

ALMOND HOUSING ASSOCIATION COMMUNITY IMPACT STRATEGY



CEO Introduction

Welcome to Almond's first ever Community Impact Strategy which outlines our determination and approach to facilitating and achieving even greater impact on the communities we serve. We have a proud history of providing community support and for ensuring the voice of our tenants is heard.

However, now more than ever, there is a need for us to play our part in a more impactful way. Whilst continuing to deliver the many engagement and community support activities that we have delivered previously our new approach signals an intent to do more. Our aim is to work with the community to deliver more tangible, practical interventions which will enable individuals and families to develop and improve their life chances via training and employability opportunities directly with the association.

We are confident that we can leverage our spending power in a more meaningful and impactful way to create real life employment opportunities which will benefit both local people and the business.

We are determined to move towards our recently agreed company vision 'Striving to Improve Life Experiences and Opportunities'. This Community Impact Strategy is integral to progressing towards that vision.

I look forward to seeing the action plan translated into tangible outcomes. At a time when the economic climate will make this more challenging, the positive impact of delivering those outcomes will be even more significant.



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Our Approach

We know that building strong communities is as important as providing a home, so this over-arching strategy is focused on outlining how we will help to create sustainable and resilient communities that people want to live in. We want to meet the wider needs of our tenants and their communities by developing and delivering services that are beyond our core activities of managing and developing housing.

Now more than ever, people need a sense of ownership of their community and to feel and genuinely be empowered and listened to, to drive change. At the time of writing we are also in the midst of one of the biggest cost of living crisis ever seen. As such support and assistance to tenants wherever possible either directly or via partners is integral to our approach. We will therefore focus on promoting effective engagement and participation to help communities achieve greater control and influence in the decisions and circumstances that affect their lives. Ensuring outcomes that result in them being as supported as much possible during such challenging times will be crucial.

Development of this strategy was carried out by consulting with:

- **The Tenants Focus Group;** A voluntary group of around a dozen tenants who act as scrutiny panel
- **The Tenant Consultation Group;** A list of tenants who have agreed to be communicated with electronically or by post so we can get their views in a way that is quick and easy for them
- **Almond Employees;** The views of our team were considered as they work directly with our tenants and know them well
- **The Associations Board;** our board is required to consider the overall direction of the organisation and input and approve any strategies such as this one
- **An independent review** of our approach to Tenant Participation via our Internal Audit programme



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Our Objectives

1. Tenant Participation. Listen to tenants and their communities to innovate and improve.

2. Community Engagement. Work to ensure there is a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions. Collaborate with our community partners to build on strengths and assets in our communities and to deliver the right services at the right time.

3. Training and employment. We will explore and promote opportunities for our tenants to develop skills and confidence and move into sustainable employment. In particular, we will aim to support those who are furthest from the employment market.

To ensure we meet our objectives we have developed individual action plans for each objective with a range of metrics to monitor our progress.



We are aware of the intrinsic link between the above objectives and so whilst separate strategic action plans are in place to ensure that we deliver across the various areas we have brought them together under this wider Community Impact Strategy.

Our aim is to ensure that we can direct the required resources to deliver on the separate strategic action plans identified whilst at the same time ensuring that all of our activity is inter-linked and collaborative to ensure the best outcomes for our communities.

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Tenant Participation

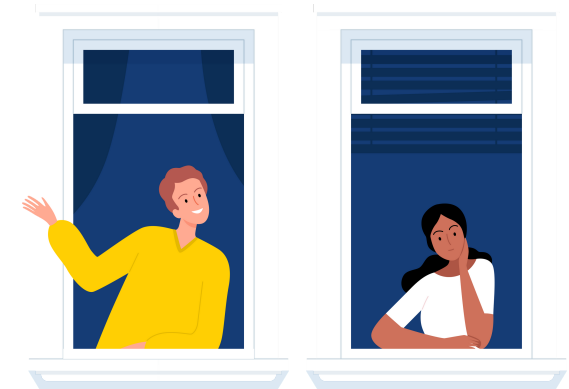
Why?

We need to be sure we are providing the right services and levels of service. We want tenants to help scrutinise, influence and co-create services.

When working well, Tenant Participation (TP) delivers clear benefits for tenants and the Association.

These include:

- ✓ better service delivery and improved outcomes for tenants which give value for money;
- ✓ working together for common goals with respect and understanding;
- ✓ informed and knowledgeable tenants who have the skills and confidence to influence decisions;
- ✓ increased tenant satisfaction with their home and neighbourhood;
- ✓ identifying actions for service and performance improvements and working together to implement these recommended improvements.



How?

The framework below identifies the current methods of participation. One of our key actions is to review this approach, consult with customers on which methods are most effective and consider new methods.

The main aim of this Tenant Participation strategy is to put you our customers, at the heart of our decision making processes. To help achieve this, we recognise that a different approach needs to be taken compared to previous strategies in an effort to make engagement easier.

