



Valleys to Coast Local Tenant Participation Strategy

Introduction

Tenant participation is a two-way process which occurs when a social landlord, such as Valleys to Coast (V2C) shares information, ideas and decision-making with tenants and works with them to agree:-

- how their homes and local environment should be managed;
- what services and service improvements are needed;
- priorities; and
- how they will work together to achieve them

From its' creation, V2C has seen the potential for large scale housing investment as a kick-start for social and economic renewal. V2C's approach of 'Community Regeneration in Action' therefore seeks to involve all community members in those areas that it serves, including leaseholders and residents as well as tenants.

In line with V2C's inclusive approach to participation that, unless stated otherwise, any reference to 'tenants' in this strategy document will also imply leaseholders, residents and others in the community.

Context of the Strategy in Valleys to Coast (V2C)

The Local Tenant Participation Strategy (LTPS) will provide a guideline to influence the way future V2C strategy and policy documents are developed and to ensure that all tenants are given an equal opportunity to participate, and have a say in the development of V2C's services.

The commitment to this is outlined in two key documents:

- "Valleys to Coast Housing Business Plan 2007-2013" is the overarching strategic plan for V2C, which includes a range of priorities two of which are specific to tenant participation:
 - 'broaden and deepen local involvement and engagement in communities, through Tenant and Resident Association's (TRA's) and other community groups; and

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- 'V2C will promote tenant and resident interest in their communities and in the services delivered by V2C'.
- V2C's 'Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy' states that "V2C is committed to the principle of equality of opportunity in the delivery of its services and in all its employment practices, policies and procedures. V2C aims to ensure that all of its customers and employees are dealt with fairly and that it takes into account the diverse nature of their cultures and backgrounds."

In addition, V2C's 'Service Standards' were developed, and are monitored by the 'Customer Service Panel' made up of tenants, which is already helping to ensure that services are tailored to tenants needs and that V2C is accountable for the delivery of those services.

Development of the Strategy

V2C formed a working group (the LTPS Group) of tenants and staff to review its' existing "Resident Participation Strategy" and update in response to the Welsh Assembly Governments "National Tenant Participation Strategy and accompanying guidance on developing Local Tenant Participation Strategies". The group completed a one day training course with TPAS Cymru on the National Strategy and attended an event arranged by TPAS to share ideas with other social landlords.

The LTPS Group met on a regular basis to look at V2C's current participation arrangements and to develop the LTPS and Action Plan (copy attached). Tenants were given the opportunity to comment on the new document via the Customer Service Panel, established Tenant and Resident groups, the V2C website and through an article in the Voice of Change newsletter. V2C staff members were also consulted prior to the LTPS Group deciding on the final format.

The Vision

The vision agreed by the LTPS Group for developing participation is:

'Valleys to Coast will involve tenants, residents, leaseholders and community groups in all areas of its work. V2C encourages and empowers using a range of methods that suit everyone's needs.'

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Aim

To improve V2C services and communities by developing tenant, resident and leaseholder participation.

Objectives

The objectives to help achieve this aim are:

- Mainstream participation throughout all staff and service areas of the organisation to develop a meaningful relationship with tenants
- To be open, honest, clear and prompt with all information provided and involve tenants in the reviewing and development of information
- To offer a range of participation methods and opportunities to encourage everyone to become involved
- To promote the message of participation throughout the county borough to generate greater involvement from tenants in a range of activities and forums

Scope of Participation

The strategy will work to the following key principles:

- Be inclusive of all V2C staff and Board members
- Be inclusive of everyone within the communities in which V2C works, and work with specific groups of tenants where necessary
- Assist in overcoming barriers (literacy, disability, language, transport etc) allowing anyone to become involved
- Ask tenants how they wish to participate and respond to their needs and wishes
- Be sustainable with support and resources from V2C
- To involve tenants in additional activities not just housing issues and use new approaches to work with established organisations within the community such as Communities First, Bridgend County Borough Council, Groundwork and the local health board.

