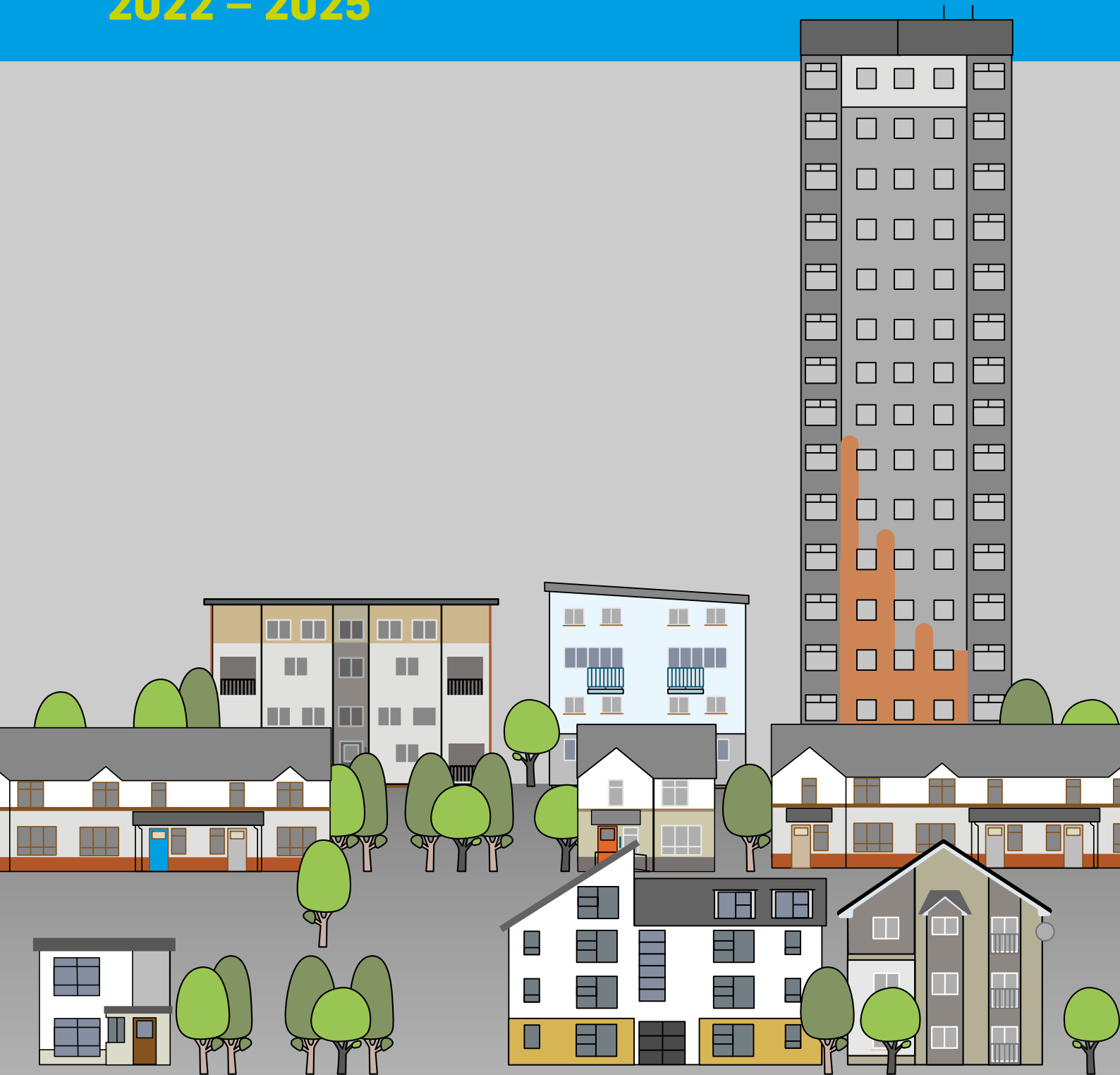


Falkirk Council Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy

2022 – 2025



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Foreword

Welcome to Falkirk Council Housing Services' Tenants and Customer Participation Strategy. This has been written following extensive consultation, and is based on what you, our tenants, and customers, have told us. Thank you to all those who took part!

