

Building Community Capacity - Paisley South Housing Association

CASE STUDY

Introduction

This case study is one of a series of good practice briefings produced by the Tenants Information Service (TIS). In 2008, Paisley South Housing Association was successful in becoming part of an innovative TIS project funded by the Scottish Government to showcase the impact of community capacity building to develop effective tenant participation.

TIS hope that as well as being interesting and informative, the case study will encourage tenants and landlords to see the value of capacity building to develop effective tenant participation.

Here's Paisley South's story

Community Capacity Building

Community Capacity Building is the process of providing resources, support and training to strengthen the skills and confidence of local people and community groups to address community issues and achieve change.

Paisley South Housing Association

Paisley South Housing Association is a charitable Registered Social Landlord (RSL) and was established in 1984 by local people concerned about the lack of affordable housing in their communities. Paisley South now has a staff team of 23 with over 1200 homes for rent throughout the south, west and town centre of Paisley, Foxbar and Glenburn. Paisley South also factors 300 home owned properties through its subsidiary Paisley South Property Services.



Tenant Participation
Good Practice Briefing



The Challenges

Paisley South was selected to take part in this demonstration project as it was fairly typical of many RSLs struggling to get tenants involved. At the start of this project there were no active tenants and residents groups. The widespread geographical areas of Paisley South with different house types meant that there was not as much common ground to organise collectively on housing issues.

Paisley South was very aware that they had very little face-to-contact with tenants. The Association's focus was very much on "*lots of information going outwith very little feedback coming back*". Tenants highlighted that they often found the written information sent by the Association "off putting" as it was very formal and full of jargon and as a result was often just binned. A few tenants highlighted that "*Paisley South doesn't listen to our views before decisions are taken, so what's the point of getting involved.*"

Apart from having tenants on the Management Committee, there were few examples of tenants being involved to influence decisions about the housing services. Tenant participation was particularly under-developed and Kathleen McCutcheon, the Director of PSHA identified "*The need to change the ethos and culture of the organisation to one that has tenant participation as an integral part of how our services are delivered*".

It was clear from the start of this project that tenants and Paisley South needed to regain each others trust and work together to take things forward and that's what they started to do.....

Getting Started

Over an 18 month period TIS provided two development staff to work with Paisley South to look at ways to get tenants involved (this worked out on average about one day a week of TIS staff time). Paisley South also dedicated staff time to work with TIS and develop tenant involvement during this project. Paisley South had no face to face tenant involvement activity and the question was where to start? To get things moving TIS met with Paisley South staff to start to build up a picture of tenants' issues and to identify areas where tenants were most likely to want to participate. Key issues were identified from the Association's

tenant satisfaction surveys and consultation exercises. TIS met with the "movers" and "shakers" - namely people active in local communities to find out their views.

It was clear from the beginning of this project that the more traditional ways of organising tenants and residents groups wasn't necessarily what local people wanted and TIS looked at a range of different ways to get people more engaged.

**Good practice point -
Tenant participation takes time.....
don't give up at the first hurdle!**

It took at least six months to get tenant and resident involvement started. It is important to be realistic in planning tenant participation activities.



Planned Maintenance - Foxbar

Foxbar is an area where there had been previous tenant involvement, particularly around the stock transfer of these houses from Scottish Homes to Paisley South. A major planned maintenance programme was being launched and Paisley South wanted to develop a model of tenant involvement that they could use and develop in other areas. TIS took time to speak to local people in Foxbar about their housing issues. While this work provided some useful background information, only a few people seemed interested in getting involved and a tenants and residents group didn't seem to be the way forward in Foxbar.

Good Practice point - Be flexible

Tenant involvement is more than setting up a tenants and residents group. In this instance a more flexible approach to tenant involvement and gathering tenant opinion has been successful.

Between July 2008 and January 2010 TIS organised ten open days jointly with Paisley South throughout Foxbar. Meetings were held in each area where planned maintenance was due to take place. Sessions were held during the day and the evening to encourage as many people as possible to attend. TIS and Paisley South staff distributed notices for the meetings and in some cases delivering them by hand to encourage a turn out at the meetings.

**Good Practice Point -
Find out what the local issues are**

Talk to local people to find out the key issues within the area, do not impose your agenda on others.

The meetings were kept very informal, with short presentations from Paisley South's Technical Team on what improvements were being planned for their area and the Association's responsibility regarding reaching the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015. The meetings also provided the opportunity for tenants to give their views about what they thought was needed to improve their homes.

