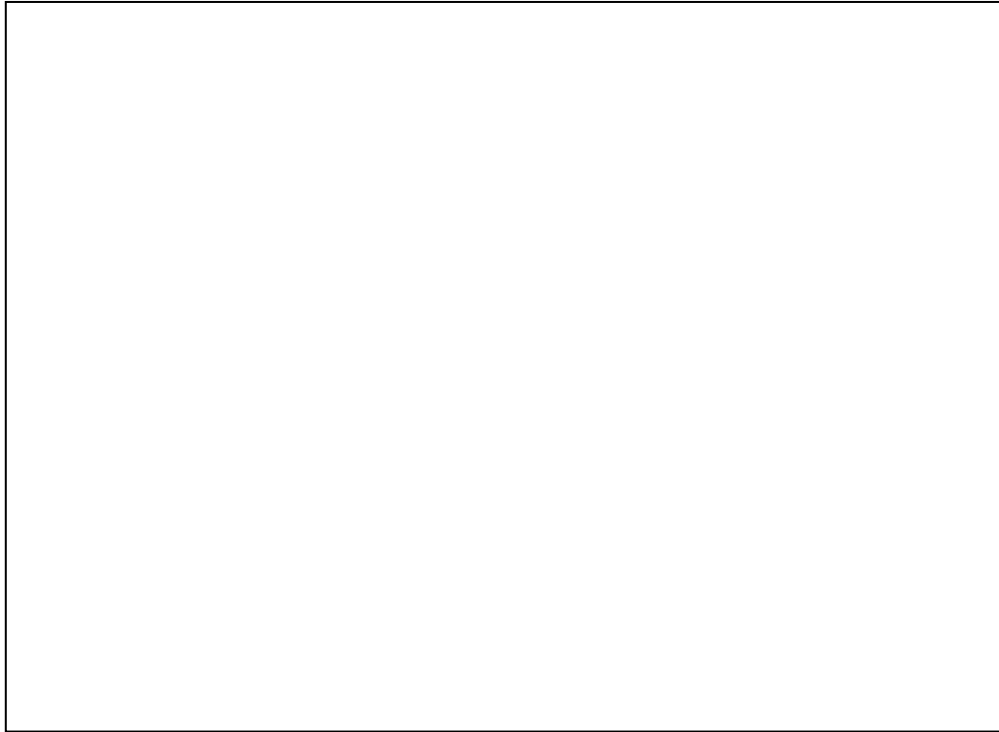
- ❑ It felt that little was done to clarify and remind tenants of their stair cleaning duties. It was left to the most conscientious tenants to do the stair cleaning and cajole neighbours to take their turn.
- ❑ The committee members felt dispirited that some tenants took little pride in the place in which they lived.
- ❑ Reletting must be speeded up and this is linked to repairs.
- ❑ They were angered by the housing department's apparent indifference to the problem.

The housing staff saw the issue broadly as follows:

- ❑ If tenants want a decent environment, it's up to them to look after it. Tenants used to take far more pride in their closes.
- ❑ Housing staff are very busy with lettings duties and chasing rent arrears. They don't have much time to contact tenants about the state of the closes.
- ❑ They feel growing concern about the drop in popularity of the Blackford area. Nowadays, as many applicants for rehousing refuse to accept flats there.

Look at these two perceptions of the problem. Is there anything in common between the views? *It's always worth looking closely to see what common ground there is between the tenants' and landlord view.* List the common views here:

Now list where the differences in view lie:



Is it clearer now where the Tenants Association must target its arguments? Look over what you have listed as the differences between the housing department and the Tenants' Association view to help you answer this question.

Activity 6

Let's summarise key points from the Blackford case, about how to take up issues with a landlord.

You considered the pros and cons of writing to the housing department, asking an official to attend one of your meetings or going to the housing office to meet them. There is no single right answer to this.

- ❑ The advantage of writing is in creating a record of the concern your association has. It doesn't rely on memory, the letter can be referred to at any time. However, a letter may provoke a formal response, and seek to end the matter rather than open it up. This depends on the attitude

of the housing staff. Conscientious staff may ask for a meeting to discuss the problem.

- ❑ An invitation for a housing official to one of your own meetings means you are operating in a familiar setting. It is also convenient, since it could be one of your regular meetings anyway. As against that, it may take up the time in your normal meetings, needed to discuss other things.
- ❑ A meeting convened just to discuss the problem has a clear purpose from the start. It allows more time and enables some informal sharing of information and perceptions of problems. As against that, it may take more effort to organise and it means some committee members putting in more time.