We recognise that listening to our customers' views and involving them in the services we provide is an essential part of shaping housing services to meet their needs and aspirations. We will continue to provide opportunities for our tenants and customers to express their views in ways that suit them and at a level they feel comfortable with. We are committed to providing tenants and customers with opportunities to access and influence services that meets their needs. This includes the introduction of a Digital Housing Strategy for those who wish to engage in that way.

We want to encourage a closer working relationship that is effective in improving Falkirk Council's Housing Services and hope that this strategy will provide a framework to make that happen.

Kenny Gillespie
Head of Housing & Communities

Our Vision



communicating and sharing information with our customers in a variety of ways

responding to the findings of our recent tenant and customer survey



listening and responding to our customers' views to improve the service we provide

enabling our tenants to scrutinise our services and performance.



“ Being involved and putting my view across makes me empowered. Just because I’m not a homeowner does not mean I shouldn’t have a say in my property ”

Sharon

Introduction

How did we develop this strategy?

This strategy is based on the tenant satisfaction survey carried out in 2021 by an independent partner with a random sample of 1000 tenants. The survey asked about our existing services, preferred options, and barriers for communicating and engaging with us along with opportunities to scrutinise our services.

When developing this Strategy, we also sought the views of our Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations and the Tenants' & Residents' Forum.

We also took advice from Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS Scotland). Finally, we asked our staff who will be delivering the strategy, what they thought.

Achievements since the last Strategy

Key achievements include:

- Recognised by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) in Scotland for our work with tenants by Gold Standard TPAS Accreditation award. This recognised that our work with tenants and customers highlighted many examples of good practice. The Chief Executive of TPAS said 'Completing the TPAS Accreditation is a big commitment and demonstrates a real openness on the part of Falkirk Council, and a willingness to build on its previous outcomes and successes.'
- 98% of our tenants told us in the Tenant Satisfaction Survey (2021/2) that they are satisfied with the opportunities given to participate in Housing Services' decision-making process.
- A Gold Award for Best External Publication from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in Scotland (tenants' magazine, 'Tenant Talk').
- The Annual Landlord Report to Tenants was held up by the Scottish Housing Regulator as a good example for other landlords to aspire to.
- A substantial assurance from internal auditors for tenant participation and engagement arrangements in relation to involving tenants and customers in the Housing Revenue Account.
- One of our RTOs received a TPAS Award for Best Practice for involving communities (Tamfourhill Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisation).
- Received TPAS Best Practice in performance reporting (online DVD).
- A tenant in one of our RTOs was awarded Community Volunteer Service (CVS) (Tamfourhill)
- We secured funding from Connecting Scotland and Fairer Falkirk to purchase digital devices for distribution to tenants who do not have access to devices,
- We hosted online discussion forums for tenants and customers
- We have aligned the 'Make a Difference' project award scheme with the Council's participatory budget initiative, 'Community Choices – Tenants'
- We increased the number of people on our Housing Consultation Register by 155%
- We encouraged engagement, participation, and scrutiny informally through competitions, 'Good Neighbour Awards', community projects.
- We worked in partnership to develop an online training toolkit on Community Engagement for staff.

Tenants' Rights to Consultation

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 means we must involve tenants in shaping services they receive and enable them to participate in the running of services. This means we:

1. Consult affected tenants on any proposed increases in rent or charges payable under the tenancy; consider their views and to provide four weeks' notice of any increase.
2. Publish a Tenant Participation Strategy containing an assessment of resources. Resources are used to remove barriers to participation e.g.
 - use venues that are accessible
 - use a mix between face to face and virtual online meetings. The online option could help tenants who have travel or time pressures because of work, or caring commitments
 - pay for the provision of transport for tenants and customers to attend tenant participation meetings and events
 - enable access to grants through 'Community Choices – Tenants' Choice'
 - fund tenants at Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) conference
 - support tenants to achieve TPAS Certificate qualification
 - fund provision of digital devices for tenants with limited access to technology
 - produce editions of the tenants' magazine, 'Tenant Talk'
3. Publish a list of Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs).
4. Notify tenants and RTOs of any proposals that would significantly affect tenants for example policy on housing management, repairs, maintenance, standards of service, the tenant participation strategy

Legislation, other Strategies and Plans

This strategy has been formulated taking account of tenants' and customers' views, as well as the following national and local influences.

