



**ATRIUM**  
HOMES

The Landlord of Choice

# **Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Strategy**

March 2019

## 1. Introduction

The introduction of the [Housing \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#) created a legal requirement for landlords to actively develop and support tenant participation. Effective participation gives tenants an opportunity to influence decisions about the housing services they receive. And it gives landlords better links to the community and the opportunity to work with others.

It is a 2 way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power. Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and service.

Atrium Homes recognises that involving and consulting with tenants in the management of the organisation and the services it provides leads to the provision of better, more effective and efficient services. Atrium Homes is committed to ensuring that tenants have the capacity to influence on either an individual or collective basis.

The Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Strategy recognises that for tenants to play an active role they must be empowered through the provision of knowledge, information, skills, authority and choice. This strategy statement aims to set out when and how Atrium Homes will work in partnership with tenants and tenant groups in developing its services.

The term participation covers a range of activities in this strategy identified as key strategic objectives of Atrium's approach to participation:

- Communicating With Tenants
- Listening To Tenants
- Consulting With Tenants
- Tenant Involvement in the Decision Making Process

Tenant Participation will not be an end in itself but will contribute to the overall pursuit of achieving high standards of service and performance across the range of housing activities.

The Strategy has been developed to ensure that customers are fully informed of Atrium Homes' activities and have the opportunity to participate in the development of services, the review of policies and procedures and in the first instance, in the development of the Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Strategy itself.

The Strategy deliberately sets out to be a practical document and in identification of action reflects legal, financial, constitutional and staff constraints.

This Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Strategy was approved by the Board of Directors on 28 April 2003 and last reviewed on 26/3/19.

## 2. Legal and Regulatory Framework

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places specific duties on Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords with relation to tenant participation, consultation with tenants, registering tenant organisations and tenant management agreements. Further duties are also created with respect to the tenancy agreement and information to be made available to tenants.

Atrium Homes' Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Strategy takes account of all relevant legislation, regulatory guidance, and good practice advice.

## 3. Equal Opportunities

This strategy aims to be inclusive of all tenants and accordingly will aim to ensure that in the implementation of this strategy it is in line with Atrium's Equality and Diversity Policy.

## 4. Aims and Objectives

We aim to:

- Encourage tenant participation in all aspects of the housing service
- Establish formal structures for the involvement of tenants
- Support existing and future representative groups whilst accepting the need to ensure that tenants not represented have opportunities to express their views
- Ensure staff are aware of the principles of tenant participation and that they act according to those principles
- Develop better services which reflect customer priorities and views
- Provide services that reflect Value For Money

In order to meet these aims, it is essential that the following objectives are met:

- Provide quality information on all aspects of Atrium's work in easily understood formats that meet individual needs and give adequate time for tenant response

- Maximise the opportunity for tenants and local groups to comment on, discuss and influence all areas of work
- Encourage tenants to become members of the organisation
- Provide training opportunities for staff and tenants in the skills necessary to develop partnership working
- Agree levels of support and resources for tenant groups
- Develop a system of performance indicators to assess the achievements of tenant participation
- Comply with the Scottish Social Housing Charter :
  - **Communication** Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.
  - **Participation** 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.

Atrium Homes recognises that there are different levels of participation and will seek to offer tenants a choice of the form or degree of involvement that they may wish to have. Such forms will range from information to control and will include consultation and involvement. Atrium Homes will attempt to utilise mechanisms for participation that best suit the needs and aspirations of those occupying our properties.

## 5. Communication With Tenants

### Provision of Information

Atrium Homes has a statutory obligation to explain how tenants will be kept informed whilst also recognising that to participate effectively, tenants need access to relevant, good quality information. This strategy recognises that to enable tenants to make informed decisions and to understand the landlord's position, Atrium Homes must provide and deliver good quality information.

Atrium Homes recognises that for many tenants, participation will only take place at this simplest level. Therefore, Atrium will aim to provide

- Clear Tenancy Agreement

- Bi-annual newsletter
- Policies and procedures
- Leaflets and guides
- Open Days
- Individual Letters
- New Tenant Packs

### **Tenancy Agreement**

Atrium Homes will provide all tenants with a copy of their tenancy agreement stating the respective obligations of the tenant and the landlord. This will be provided electronically in advance of the sign up with a paper copy issued at the sign up interview.