Our intention is to create a menu of involvement which identifies the time commitment and impact of each method. As we move forward with our digital improvement agenda our approach will also make use of technology to make it easy for tenants to get involved.

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Tenant Participation Strategy



Current participation framework

We currently have a variety of methods for you to engage with us. As outlined in the introduction a review of this framework is a key action within this strategy.

- **Tenants focus group;** Focus Groups are a popular way for tenants to get involved partly because they usually 'focus' on one issue at a time, such as reviewing a particular policy or a set of standards. They can also carry out an assessment of a specific activity, such as repairs. They meet for just as long as it takes to complete the project. Meetings are normally held monthly.
- **Tenant consultation group;** The Consultation Register is a list of tenants who have said they are happy to be asked their views regularly by letter or questionnaire, or who wish to be kept informed about Focus Group meetings. If you choose to join the Register you don't have to comment about everything we send you. You can choose what is of interest to you and just give your views on these matters. If you respond to at least one consultation per year, you will be entered into our good tenants award with a chance to win £250.
- **Short term working groups;** These can be made up of volunteers from the focus group, consultation group or just tenants who are interested in a particular subject that we want to look at in more detail with you.
- **Tenant Surveys;** These can be large surveys such as our Profiling one done in 2022 or the full survey done every 3 years. There are smaller ones also done on specific services, such as repairs, improvements and customer services which are often done digitally for a quick and easy response.
- **Tenant Led inspections;** These can be requested any time by local groups or even informally with your Housing Officer or the Community Engagement Officer.
- **Community projects and tenant events;** When we run events we will take the opportunity to ask your view on our services, such as seasonal events or community garden events.
- **Registered Tenants Groups;** Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) were introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and give important rights to groups who register with their landlord. Representing residents living in an area or street, their aim is to put forward views and concerns about their community so they can contribute in the decision-making processes around services we provide. When groups register it enables a recognised role in our decision making process. We are committed to assisting groups get started and keep running through a variety of resources such as training, guidance and administration.

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Tenant Participation

How we'll keep you informed

- **The AlmondView;** Our Quarterly information leaflet- which will be offered in digital format to reduce environmental waste and costs
- **Our Website;** Our website will be a convenient source of information for our customers 24/7
- **Social Media;** We'll use social media to keep you up to date with new and important information
- **Paper and electronic correspondence;** Traditional methods will not be discarded for customers that still want a letter but, when we can, we will use electronic correspondence
- **Annual Return of the Charter;** We will circulate our performance each year for your review
- **Annual Report at AGM;** We will always update our members at the AGM of our activities



What will we consult on?

- Policies and procedures relating to housing management and repairs services, for example allocation homes, rent setting and service charges, rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, estate management, repairs, planned maintenance.
- Service standards relating to housing management, repairs and maintenance.
- Future Tenant Participation Strategies.
- Priorities for the Capital Works programme
- Annual Assurance Statement, Annual Report and Charter Report.

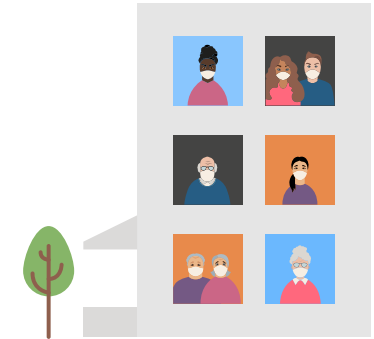
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Tenant Participation

Improving our approach

The following actions will be undertaken to develop our approach to Tenant Participation:

- Review current participation framework and develop a new menu of involvement in line with tenant aspirations.
- As part of above consider how we can increase tenant engagement at all levels within the organisation including representation at Board level
- Review our methods of communication with tenants
- An appropriate approach to tenant training will be included within the refreshed TP Strategy
- We recommend that the Association look to define the remits of both the Tenant Focus Group and the Consultant List to stop a duplication of effort and to ensure that roles on both are well defined
- Our refreshed TP Strategy will identify the different methods of involvement and include clear remits for each method alongside Terms of Reference and membership criteria.
- We will develop quarterly reporting on our new transactional customer satisfaction surveys as part of our KPI pack which will provide a high level overview to Board of the outcome of surveys completed
- We recommend that the Association consider further use of the electronic system and if the paper based surveys represent value for money.



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Tenant Participation Strategy

Financial impact of proposed

- Full Survey costs Approx £15K
- Survey software £15K
- Events administration and expenses £2K



Success measures

- Increased interest in participation since 2019 survey (91.5% stated not interested in participation)
- Continued (90+%) high satisfaction with opportunities to participate. Was 94% in 2019.
- Tenant approved Tenant Participation strategy in place
- Increased methods to engage made available.
- Increased numbers of tenant participation across our menu of involvement including representation at Board level



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Community Engagement



Why?

We are committed to developing and supporting resilient thriving communities where our housing stock sits. Our well-established community relationships and joint working partnerships have assisted us to date in delivering programmes in line with the mission and values of the Association and we hope these foundations will continue to allow us to do so.