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- Guidance on Tenant Participation (Scottish Government, 2002)
- The Scottish Governments' Housing 2040 plan
- The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
- Equality Act 2010
- Scottish Social Housing Charter (Scottish Government, 2012)
- Digital Participation: A National Framework (Scottish Government, 2014)
- The Scottish Government's Connecting Scotland programme
- Frontline Futures: New Era, Changing Role for Housing Officers (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2014)
- Guidance on the Operation of Local Authority Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs) in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2014)
- The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- National Standards for Community Engagement Review (Scottish Community Development Centre, 2015)
- How Social Landlords Consult Tenants About Rent Increases: A Thematic Inquiry (Scottish Housing Regulator, 2016)
- Falkirk Plan
- Locality Plans
- The Falkirk Council Plan (2021 – 2030)
- 'Have Your Say' a Plan for Local Involvement
- Falkirk Council's Digital Strategy
- Falkirk's CLD Plan 2021-2024
- Annual Landlord Report to Tenants
- Falkirk Council's Corporate Participation Strategy (2019 – 2024)
- Falkirk Council's Local Housing Strategy (2017 – 2022). This Strategy links to the priority in the LHS of Creating Sustainable Communities which will be developed further in the Equalities and Poverty Impact Assessment to be carried out for this Strategy.
- Falkirk Council's Corporate Plan: Our Area, Our Council, Our Services (2017 – 2022)

What are the benefits of participation?

Benefits to participation for our tenants, customers and staff include:

- Higher customer satisfaction because we design services to reflect customer priorities
- Fewer customer complaints because we listen and learn from feedback
- Higher staff satisfaction because we get better feedback from customers
- Higher quality services because our customers can hold us to account
- More efficient and effective services because resources are targeted at what matters most to our tenants and customers

Aims of the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy 2022 – 2025

As we progress this Strategy, we have the following aims:

- Every tenant and customer will have their individual needs recognised, be treated fairly, with respect, and receive fair access to housing and housing services. This means we will continue to diversify tenant participation to represent the profile of our tenants.
- Tenants and customers find it easy to communicate with us and get the information they need to know how and why decisions are made on the services we provide.
- To raise awareness of tenant participation through improved communication to tenants and Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations
- Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate
- Increase opportunities for tenants and other customers to influence the delivery of housing services, scrutinise performance and influence decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.
- Comply with statutory requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Enable the Council to achieve effective outcomes for our tenants and other customers, as set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter
- Enable the Council to achieve its strategic outcomes as outlined in The Falkirk Plan (2021 – 2030), Local Housing Strategy (2017 – 2022) and future related strategies.
- Make sure the strategy can adapt to the changing needs of and issues raised by our tenants and customers.
- Continually develop and improve our customer relations, including communication, engagement, participation, and scrutiny across a broad range of housing and housing-related services.



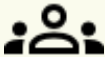

Objectives of the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy 2022 – 2025

To achieve the objectives, we will:

- Provide the information that tenants, and customers want to know and deliver this information in formats that people can access. We will use formats that are accessible, and people are comfortable with.
- Consult with our tenants and other customers on issues that are important to them in ways that are most effective for them
- Offer a wide range of options for tenants and other customers to communicate, engage, participate, and scrutinise in a way and a way which suits them.
- Promote the values of tenant participation and good customer relations to staff across Housing Service, colleagues in other services, Elected Members and tenants, and customers.
- Agree levels of support and resources for Tenants and Residents' groups and this Strategy
- Review and monitor Housing Services' Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy on a regular basis in consultation with our tenants and customers.
- Identify and create a culture to support active democratic Registered Tenants & Residents Organisations in the Falkirk Council area.
- Prevent tenants and customers feeling socially isolated or lonely because they cannot participate in a way that suits them, or at a level that suits them.