Information should be gathered about a problem, and shared. This can help it be better understood by all concerned. You may have information to share with the housing department. You may also want it to provide information for you.

It is important to explore how similarly or differently the landlord sees the problem from you. Where differences in the perception of a problem exist, it is harder to find an agreed solution. It is therefore worth spending time trying to agree the nature of the problem before moving on to finding a solution. In tenant participation activity, this step is often forgotten. Yet is is fair to say it is one of the secrets of success, when this approach is used.

This is perhaps a good time to take a break. When you start again, look over ACTIVITY 6 before going on to ACTIVITY 7.

Activity 7

In the previous ACTIVITIES in this workbook, nothing has been said about who in the housing department you should approach about an issue. Remember from the Workbook, Tenant Participation Part One, the rule of thumb was to *seek out whoever it is that has the authority to make decisions about the matter in question.*

Do you think this person should be:

- a) The Tenant Participation Officer (if your landlord has one)
- b) The local Housing Officer, who works in your area
- c) The Director of Housing (in some landlords, the head officer has a different title), or
- d) Someone else?

If you have a view at this stage, tick here - a) b) c) d)

If your landlord has a Tenant Participation Officer, you may feel it best to approach this person first, since you are likely to know her/him well. On the other hand, you can be sure this Officer will NOT have decision making authority over any housing management issues. Rather use this Officer to seek advice about who does have decision making authority on the issue you want to raise.

You may also know the local Housing Officer well. She/he may be able to help with the issue you are raising. However, local housing staff usually have to work within set guidelines and procedures laid down by more senior staff. The local Housing Officer may offer to take the issue up with more senior staff. This could save you bother. As against that, the senior housing staff are hearing about your issue second hand.

Some issues you take up will need the authority of the Director of Housing to get a solution. But the Director of Housing is likely to be too busy to see you every time you have an issue to raise.

All of this suggests that it is a good idea to get to know different staff at different levels and what they are responsible for. A forward looking landlord will be only too pleased to introduce your committee members to a range of staff. It is quite common for a senior member of staff to be identified as a link person for each tenants' association. This could allow regular meetings to take place between representatives of the tenants' association committee and the housing department. This may help develop a

productive working relationship. You should, however, take care not to allow certain staff to stop you contacting more senior staff when you feel it is necessary. Experience of trying different ways to relate to the housing department will help you decide which works best for you.

Now check back what you ticked earlier in this activity. Have you changed your mind now? There's no simple answer, is there!

Activity 8

What if your own Tenants Association tried all the ways suggested in this workbook and they failed? In tenant participation, there are certainly no guarantees of success every time. What happens next depends on answering the question, *why did we fail?*

- Consider first, did you and your colleagues in the tenants association do something wrong?
- Or, were the landlord's representatives not interested in listening to tenant opinion?
- Of course, it could also be the case, that the problem is genuinely very difficult with no easy solution. However, was some progress made?

Where you feel that your tenants association has a very good case and it is not being listened to, some options to consider are:

- Get in touch with someone in the landlord organisation more senior than whoever you have dealt with so far.
- Seek publicity for your case. Your landlord may feel more inclined to take an issue seriously, if there is a threat of bad publicity.
- Think of ways to demonstrate how strongly local tenants feel about the issue. This may help push the issue up the landlord's agenda.

When trying out any of these options, bear in mind that you do not want the relationship between your committee and the landlord to break down. A permanent state of conflict will not gain you influence. Always try to find a constructive way forward.

This may be a good time to take a break. When you start again, have a quick look over ACTIVITIES 7 & 8, before going on to ACTIVITY 9.

SECTION 2

Responding to Opportunities for Influence Offered by Your Landlord

Activity 9

So far in this workbook, you have looked at how to take up an issue with your landlord. Now it is time to consider how a tenants' association should respond to an opportunity offered by the landlord to give your views about something.

Again, let's follow an example from Blackford.

The Local Housing Manager from Blackford has written to Blackford Tenants Association. She wants to look at ways to cut down the time it takes to relet vacant houses in the area. The letter is asking of the Association has any views about how this can be done. The Association's secretary reads out the letter at the Association's regular monthly meeting.

What are the different possible ways the Association could respond? List them in this box:

How does your list compare with those here:

- a) Decide not to get involved because the Association is very busy with other things.
- b) Decide to get as fully involved as possible because there is a big problem in the area of how long it takes to relet vacant flats. (This may mean delaying other things the Association was doing at the time)
- c) Decide to ask the Local Housing Manager to prepare proposals and give the Tenants' Association a chance to comment on them.
- d) Have a quick discussion in the committee, from which a list of ideas for things the Local Housing Manager could consider is made up. This list is then sent to the Local Housing Manager.