### **Newsletter**

The newsletter is distributed twice a year to tenants in Atrium's areas of operation and will provide information on housing and associated initiatives and developments and information on the achievements of Atrium Homes. Regular information about performance against targets will be provided. On a regular basis, the newsletter will be supplemented with dedicated inserts to specific areas of operation i.e. housing management, repairs and maintenance. The content of the newsletter will attempt to reflect the interests of all customers. Atrium is committed to publishing information on its own performance on an annual basis including results from tenant feedback and the Annual Return of the Charter.

### **Policies and Procedures**

Atrium will develop policies and procedures in partnership with tenants and tenant groups through the review of current policies/procedures on all aspects of the housing service. Tenants will be provided with copies of policies and procedures upon request. Key Policies will be made available on the website.

### **Leaflets and Guides**

Atrium Homes will make available a series of tenant information leaflets on its policies and procedures. The leaflets will be written in Plain English and address some of the most frequently asked questions on each topic. Guides containing more detailed information about specific issues will be produced on an adhoc basis and in response to tenant enquiries.

### **Open Days and Roadshows**

On major initiatives, policy, housing management and maintenance issues such as improvement schemes, major investment plans etc Atrium Homes will hold open days for tenants to attend to obtain further information and give tenants an opportunity to meet and discuss the issues with staff. Open Days will be held in local facilities and tenants will be given a minimum of one week's written notice of the event.

### **Individual Letters**

On most occasions, tenants will receive individual letters from Atrium Homes. Letters will be written in Plain English, avoiding the use of jargon or technical terms, signed by the person responsible for the letter and always containing

contact details and timescales for response. In correspondence advising tenants of major improvement works, Atrium Homes will strive to ensure that full details and explanations of the required works are given and that the mechanisms for contact and complaint are included.

Atrium Homes will respond to all written communication within a period of 10 working days. Where a full response is not possible within the timescale, an interim reply will be given with a clear indication of when a fuller response is to be expected.

### **New Tenant Packs**

Each new tenant will be issued with a pack containing:

- Information on tenant groups/ consultation register
- Tenant handbook covering policy and procedures
- Contact details for staff, other relevant agencies

All information provided will be in accordance with Atrium's policy on equal opportunities and take account of Data Protection and confidentiality issues. Where appropriate, information can be made available in non-standards forms i.e. large print, Braille, audio, languages other than English. The content and format of information will vary in recognition of different groups of tenants.

## **6. Obtaining Tenant Feedback**

Feedback from tenants can improve existing services and lead to a better understanding by staff of tenants needs and preferences. Atrium Homes are committed to improving the mechanisms by which it obtains tenant feedback.

Tenants may raise issues or concerns with Atrium Homes through individual direct contact or through tenant groups. Atrium Homes actively seeks feedback on service delivery from all its tenants. To make sure that all tenants and tenant groups have an opportunity to have their views heard and are included at an early stage of policy/ development and procedure review, the following consultation techniques may be used:

- Satisfaction slips/surveys
- Local tenant group meetings
- Specific issue meetings
- Surveys/questionnaires
- Armchair Panel
- Tenant Scrutiny Group
- Letters
- Website and social media

### **Satisfaction Slips**

Whilst different maintenance contractors have different approaches/contractual obligations to obtaining satisfaction information on reactive repairs, Atrium Homes supplements this with it's own telephone sampling for quality testing. . In addition, Atrium will issue 100% post

inspection surveys for all major investment activity. Satisfaction surveys are also issued to tenants who receive medical adaptations, new tenants and those terminating their tenancy.

### **Local Tenant Group Meetings**

Atrium Homes will contact both Registered Tenants Organisations and other Tenants and Residents Groups to obtain feedback. Copies of policies for amendment are also issued to RTO's who are encouraged to participate in the decision making process.

### **Specific Issue Meetings**

Atrium Homes will convene ad hoc public meetings and/or invite relevant tenants to meetings regarding specific topics e.g. major repairs, problems with vandalism in an area etc. When convening any meetings, Atrium will try to ensure meetings are genuinely accessible to all and will pay due consideration to the venue, timing, location and publicity as well as transport and childcare implications.