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Participation Options

Since the transfer of the Bridgend County Borough Council's housing stock to V2C in 2003 the number of involved tenants has started to rise from a low base but remains small in relation to the number of properties when compared to a long-established, traditional, housing association.

V2C's Customer Survey 2007 indicated that there is a possible low level of awareness of participation opportunities amongst tenants, and that a high number of respondents did not wish to be involved in how their homes and services are managed.

To achieve V2C's aim for higher levels of tenant participation, it is therefore critical that, through the LTPS, V2C actively promotes and maintains a broad range of participation options, adopting new approaches that are flexible and responsive to the needs and aspirations within the communities in which V2C works.

Current information and access to it

The following information is currently available from V2C and staff will work with tenants to ensure that they remain current and are accessible and available in a variety of suitable formats.

- Tenancy Agreement - issued to all V2C tenants
- Tenant Handbook - issued to all V2C tenants on signing the tenancy
- Lease Agreement - one issued for each leasehold property
- Leaseholder Handbook - sent to all leaseholders
- Voice of Change Newsletter - sent to all V2C tenants and leaseholders every quarter
- Information leaflets – are available on various V2C services either on request or at the Customer Services Centre
- Getting Involved leaflet- advising of the opportunities which are available
- Website - contains news and information in relation to V2C
- V2C's Annual Review- issued to all shareholders and on the V2C website

Current participation opportunities

V2C is committed to trying new approaches both formal and informal of involving tenants both in improving services and local communities. V2C recognises that not all tenants wish to participate in the same way, therefore will continue to promote a variety of different ways (both individual and collective) to involve people including:

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- Voice of Change Newsletter Editorial Panel
- Customer Service Panel
- Formal Complaints process
- Local Consultation Road Shows
- Questionnaires
- Fun days
- Door knocking, one to one consultation
- Tenant and Resident groups
- Tenant members on the Board of Management
- Sheltered Housing Forum
- Focus Groups and Working Groups
- Website feedback form
- Drop in meetings
- Shareholder Membership and V2C AGM
- Providing representation at events that are organised by other agencies

V2C recognises that there are barriers to participation and will try to overcome them for tenants through means such as:

- Arranging and reimbursing transport costs
- Arranging and reimbursing child care costs
- Holding meetings in facilities with appropriate disabled access
- Holding meetings at a range of times to ensure everyone has an opportunity to be involved
- Providing information in a range of formats if necessary

Delivery

Under the objectives of the strategy, tenant participation is the responsibility of everyone working for and on behalf of V2C. For staff, this will be underpinned with on-going training and monitoring as part of V2C's Personal Development Review process.

The LTPS Group will oversee the implementation of the LTPS and within V2C; the Community Regeneration Team is responsible for delivering the LTPS.

It is recognised that there are many ways for participation and engagement to be effective and therefore V2C will ensure that methods will be innovative and flexible to meet the aspirations of our communities.

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Resources

V2C has in the region of 5600 tenant properties and 740 leaseholder properties. There is an annual budget available for participation activities, tenant training, tenant group funding within V2C areas and the production of the V2C Voice of Change Newsletter.

The budget will be reviewed annually and the LTPS Group will also seek to ensure that tenant participation is being adequately funded and is meeting the needs of the communities it seeks to serve.

Training

An on-going training programme will be developed to ensure the LTPS becomes a major element in the delivery of V2C's core business. A further programme of training will also be developed for the LTPS Group.

Publicity of the strategy

The strategy and the progress made in implementing it will be publicised to all V2C tenants in a variety of ways, for example:

- Through the Voice of Change Newsletter
- On the V2C website
- Through recognised tenant and community groups
- Internally using the intranet and bulletins for staff and Board Members
- Through the Customer Service Panel
- Through a new leaflet on tenant participation
- At V2C Customer Events
- Through the local media
- At other community events and through local agencies

Monitoring and Review

The LTPS Group will meet on a quarterly basis to monitor and evaluate progress against the Action Plan and produce regular progress reports for V2C's Board, staff and tenants. This process will ensure that V2C is responding to and adapting the LTPS to achieve the desired objectives.

A thorough review of the strategy will be undertaken by the end of 2011.