The Action Plan for the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2022 – 2025) is available at the end of this document and shows how we will achieve the aims and objectives of this strategy including target timescales.

This Strategy is based on 4 key issues namely.

 Communication	 Engagement
 Participation	 Scrutiny



Communication

'The imparting or exchanging of information'

Ref: Collins Dictionary 21st Century Edition

Appendix 1 to this Strategy sets out tenants' preferences around communication set out in the Tenant Satisfaction Survey.

There has been an increase in willingness of tenants to engage digitally compared to 3 years ago when the last survey was carried out. This relates to the changing tenant profile over time and the COVID19 pandemic which led to increased use of social media/digital connection. We will give tenants and customers equal opportunity to access digital services and have skills and confidence to participate securely online.

Housing Services' want to keep their customers informed and make sure our services and information is accessible to our tenants and customers. We recognise that tenants and customers may not be aware of the differences in costs of communication (e.g., the cost of sending a letter verses the cost of sending an email) and the impact this may have on rent levels. We will begin to have these conversations with our tenants' groups. Throughout the duration of this strategy, we will raise awareness of cost comparisons and provide tenants with information to make an informed choice of their preferred method of communication via the new housing IT system. We will take these issues into account through the Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment we will carry out for this Strategy.

We recognise that information should be consistent in terms of content and style. If someone picks up a leaflet on any given housing topic, the information they read should be consistent with our website and Tenants' Handbook. The Falkirk Council website can be viewed at [Your Council tenancy - Tenants handbook | Falkirk Council](#)

Our methods of communication with our tenants and customers include:

The following sections outline the different levels at which our tenants can choose to get involved, namely engagement, participation, and scrutiny. Generally, interest in involvement drops in direct relation to the time commitment required as highlighted in the overview of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey results appendix 1.

How do our customers engage with the Housing Service?



Engagement

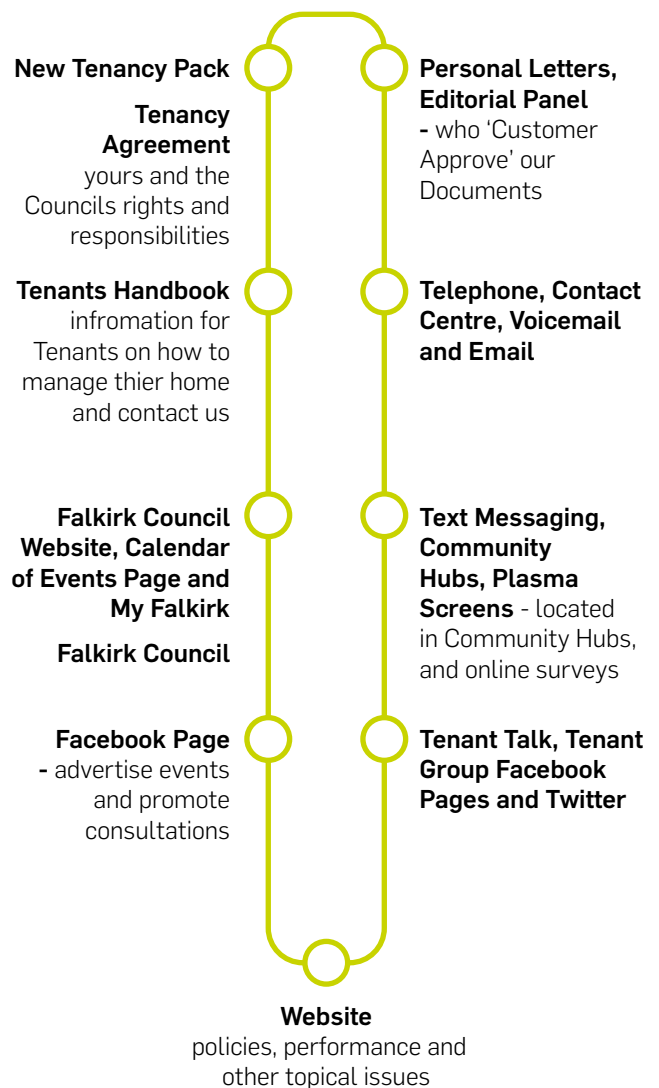
'To begin an action with' or 'employ for a short period'

Ref: Collins Dictionary 21st Century Edition

Appendix 1 sets out what tenants and customers advised us in the Tenant Satisfaction Survey on engagement with us.

