

TAKING PART

United Welsh
Tenant Participation Strategy
2008 – 2011



Taking Part: The United Welsh Tenant Participation Strategy

Vision

To provide opportunities through Tenant Participation for United Welsh and its tenants¹ to work together to improve housing conditions and housing services; and to agree appropriate levels of participation in the decision-making process.

Tenant Participation is regarded as a two-way process, a dialogue, which exists to enable the sharing of ideas, information and responsibilities between landlord and tenant.

Values

The values that underpin the way we work are:

- Equality and diversity
- Being customer-focussed
- Being accountable
- Making sound financial decisions
- Supporting and empowering staff and tenants
- Working in partnership
- Growth and improvement
- Caring for our environment

Aims

- Better tenant participation – encouraging the involvement of empowered tenants in decision making and of staff in supporting such involvement; and making sure that opportunities for being involved are broad and can be easily taken up by everyone.
- Improved housing services – developing Compacts² with local communities and interest groups to make sure that local needs are taken into account when decisions are made
- Good quality housing conditions – working together to meet the requirements of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, asking for and using tenants' views on new developments to inform future home building plans and doing as much as possible to ensure that United Welsh tenants live in homes that are in good repair, comfortable and safe.
- Beneficial Tenancy Conditions – working with tenants to ensure that Tenancy Conditions continue to be mutually beneficial.
- Good quality of life – as well as the points outlined above, this Strategy aims to set out ways to help make sure that United Welsh tenants can live in a good, positive environment, with safe neighbourhoods and a real sense of community.

¹ The definition of "tenant" for the purposes of this document includes all people living at properties owned by United Welsh, whether those properties are directly managed by United Welsh or by one of their Managing Agents. It also includes Managing Agents themselves as stakeholders with an interest in the strategic development of opportunities to influence decision-making at United Welsh and in their own active role as support providers to people living in United Welsh homes.

² The definition of Local Compacts in the context of United Welsh tenants and their homes is more clearly set out within Objective 2 of this Strategy.

Objectives

1. To improve two-way communication between United Welsh and its tenants by making it easier to become involved in the decision-making processes; by making the processes more transparent; and by improving the consistency of communication, simplifying terms, avoiding jargon, using a wide range of formats including clarification of the importance and validity of oral communication and by increasing opportunities for involvement in the development of communication.
2. To create opportunities for tenants to be involved more widely, including development of existing opportunities to influence decision making, such as through voice4tenants and tenant membership of the Board of Management.
3. To establish support for local tenant groups and encourage their development.
4. To create opportunities for tenants to directly influence service improvements, such as through the Tenant Inspection Service and Consumer Panels – established focus groups for considering services such as Repairs and gas servicing

Objective 1

Effective communication, whether formal or informal, is an essential requirement for the success of this Tenant Participation Strategy. This Strategy is intended to build on the positive working relationship between staff and tenants to promote an environment of mutual respect. We expect United Welsh staff to listen with respect to tenants' views; and we expect tenants to treat staff with respect in return.

Targets:

- 1.1 To continue to provide information on United Welsh services and the standard of service which can be expected; and to provide increased opportunities for tenant involvement in the development and review of service standards.
- 1.2 To continue to provide information about United Welsh performance in providing services and to review performance reporting in response to tenant opinion on what should be reported.
- 1.3 To offer training to tenants who feel that they need to acquire or renew skills, knowledge or experience to enable them to take advantage of opportunities to be involved in improving the flow of information to and from tenants.
- 1.4 To ensure that all information, letters and other publications for tenants are clear and accurate and meet the stated needs and requirements of tenants, including offering a range of formats to meet specified needs and changes in the way people use developing technology.
- 1.5 To ensure that the range of information available meets the needs and requirements of tenants and contributes effectively to the responsibility United Welsh has to provide readily accessible, clear and accurate information and advice.
- 1.6 To develop, with voice4tenants, an accessible tenant information pack to include advice on what information and support is available; how community groups can be started and maintained; the range of options for involvement available to tenants; and whom to contact on a range of decision-making issues.
- 1.7 To ensure that staff and tenants are aware that all communication, written or oral, is of equal importance and is to be treated with respect.