When a meeting or interview is held, the staff member involved will make a written note of such and a copy can be supplied to the customer upon request. Where group meetings are arranged, minutes will be produced and circulated to appropriate people as soon as practicable after the meeting.

### **Surveys/Questionnaires**

Atrium Homes will canvas the views of its tenants through periodic questionnaires and customer satisfaction surveys. Surveys are realistic in length and content.

The development of a range of surveys on specific management functions as well as overall service delivery and performance has been addressed through the introduction of surveys on planned maintenance, reactive maintenance and allocations. Feedback from Atrium Homes on the outcomes of tenant responses will be communicated to the tenant.

A full customer satisfaction survey will be conducted every 3 years. This will form a major reference point for service delivery and development and will inform priorities on an Atrium Homes' wide basis both operationally and strategically.

### **Armchair Panel/Interested Parties**

Atrium will keep a register of actively interested tenants who have indicated that they would like to be consulted, in survey form, over issues that may affect them. To register, tenants can complete a registration form, available from the office and included in all New Tenant Packs. Periodically, staff will canvas tenants on membership through text messaging, use of social media, inclusion in Newsletters.

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### **Tenant Scrutiny Group**

Where sufficient membership allows, the group meets regularly and reviews policy and procedure documents in line with an agreed timetable as well as acting as a sounding board for initial consultations to assist staff in designing how and in what format wider consultation with the general tenant audience will take place. On an annual basis the group will set out its priorities and areas of interest for the year ahead. The group will also assist in developing any action plan coming out of the Customer Satisfaction Survey.. Staff will ensure that all tenants are made aware of the group and members will be sought through open advertising, targeted invitations and other incentives

### **Letters**

Tenants will be contacted on an individual basis also and asked for comment on specific issues which affect them. Clear timescales for responses will be indicated.

### **Website**

The website will offer customers information on Atrium's services as well as including performance information and downloadable content. [www.atrium-homes.co.uk](http://www.atrium-homes.co.uk)

### **Facebook/Social Media**

Atrium will also explore the use of social media to ensure information can be communicated to tenants in a format suitable to them.

### **Portal**

The Portal offers customers access to Atrium services 24/7 and gives information on individual customer's rent accounts as well as allowing them to complete forms and contact the organisation at their convenience on any mobile device through the downloadable app.

## **7. Consultation With Tenant Groups**

Atrium Homes believes that tenant participation can benefit the service tenants receive and the wider community. Atrium recognises that some tenants may wish to be actively involved in issues affecting their own area. Atrium has a commitment to support local tenant groups and will respond positively by encouraging the establishment of local groups. Tenant groups play an important role in providing information and local knowledge, identifying issues of local concern and representing the views of the wider community.



Atrium will actively promote the benefits of collective action and strive to work in partnership with tenant groups to devolve real decision making power and to improve the quality of life for all tenants of Atrium Homes.

Atrium Homes recognises that tenant groups are independent bodies set up by communities to achieve aims they say themselves. However, Atrium Homes will attend, on request, any meeting held by a tenant group provided that 2 weeks notice is given. A request must detail the nature of the issue/concern to allow an appropriate staff member to attend.

The strategy recognises that joining a tenant group does not appeal to all tenants and Atrium will therefore consult with informal groups of tenants also that emerge in response to a particular issue.

Atrium will seek to consult with tenants and tenant groups on issues which directly affect them. Tenants are encouraged to participate in the review and development of the following policies and procedures:

- Housing Management (including allocations, estate management, tenant participation)
- Neighbour relations
- Complaints Procedure
- Communication and information
- Repairs and Maintenance (including modernisation projects, appointment of design teams where possible etc)
- Rent and service charges
- Measuring and monitoring performance

Consultation will be an evolutionary process, which will encourage tenants to achieve increased participation. Methods used will be regularly reviewed with tenants to ensure their effectiveness.

After each exercise, Atrium Homes will consider the success of consultation exercises in attracting representative groups of tenants to attend and consider the use of incentives, as appropriate, to increase the numbers of people participating.

## **8. Setting The Agenda**

Tenant Engagement and Empowerment covers all functions but some more than others interest tenants. Atrium will determine through consultation the range of issues tenants wish to be consulted on.