Our engagement with our tenants and customers includes.

How we engage with tenants & customers





Participation

'To take part, be or become actively involved, or share in.'

Ref: Collins Dictionary 21st Century Edition

Appendix 1 highlights what our tenants and customers advised us of in the Tenant Satisfaction Survey.

Opportunities to participation include the following:

Participation

- Discussion Forums
- Registered Tenants and Residents Organisations (RTO's)
- Tenants and Residents Forum and Short Term Sub Groups
- Community Choices and Tenants Choices funding
- Scrutiny Panel
Editorial Panel
- Housing Asset Management Plan (HAMP) and How Your Rent Money is Spent (HYRMIS)

How can our customers scrutinise the Housing Service and its performance?



Scrutiny

'Close examination; a searching look'

Ref: Collins Dictionary 21st Century Edition

Appendix 1 highlights what our tenants and customers told us in the Tenant Satisfaction Survey on scrutiny.

Opportunities to scrutinise our performance include the following:

Tenant and Customer Groups
How Your Rent Money Is Spent
Housing Asset Management Plan
Scrutiny Panel
Providing information for tenants and customer to use
Annual report to Tenants
Housing Regulator
Legal requirements such as the Freedom of Information Act

We provide the annual report to tenants published annually at the end of October. This is written with our tenants who tell us what performance information they would like and how they want this presented.

As with other landlords we provide information to the Housing Regulator which is published on their website.

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 also enables any member of the public to request information held by Falkirk Council as a public body.

How will the Housing Service make sure that everyone is included and treated equally?

We believe that the diversity of our communities is an essential part of who we are. Along with all other social landlords in Scotland, we will review how it collects equalities data to better understand the profile of our tenants and customers. Information gathered will be used to shape services, making sure they meet the needs of people who use them.

We are committed to equality opportunities in the work and involvement of the Tenants' & Residents' Forum, the Consultation Register, Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations and any other group or sub-group formed as part of this strategy. These groups should involve and represent all sections of their communities where they operate. We will encourage each of the groups involved with the Housing Service to adopt an inclusive approach involving minority groups, or groups that are at risk of being excluded, in the community they are active in. We will do this by ensuring that the standard constitution for each of our Registered Tenants' Organisations has a clause on equalities included. Groups or individuals involved with the Housing Service who do not act in an inclusive way could be subject to the removal from the involvement process. We will explore in more detail through the Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment to be carried out for this Strategy.

How will the Housing Service encourage and enable tenant and customer involvement?

The Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2022 showed that 78.3% of tenants were not interested in getting involved. They were asked why they felt that way. Comments included:

- 'I feel they have meetings, but they just go through the motions as they have made their decision before, they even ask tenants their opinion. I used to get involved but there is no point.'
- 'There aren't many things in my area to get involved in, I would have to travel to Falkirk.'
- 'I need things posted as I am hard of hearing.'

To address these issues, we will:

- Only consult on issues where a decision has still to be made and/or clearly communicate the parameters within which a decision can be made (i.e., legal restrictions, policy decisions that have already been made, budgetary constraints etc.).
- Offer free transport or compensate transport costs to attend events, host on-line options and/or local events.
- Make documents available on-line or available in other formats/languages upon request.

Statement of Resources

Falkirk Council's dedicated resource budget for Tenant & Resident Participation is about circa £7.69 per tenant household per year (based on an approximated 16,250 tenants).

The annual financial resources for delivering this strategy will be funded from the Housing Revenue Account.