While attendance at these meetings was mixed, the meetings provided an opportunity to develop tenants understanding of the financial constraints of the Association and joint decision making about future planned maintenance.

**Good practice point -
It is not about numbers**

Tenant involvement should not be gauged by the number of tenants that turn out for a meeting but by the contribution of the ones that do turn out.

Following the open days TIS and Paisley South organised a follow up meeting to discuss the planned maintenance programme in more depth and future tenant involvement. From this meeting a "Planned Maintenance Monitoring Group" was formed to monitor and review progress of the 5 year planned maintenance programme.

Paisley South now has regular dialogue with the Planned Maintenance Group to check that it is getting things right in the planning and delivery of the planned maintenance programme.

It was also agreed to continue to hold local meetings once the programme is agreed annually to discuss in each neighbourhood the investment that will be carried out in the houses. This is a model of working that Paisley South will be using in other areas.

**Good Practice Point-
Listen to what tenants have to say**

Work with them on their concerns for their area. Following the consultation tenants in the Oliphant Court area of Foxbar decided to get organised to represent tenants in their block of flats. The group is now a Registered Tenants Group.



Problems with the Common Heating

Paisley South had received quite a few complaints about the common heating system in the Storie Street, George Street and George Place areas in the centre of Paisley. The Association identified these areas as ones that might be interested in working with TIS during the project. TIS wrote to every household and provided a freephone number they could call TIS to discuss any problems they were having with their heating system. TIS received quite a few calls and a small group of tenants met with TIS and Paisley South to talk about the heating problems and possible solutions. The tenants worked with TIS and Paisley South to get the local community out to a public meeting. This meeting provided a great opportunity for Paisley South to hear tenants' views and to have a better understanding of the problems tenants were experiencing. As a result of tenant involvement, Paisley South have commissioned an independent engineer's report to be carried out to look at the scope to improve the common heating system. Paisley South will continue to work with tenants to resolve these issues.

**Good practice point -
Tenants require feedback**

It is important to make sure there is feedback following any consultation.

Tenant participation – making a difference

This is an example of how the local community worked with an organisation called Community Links to make a difference to create a garden project in the centre of Paisley.

Paisley South commissioned Community Links to work with the local community to draw up plans to provide a landscaped area at the backcourt area of Storie Street, George Street and George Place.

TIS and Community Links organised an open day in the Arts Centre to get the local community out to give their ideas on the plans. Sadly no one turned up. Rather than conclude “that no one was interested”, Community Links and TIS organised another event, this time in the backcourt area itself with a gazebo and fortunately good weather.

Having an event on people's doorsteps was a great idea to get children and the local community interested. Community Links took away the communities ideas and incorporated these into the final design.

The project was successful in receiving wider action funding and the Storie Street landscape project was opened in May 2009. The community now has an attractive backcourt area it can enjoy.

According to Mrs Stevenson “The garden is a great wee place, nice and secure, especially for the younger and older kids. It's really good in the summer as the neighbours go out and sit and often have a chat”

Moving Forward

The TIS project has shown that capacity building support has had a positive outcome to support tenants and residents to get more involved. Capacity building support provided tenants and residents with:

- Practical support to get more involved and be effective
- Relevant and accurate information - avoiding jargon!
- Practical training to increase skills and confidence
- The opportunity to network with other tenants and residents and agencies

Paisley South described the benefits as:

- Useful to have an independent organisation to provide support to tenants and residents
- Working more closely with tenants and residents to shape future housing services
- Providing a focus for staff that tenant participation is important and an integral part of any project
- Training and support for staff and committee to increase their confidence and improve their communication skills working with local communities
- Providing models of tenant involvement that can be replicated in other areas

“Staff will automatically think of meeting face to face with residents where possible”

Elaine Thomson

Depute Director, Paisley South.

“With the capacity building support, tenants have gained more of a voice to influence how housing and related services are delivered”

Lorna Gilroy, Housing Manager.

Conclusion

The case study has shown that having dedicated capacity building support has had a positive outcome both for tenants and the housing association. TIS has supported Paisley South to review its Tenant Participation Strategy. A Tenant Participation Working Group was formed and tenants views have been taken into account in taking tenant participation forward. Now that the demonstration project has ended an option for Paisley South to consider is the scope to share capacity building support services for tenants and residents with other RSLs across Renfrewshire.



The Tenants Information would like to thank the tenants, residents and staff of Paisley South Housing Association and other agencies who were involved in this demonstration project on which this case study is based.

For further information please contact TIS on **0141 248 1242** email **info@tis.org.uk** or visit our website **www.tis.org.uk**