All of these ways to respond are possible. Which one is likely to give the Tenants' Association the most influence? Put a, b, c, or d in this box for your answer:

Activity 10

Big factors in how a tenants association might respond when asked for views on a subject are:

- How important is the issue to you?
- How much time can you devote to it, without losing sight of other important things you are doing?

In the Blackford example, the Tenants' Association decided to get as fully involved as possible. At some point in the process, discussion between the Local Housing Manager and representatives of the Tenants' Association's committee will be needed. On a complex matter like speeding up relets, perhaps quite a few meetings will be needed.

How should the Tenants Association committee prepare for meeting the Local Housing Manager? Here are some options, which do you think is best?

- a) Seek agreement to a series of meetings with the Local Housing Manager and go along and see what happens.
- b) At a committee meeting, work out some ideas for how to deal with the relets problem and suggest the list forms the agenda for a meeting with the Local Housing Manager.
- c) At a committee meeting discuss the problem to get a general feel for it, then list what information might be useful to help understand the problem better. Then try to get this information. (It may be that the Local Housing Manager has to be asked for some or all of it).

Option a) is the least effective. The Tenants would find themselves continually reacting to the Local Housing Manager making the "running".

Option b) would be better. It ensures the Tenants Association committee has views to offer when a meeting with the Local Housing Manager takes place. The disadvantage of this option is in omitting the information gathering stage and considering how both landlord and tenants view the problem before going on to work out solutions.

Option c) may be best because it follows these important stages, one at a time:

- 1) Gets the facts needed
- 2) Try to agree the nature of the problem
- 3) Consider alternative solutions, then decide.

Notice that this is the same pattern advocated earlier in this workbook, when the Tenants Association was taking up an issue. Going through these stages would take several meetings with the Local Housing Manager.

Following the pattern would ensure these meetings were well focused and purposeful.

Activity 11

What happens in between meetings taking place with the Local Housing Manager?

The Tenants Association might behave in one of these ways:

- a) Forget about the issue until the next meeting with the Local Housing Manager.
- b) Report back to the full committee or members meeting on the discussions taking place, as they go.
- c) Report back to the full committee or members meeting on the discussions taking place, and consider some views tenants' representatives should take to the next meeting with the Local Housing Manager.

Which of these options is likely to get the Tenants Association most influence?

Tick your choice: a) b) c)

The last of the options is more likely to lead to the Tenants Association getting a solution it thinks will work. It certainly requires more effort from the committee of the Tenants Association, but it should be worth it.

It is probably a good time to have a break. When you start again, go back over ACTIVITIES 9, 10 & 11, before working on ACTIVITY 12.

SUMMARY

Here is a summary of key points from this workbook:

SECTION 1

Serious tenant participation usually needs face to face meetings with decision makers from your landlord, separate from your routine activity.

Collecting information comes before

Sharing views on the problem, which comes before

Trying to agree a solution.

SECTION 2

How a tenants' association responds to a landlord offering it an opportunity to get involved in an issue depends on how important the issue is to you and the time you are willing to devote to it.

Try to follow a process which first collects and shares the necessary facts; then considers the problem from both the tenants' and landlord's perspective - striving for a shared view of the problem; and only then start working out a solution.

On complex matters, discussion may take several meetings with the landlord. Before each meeting ensure you and your colleagues have thought about what you want the meeting to achieve. After each meeting, go over what has been achieved and develop ideas and views for the next meeting. Don't just leave the landlord's representatives to make all the running.

Whether you take an issue to your landlord, or they come to you for views, the information gathering, then *problem sharing*, then *finding a solution* steps are the best ones to follow. Remember also, a tenants association's views will always be more credible, if you can show local tenants support it.

Extra Activity

If you have been in discussing an issue with your landlord recently, how does the approach you and your colleagues used compare with that advocated in this workbook? To help you reflect on this, consider the following questions:

- 1) Did you contact the landlord by writing to someone about the problem invite landlord attendance at one of your regular meetings , or did you take part in joint meetings set up especially to consider the issue?
- 2) Did you systematically list the information you needed and try to get it?
- 3) Did you share information with your landlord?
- 4) Did you just state the problem and expect the landlord to solve it?
- 5) Did you compare your (the tenants association's) perception of the problem with that of the landlord?
- 6) Did you try to reach a shared view of the problem before discussing possible solutions?
- 7) Did you feedback to the full tenants association committee or a members' meeting any progress as it happened?
- 8) Did you prepare ideas and views to take to meetings with the landlord?
- 9) Did you work out in advance what you wanted to achieve in each meeting with your landlord?
- 10) Did you check what you actually achieved in each meeting with the landlord?
- 11) Did you influence how the problem was actually handled?
- 12) Looking back over how the problem was approached, what could have been done better?