Table 1 Tenant and Customer Participation budget

Items	£
Supplies and services	
In-House Printing Recharges	62,730
External Printing Charges	100
Publicity & Promotion	500
Make a difference scheme (now community choices)	37,840
Misc. Supplies & Services	20,000
Sub total	121,170
Salaries	£91,600
Total	£212,770

The table above shows the "Statement of Resources". This includes 2 Officers whose key focus is tenant participation. Local housing teams also support their local Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations. This includes assistance with promoting groups, accessing grants, managing community-based projects, assistance with consultations and administration tasks (i.e., typing, photocopying, printing etc.). Support is offered as part of routine business and not reflected in the Statement of Resources or budget.

Housing Services' project award scheme, 'Make a Difference' has been streamlined with Community Choices as part of the Council's overall Participatory Budgeting program. The £35,000 normally set aside from the Tenant Participation Budget for 'Make a Difference' projects will be transferred to Community Choices each year. Since this is tenants' rent money, the money will be ring-fenced for projects that meet the same criteria as 'Make a Difference', which is as follows:

- It will benefit Falkirk Council tenants.
- It will help improve the quality of life in the applicant's community.
- It will enhance the environment and/or improve the appearance of estate where there are Falkirk Council tenants.
- It will help solve a problem identified by the applicant and their group.

A financial breakdown of how monies are spent is provided to the Tenants' & Residents' Forum in their capacity of monitoring this strategy. The financial budget for tenant participation may change throughout the term of this strategy.

Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy

To ensure this Strategy is progressed the following monitoring arrangements have been put in place:

Monitoring and Reviewing the Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy

- 
- Reporting regularly on the outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter
 - Checking levels of satisfaction with Tenants and Customers
 - Maintaining a database of all consultations
 - Compare Falkirk Council's performance with peers across Scotland
 - Providing annual updates on the progress of this strategy to the Tenants and Residents Forum and Elected Members

Conclusion

This Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2022 – 2025) builds on previous strategies.

Our tenants and customers communicate, engage, actively participate in, and scrutinise Housing Services. This helps the quality of housing and the services provided to continually improve. The Housing Service strives to keep on improving by listening to our customers, responding to their needs, and meeting their aspirations. This strategy provides a framework for customers to communicate, engage, participate, and scrutinise in a way and at a level that they feel comfortable with so that we can listen to their views, respond to their needs and meet our aspiration to deliver quality homes, inclusive communities and create sustainable communities,

Our efforts do not stop with the publication of this strategy. This is a “living” document and the action plan will be adapted in partnership with our tenants and customers to respond to changing circumstances. We are always looking to improve by finding more innovative and imaginative ways to communicate and engage with tenants and customers. This strategy’s action plan will change as the relationship with our tenants and customer grows develops and deepens.

The Housing Service will continue gather opinions from as wide a variety of sources as possible to identify common themes and trends before making changes to services.

If you would like more information on this strategy, or how you can get involved, contact the Community Engagement Team on 01324 590796, by email at tenant.participation@falkirk.gov.uk or you can find out more by visiting our website at <http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/council-housing/customer-involvement/> Alternatively, you can ask to speak to a member of staff at one of our Support & Advice HUBS.

Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy action plan

2022 – 2025

Theme 1: Communication
<p>1.1 Embed the Scottish Social Housing Charter and Tenant Participation into staff Induction Training.</p> <p>Timescale: 2022</p>
<p>1.2 Raise awareness of this Strategy amongst staff in Housing & Communities and colleagues in Building Maintenance Division so they can contribute to the strategy aims in their generic roles</p> <p>Timescale: 2022</p>
<p>1.3 Identify individual tenants' preferred methods of communication and tailor communication to individual tenants needs through the introduction of the new housing IT system.</p> <p>Timescale: 2023</p>
<p>1.4 Monitor tenants' preferred methods of communication on general issues through the Tenant Satisfaction Survey and ongoing engagement.</p> <p>Timescale: 2022</p>
<p>1.5 Develop and encourage the use of digital communication and the engage with tenants on the Digital Housing Strategy</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>1.6 Offer a variety of methods of communication so that tenants and customers can choose a method they are comfortable</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>1.7 Provide direct dial telephone numbers on all correspondence with tenants and customers so that they can speak to the right person and get the right information at the first point of contact.</p> <p>Timescale: 2022</p>
<p>1.8 Provide feedback on the outcomes of consultations using the most appropriate method of communication.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>