- 1.8 To continue to produce the periodic tenant newsletters Linkup and Focus and to improve tenant involvement in producing them and deciding on their content.
- 1.9 To promote the development of The Hundred Club and conduct regular opportunities for consultation on service changes through it.
- 1.10 To develop effective ways to provide feedback to tenants about changes to policy and services, particularly those made as a result of tenants' views and responses, but also about all other relevant changes; and to ensure that consultation outcomes are promptly reported to affected tenants.
- 1.11 To actively encourage staff to attend tenants' meetings and to monitor the effectiveness of staff involvement.
- 1.12 To continue to develop methods of providing information to tenants such as:
 - Text messaging and e-mails
 - Internet message boards
 - Information stalls at Fun Days and other community events
 - Information stalls at voice4tenants' Local Area Forums
 - Staff input to tenants' meetings
 - Regular issue-specific updates to relevant people on circumstances which directly affect tenants and their homes

Objective 2

Tenants have a legal right to be involved in decision making and the Assembly Government expects United Welsh to maximise tenants' rights to participate as well as to promote equitable rights to participate whatever their tenancy status. We also recognise that people have the right to choose not to participate and seek to provide those who do wish to be involved with opportunities to take part at a level they choose³.

Targets:

- 2.1 To continue to provide a range of options for tenants to be involved in the decision-making processes, including through consultations, Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, The Hundred Club and focus groups, for example; to maintain and further develop opportunities for Supported Housing tenants to become involved through the promotion of the developed Compact structures: and to develop with all tenants new options for involvement, such as local strategies or Compacts⁴ and other formal or informal structures in response to locally identified needs and requirements.
- 2.2 To recognise the right of an individual to choose not to participate but to be honest with such individuals when there is a requirement to consult with all tenants
- 2.3 To continue to provide staff time and resources to develop and promote tenant participation and to ensure that staff at all levels understand the organisation's commitment to tenant participation, are properly trained and have appropriate awareness.

³ A menu of current and planned participation opportunities can be found at Appendix I

⁴ Local Compacts are agreements between local community groups or representatives which inform and govern a positive working relationship between the community, taking account of local circumstances and conditions, and United Welsh as a significant stakeholder in that community. Compacts are developed in addition to the direct provisions of the Tenant Participation strategy and can be used to agree how those provisions can be delivered at a local level.

- 2.4 All teams throughout United Welsh will be required to develop their own Statement of Commitment to Tenant Participation, which will include each team's vision of their contribution to tenant involvement.
- 2.5 We will regularly and extensively review the processes for consultation to ensure that development of them is based on learning from experience and from the introduction of good practice developed elsewhere; and that the processes are effective in gathering views, that those views are considered and outcomes followed through and that a culture of transparency is engendered in which we are open about the influence of tenant opinions on decisions.
- 2.6 To continue to support the development of existing opportunities to influence decision-making through local Tenants' Associations and voice4tenants, to support the development of individuals within them to ensure that they are effective and to maintain systems which enable tenant opinion to be voiced regularly directly to senior managers.
- 2.7 To develop additional strategy to encourage young people in particular to give their views and in doing so accept less traditional forms of feedback within formal decision-making structures; and to encourage a more imaginative approach to consultation generally with an acceptance of less traditional outcomes, such as through art media or other forms of creativity, as valid opinion.
- 2.8 To provide active support and training for individual tenants and groups who wish to acquire skills, knowledge and experience to enable them to participate at their chosen level, such as membership of The Hundred Club; at local community groups and partnerships; within voice4tenants, including membership of the Executive Committee; and membership of the United Welsh Board of Management.
- 2.9 To ensure that the Executive Committee of voice4tenants is consulted on changes in policy and strategy before submission to the Senior Management Team.

Objective 3

The development of local tenant groups and the employment of local knowledge and experience will be a valuable asset in the successful implementation of this Strategy. Through it we will seek to develop constructive working partnerships with local tenant groups and other agencies and to work together to create safe, happy communities which exist in a positive environment.