Atrium recognises that consultation and participation must be managed to ensure the greatest benefit for tenants, staff and the organisation. Tenants should be able to input into what they want from participation, how they wish to participate and what issues they wish to cover.

Atrium will prepare an annual plan setting out the issues for consultation, the means of communication and timescales for response and action. The work plan may be amended as circumstances require and progress against planned objectives will be recorded and reported to tenants. It is intended that the workplan reflect the strategic and operational objectives set out in Atrium Homes' Internal Management Plan.

## **9. Registered Tenant Organisations**

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 has identified the concept of Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) as a requirement to benefit the Tenant Participation process. Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords must now keep a register of tenant groups operating in their area, which must be available to the public on request.

### **How To Register**

Atrium will provide a registration form for interested parties. To be accepted on to the register, local tenant groups must meet the following criteria for registration:

- Formal constitution
- Equal opportunities statement
- Open membership
- Elected office bearers
- Minutes of meetings available for inspection
- Annual audited accounts
- The area the group represents must be clearly defined
- Open meetings accessible to all

Registered groups must submit minutes of their AGM annually and are required to re-register every 3 years.

### **Refusal of Registration**

Atrium will refuse registration or remove from the register if

- A group does not meet the registration criteria
- A group has failed to comply with its constitution

If a group is refused registration or is removed from the register, an appeal can be made. Atrium's internal appeals procedure will be communicated to groups at registration.

### **The Register**

The register will include the name of the tenant group, the area of operation, a contact address (chosen by the group) and other information such as dates of meetings. Groups will be advised this information will be made available publicly.

### **10. Assessment of Resources**

Atrium Homes will provide support for new and existing tenant groups. Resources available will include not just financial assistance but access to training, accommodation and equipment, access to independent advice and the distribution of information

The level of tenant participation funding will be determined annually. Atrium

Homes set an annual Community Activity Budget and from this budget will:

- Assist groups in the period before they become formally established by paying for room/hall hire; promoting the existence of the group with mail drops etc and pay and arrange for organisational support
- Provide direct revenue funding to groups through start-up funding, annual revenue funding and one off funding.

To qualify for funding tenant groups must meet a set of established criteria set out in Atrium Homes' **Funding Community Activity** policy. In addition to financial support, Atrium Homes will offer assistance in kind to new and existing tenant groups. Assistance to new tenant groups will be:

- Guidance and support for new groups
- Staff input as enablers
- Assistance with arranging meetings, identifying and organising venues
- Stationery/photocopying

Assistance to sustain existing tenant groups will be:

- Training for tenants and office bearers
- Making contact with other groups
- Assistance in developing their knowledge of housing issues
- Staff attendance on request

In addition to the above commitments to funding, the following items form part of Atrium Homes resource commitment to customer participation:

- Newsletter (2 editions per annum)
- Customer Satisfaction Survey (every 3 years)

Members and staff may need new skills to be able to give information to tenants in a way that is easily understood and may require training as enablers. Atrium recognises that effective participation may require a great deal of existing staff time and that this will impact on current staffing resources.

## **11. Board**

The Board is the body ultimately responsible for the running of Atrium Homes. Tenants' viewpoints from all feedback and consultation exercises will influence the decision making process undertaken by staff in developing policies, procedures and operational performance and this will be reflected in the material presented to Board. However, tenants can exercise further direct control by becoming members of Atrium Homes' governing body. Individual tenants who wish to become more actively involved in the running of Atrium Homes may be invited to attend sub-committee and/or Board meetings. Tenants who wish to become a member of the Board will be provided with access to training to assist them to maximise their contribution to the Board.

## **12. Performance**

In order to judge the success of tenant participation, Atrium will review, monitor and measure performance against set objectives on an annual basis. Numeric indicators need to be supplemented with some means of assessing the quality of participation. Specific evaluation exercises will be carried out from time to time to gather information on the quality of participation, including a tenant perspective.

## **13. Review**

The Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Strategy itself will be reviewed formally every 5 years and in response to legislative change. However, to ensure its continuing relevance to tenants and service users it is likely to be presented more often as the development and continuous review of this Strategy will recognise the central role of tenants and residents and will be a key component in developing efficient, customer centred practises.