Theme 2: Engagement
<p>2.1 Promote Tenant & Customer Participation at 'Settling In' visits, providing the Community Engagement Team with information on those tenants interested in tenant participation.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>2.2 Conduct a large-scale Tenant Satisfaction Survey that includes questions required by the Scottish Social Housing Charter, at tri-annual intervals.</p> <p>Timescale: 2025</p>
<p>2.3 Use transactional surveys (whether postal or digital) where appropriate, to gather views on tenants' satisfaction and engagement with the service they have received.</p> <p>Timescale: Ongoing</p>
<p>2.4 Use comment cards as and when appropriate to collect tenants' views on services.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>2.5 Carry out Estate Walkabouts with RTOs and local groups, in partnership with other service providers.</p> <p>Timescale: Annually</p>
<p>2.6 Work in collaboration with colleagues to analyse tenant and customer feedback to identify themes or trends to improve service delivery.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>2.7 Work with colleagues to use complaints identify themes and trends to improve service delivery.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>2.8 Develop and encourage the use of digital engagement.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>

Theme 3: Participation
<p>3.1 Comply with our legal obligation to consult tenants on any service changes that will significantly affect them.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>3.2 Comply with our legal obligation to consult on any proposed rent or related tenancy charge increases.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>3.3 Offer a variety of methods for our tenants and customers to participate at a level they feel comfortable with, and in a way, they feel comfortable.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>3.4 Use methods of participation that are appropriate for any given consultation, recognising this may mean using a variety of methods</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>3.5 Support Registered Tenants Organisations to operate by representing tenants' views, addressing tenant issues, and responding to consultations.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>

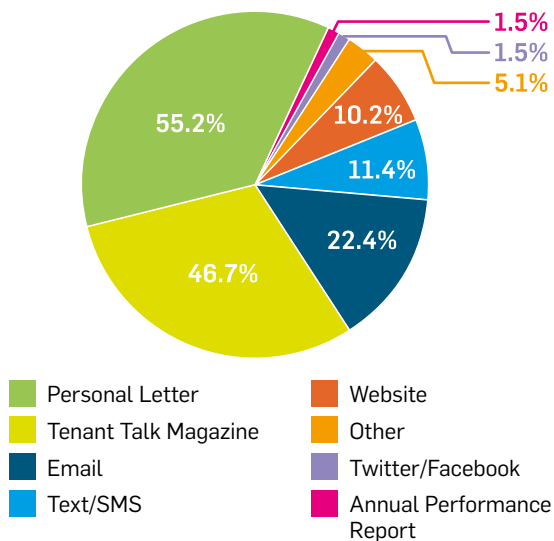
Theme 4: Scrutiny
<p>4.1 Involve tenants in approving the Annual Return on the Charter each year by 31st May each year.</p> <p>Timescale: Annually</p>
<p>4.2 Publish an Annual Report to Tenants, in consultation with our tenants, by 31 October each year.</p> <p>Timescale: Annually</p>
<p>4.3 Provide a variety of methods for tenants and customers to scrutinise Housing Services' performance at a level they feel comfortable with and in a way, they feel comfortable with.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>4.4 Support Housing Services' Scrutiny Panel to conduct at least one scrutiny exercise once each year.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>
<p>4.5 Provide performance information in each edition of the tenants' magazine, Tenant Talk.</p> <p>Timescale: On-going</p>

Theme 5. ALL
<p>5.1 Provide an update on actions annually to the tenants' forum then council Elected Members through the Local Housing Strategy Update</p> <p>Timescale: Annually</p>
<p>5.2 Continue to work in partnership with our tenants and customers to ensure tenant participation reflects the diversity of our communities</p>

Appendix 1 – Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results overview