Targets:

- 3.1 Actively support and encourage the establishment and development of local tenants' associations which are representative of their communities, accountable to their communities and work to clear recognition criteria laid down by United Welsh in conjunction with tenant representatives.
- 3.2 Provide adequate staff and resources to enable practical support to be given to local tenants' associations and to help them develop positive working relationships with other agencies, networks and suitable groups, including directing them to other support organisations where appropriate.
- 3.3 Promote our commitment to accessibility of involvement such as meeting the cost of travel and childcare; ensuring that venues are physically accessible to people with mobility issues; identification and reduction of barriers to individual involvement; on-going development of a range of participation opportunities (including non-traditional

- ones) to ensure that different groups of tenants can actively participate; adoption of the United Welsh BME Strategy into tenant participation; and active encouragement to all tenants' groups through the recognition process to adopt active policies which eliminate discrimination.
- 3.4 Provide training opportunities for local tenants' associations and individuals within them to help to achieve the goal of encouraging the emergence of confident and effective community leaders.
 - 3.5 Provide training opportunities which include tenants, staff and other service providers together with contractors to promote understanding of local needs and the challenges in meeting them.
 - 3.6 Actively encourage involvement by marginalised and under-represented groups and develop a strategy to enable young people and people with support needs, including those living in wider communities, to fully participate in influencing the decision-making process.
 - 3.7 Encourage staff to be more flexible in the way they work with tenants such as by encouraging attendance at evening meetings and explore and seek to reduce barriers to staff attending tenants' meetings.
 - 3.8 Encourage staff to undertake local consultation on local issues.
 - 3.9 Include local tenants' associations in wider consultations on policy and strategy in partnership with the Executive Committee of voice4tenants.
 - 3.10 Provide easily accessible information about the benefits of local area Compacts and support the development of Compacts where local tenants' groups request them.
 - 3.11 In developing and allocating new homes we will work to ensure that any unavoidable disruption to communities, geographical or cultural, is limited and that we actively encourage community cohesion and integration.

Objective 4

Through this Strategy we will develop and strengthen new and existing mechanisms for tenants to directly influence service improvements, establishing voice4tenants as the representative body for United Welsh tenants and formalising a role for a Tenant Inspection Service to improve the transparency of our services and involve tenants in their development.

Targets:

- 4.1 To continue to provide practical and advisory support to voice4tenants through its Executive Committee and to maintain regular dialogue directly between the Executive Committee and United Welsh senior managers.
- 4.2 Encourage voice4tenants to develop its management systems to be representative of all United Welsh tenants, to provide equality of opportunity and to eliminate discrimination.
- 4.3 To provide the Executive Committee of voice4tenants with information, training and resources to enable its members to develop their understanding of the services we provide to tenants and the policies and procedures that make the process work.
- 4.4 To consult with the Executive Committee of voice4tenants on changes in policy and strategy before they are submitted to the Senior Management Team.
- 4.5 To invite representation from voice4tenants to join service improvement working groups.

- 4.6 To support the establishment of a Tenant Inspection Service, providing individual training and resources to enable tenants to undertake service audits, report their findings to United Welsh and its tenants and make recommendations for improvements.
- 4.7 To develop Consumer Panels for services to enable regular exchange of information and views and to ensure that services are developed with direct input from tenants and other service users in an atmosphere of realistic expectations and positive intent for service improvement.

Objective 5: Monitoring Progress

The Strategy will be supported by an operational plan which will set out clear targets and milestones for the future development of tenant participation at United Welsh. It will be important to the success of the Strategy that its progress is both measured and monitored, that there is agreement on what success actually looks like and that there is a clear system of review for the strategy and operational plan.

Targets:

- 5.1 To develop and review an operational plan to support the Strategy; to set out clear goals, milestones and timescales for the implementation and development of the Strategy; to clarify responsibility for implementation and development; and to identify resource requirements for successful implementation.
- 5.2 We will continue to conduct regular Tenant Satisfaction Surveys and future Surveys will include questions directly related to the effectiveness of tenant participation.
- 5.3 We will continue to conduct regular staff surveys and future surveys will include questions directly related to the effectiveness of tenant participation.
- 5.4 The Strategy and associated operational plan will be formally reviewed every three years with interim reviews of both Strategy and the operational plan conducted annually. The review will be overseen by a Tenant Participation Strategic Monitoring Group.
- 5.5 A Tenant Participation Strategic Monitoring Group will be established with terms of reference to cover:
 - Development of a set of indicators against which the development of tenant involvement can be measured and which will indicate the success of the Strategy
 - Monitoring Strategy implementation and review
 - Set annual budget requirements for the implementation of the Operational Plan
 - Monitoring local agreements/Compacts
 - Monitoring commitment by United Welsh, its staff and tenants
 - Monitoring consultation progress and responses
 - Monitoring good practice and ensuring it is shared across areas
 - Develop, monitor and review targets for tenant participation
 - Communicate its findings to tenants and staff