Check Up

Answers for many of the ACTIVITIES in this workbook were given either in that activity or the next one. The rest of the answers are here:

ACTIVITY 1

Separate face to face meetings with the landlord is usually best. But try different ways and see how you get on.

ACTIVITY 2

Information on the Blackford case worth collecting includes:

- The number of closes and stairwells which have a problem.
- What is done to clarify for tenants their cleaning duties.
- What reminders or efforts at enforcement does the housing department try.
- How long it typically takes to relet flats in Blackford.
- In what circumstances the housing department sees it as its duty to have closes cleaned up.
- How seriously the housing department takes the problem.

ACTIVITY 5

Views in common:

- Tenants have responsibilities for stair cleaning.
- There is less local pride in Blackford than there used to be.

- Attracting new tenants to Blackford is becoming more difficult.

The differences of view lie with:

- The level of effort needed to clarify and enforce stair cleaning duties.
- The need for specific action to tackle letting problems and the attractiveness of Blackford to prospective tenants.

Don't worry if you have described these points differently. The important thing is to have a sense of where agreement exists and doesn't exist at this stage. This analysis points to the need for discussion about

- how to clarify stair cleaning duties and enforce them better, and
- How to attract people to come to live in Blackford and how to relet empty flats more quickly.

ACTIVITY 9

Option "b" is most likely to gain tenants influence. Option "d" is a good second best, if you don't have much time.

ACTIVITY 11

Option "c" is likely to gain most influence for tenants, because

- You will have better worked out ideas to take to the landlord
- You will be able to show fuller support for the views you put.

Now, to Round off the course...

This part of the course gives you a chance to check your understanding of the main points of the course.

1. Each of the following statements belongs in a different box. Can you put each one in its correct box?

- It's a chance for a dialogue with the landlord, without you having to attend extra meetings
- It may squeeze out time you need in your regular meetings for other things
- A clear record is available
- Possibly no dialogue will take place
- It offers more chance for a serious dialogue
- It takes the most effort for tenants' representatives

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Writing to the housing department		
Asking for a housing official to attend one of the Association's meetings		
Seeking a face to face meeting with housing officials in their office		

2. Put the following in the correct order for a good tenant participation process:

- ❑ Discussion takes place to find a solution
- ❑ Either tenants or the landlord has identified a problem
- ❑ The other party considers how it sees the problem
- ❑ A dialogue takes place to try to agree about the various angles on the problem
- ❑ Information needs are identified

3. Suggest something a tenants association can do when it has a very good case and the landlord doesn't appear to be listening so far.

4. When trying to reach agreement with a landlord about the nature of a problem, which of the following is good practice and which bad practice?

	GOOD PRACTICE	BAD PRACTICE
As tenants, you should try to impose your own view		
When a landlord states what the problem is, tenants might say, <i>yes but the problem can also be seen from another angle</i>		
First identify views about the problem which tenants and landlord already share		
Tenants and landlord argue about differences, till one side gives in		
Once shared views about a problem are clear, go on to discuss differences constructively		

5. Which of these three statements best guides tenants as to who to see about an issue?

- a) Start with the local housing officer and work up from there if necessary
- b) Start at the "top of the tree"
- c) Seek out the decision makers on the matter in hand

Tick your choice here a) b) c)

6. Consider the situation when a landlord has worked out proposals before speaking to tenants. Which of the following statements represents an advantage and which a disadvantage of this approach:

	ADVANTAGE	DISADVANTAGE
It saves tenants time		
The proposals will only reflect a landlord view of the problem		
It means less work for tenants' representatives		
It may be harder to get the solution tenants want		

7. Is the following statement TRUE or FALSE?

When tenants attend meetings with the landlord, they should keep the discussions confidential and never tell other tenants what took place.

Tick your answer here: TRUE FALSE

Give a reason for your answer:

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 questions in the last three pages
- a list of sources of further information about tenant participation
- information about the third part 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.

Tenants Information Service
Freepost SCO 4863
Glasgow G2 6BR

0141 248 1242

e-mail: info@tis.org.uk

PS Remember to phone or send for your Check Back Pack!