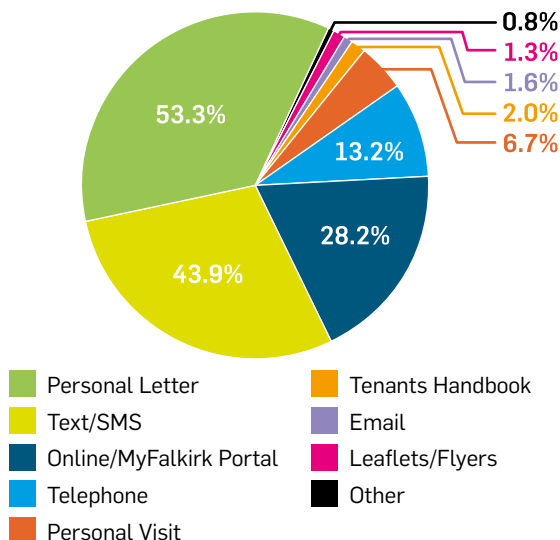
We asked: 'How would you prefer the council to keep you informed about general issues such as their services or decisions or events?'

Tenant and customers said



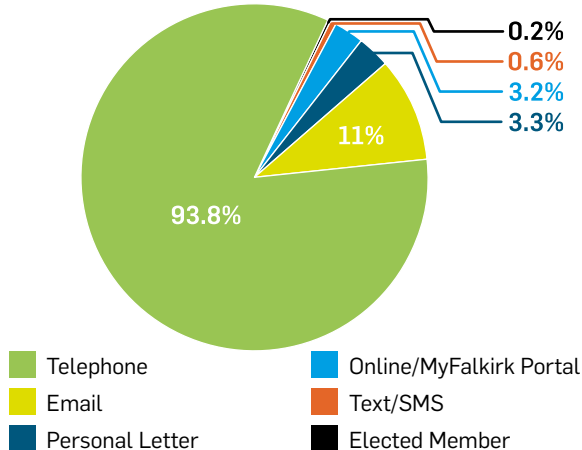
We asked: 'How would you prefer the Council to communicate with you about your tenancy?'

Tenants said:



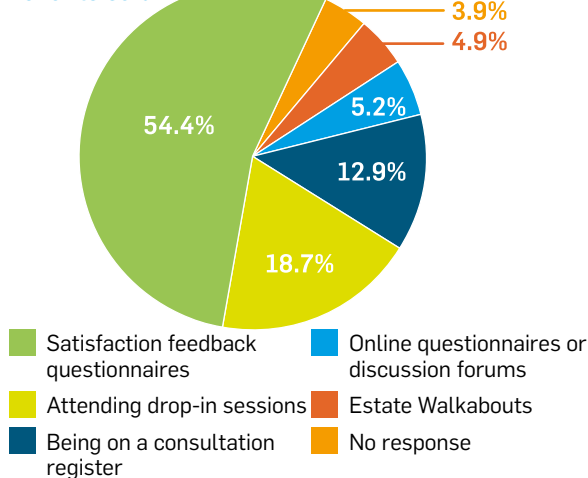
We asked: 'And if you needed to communicate with the Council about your tenancy, which of the following methods would you be happy to use?'

Tenants and customers said

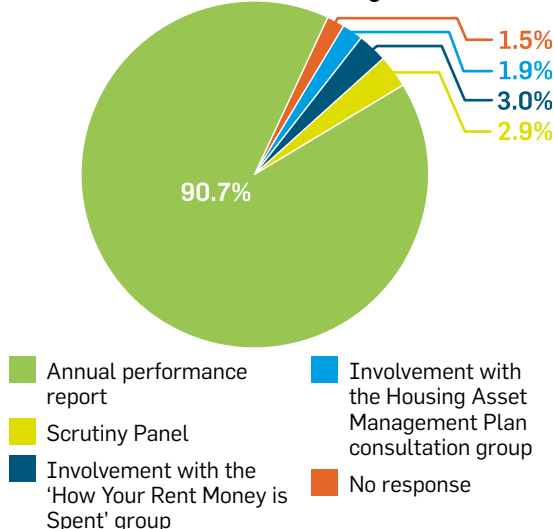


We asked: 'Falkirk Council provide a range of opportunities to tenants to get involved in decision making. Would you be interested in participating in any of the following ways to help the Council improve their housing services?'

Tenants said



In relation to questions around scrutiny tenants and customers advised the following.





Falkirk Council