We are committed to using our skills and community investment activities to contribute to social progress and create opportunities that can help empower and improve the lives of local people, helping to build community capacity. We view both tenant participation, local accountability and community empowerment, along with the feedback we receive from all our stakeholders, as essential tools for assessing how we operate, deliver change and adapt to ensure essential services are provided to everyone residing within the communities we serve.

We also aim to harness the wealth of insight and learning that we gain through the community initiatives we support each year to benefit our customers, community partners and our business.

We are committed to funding our community engagement activities either directly or by working in partnership, whilst ensuring value for money and financial scrutiny.



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Community Engagement

How?

Action taken:

- Consult and engage with our communities, maximising opportunities for local involvement in developing place-based services designed to meet their specific needs
- Co-produce community-based events and activities that support people to build and maintain relationships, increase connection to their community and feel part of it, increasing their ability to adapt to adversity in a positive way
- Deliver careful targeted well-managed community investment fund activity that levels in other resources, including community benefit pledges from our contractors and make sure every pound goes further
- Increase the level of digital inclusion by improving access, support and resources to help people achieve maximum personal, household and community benefit from the information and services available via the internet
- Increase financial inclusion by ensuring wide availability of information about, and assistance with, access to welfare benefits, homestarter packs, food, fuel and budgeting skills
- Support community wellbeing and positive development by working in close partnership with local organisations to reduce poverty, deprivation and isolation, and improve employability, health outcomes and access to beneficial information and services.



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Community Engagement

Success Measures

Success for AHA is about harnessing all available resources to maximise the production of social value. For all of our community engagement activities we will measure the impact and will set measurable outcomes using the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) tool measuring participating, monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

This will help us demonstrate our return on investment in the following categories:

- Social value: use existing resources to deliver more social outcomes and wider benefits for our neighbourhoods that make them better places to live
- Resident and community benefits: improving the lives of our residents and local communities in terms of better health and employment opportunities
- Business benefits: the reduction of some of the key performance indicators e.g. void levels. Rent arrears, anti-social behaviour
- We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we have learned to improve our future community engagement.



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Training and Employment

Why?

As a housing association based in the heart of the community, we are well placed to provide employment opportunities and dedicated programmes which support progress into employment. Our aim is to adopt a place-based approach to empower and assist tenants who are not in employment to access the relevant training and skills they need to get into work. We are committed to exploring all avenues of guidance, support and practical help that is available to help Almond tenants overcome barriers to employment and in work poverty.

We will promote opportunities for our tenants to develop skills and confidence and move into sustainable employment and support those who are furthest from the employment market.

Working with partners in West Lothian such as local colleges and training providers our aim is to provide real life training opportunities where local people benefit from real life experience and recognised qualifications. Whilst our initial approach is likely to involve delivery via community partner organisations over the longer-term we will utilise our subsidiary, Almond Enterprises Limited (AEL) to help deliver the training and employment opportunities and this is also reflected in AEL's business plan. We have significant opportunity to provide training opportunities via our core work with examples being void decorating and environmental works such as fencing programmes.

In combination with our overall approach we will also consider how we can gain better value from our office building and will explore the potential for offering the space to local partners for use as a training and employability resource.

In addition we are currently exploring how our office space may be used to provide a daily resource centre or 'heat hub' providing support to tenants during the acute Cost of Living crisis.



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Training and Employment

How?

Action taken:

- Wherever possible we will work with our contractors through community benefit activity to create employment and training opportunities for our tenants.
- We will seek to identify grant funding where possible and make best use of The Wage Subsidy, offered through WLC Job Creation Fund and other key initiatives.
- Assess the viability of different approaches to training and modern apprenticeships via an independent Skills Development Scotland assessment.
- We will position ourselves alongside third sector partners to work with West Lothian Council Employability team, establishing ourselves as key partners in shaping and potentially delivering programmes.
- We will develop and encourage more opportunities for people to volunteer to gain meaningful skills, confidence and for groups and individuals to connect and support each other.
- Consult with potential local partners on how they can help us take forward the opportunities we have identified re training & employability opportunities.
- Explore provision of training opportunities via our core work with examples being void decorating and environmental works such as fencing programmes.
- Consider how we can gain better value from our office building and will explore the potential for offering the space to local partners for use as a training and employability resource.
- Explore the establishment of a 'heat hub' / community resource for tenants during the current Cost of Living crisis.



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Training and Employment

Success Measures

We will use the Wellbeing Calculator from the Housing Associations Charitable Trust (HACT) to provide a value in pounds for changes to an individual's wellbeing, such as unemployment into work.

Monitoring the strategy

- Action plan progress reports to senior management
- Strategy progress reports to AHA Board
- Updates to tenants on progress via Almond view and Almond Web site



Equal Opportunities

We will encourage equal opportunities and diversity, responding to the different needs and service requirements of people regardless of sex, race, colour, disability, age, nationality, marriage and civil partnership, ethnic origin, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation or gender reassignment.

We are not just required by law but fully support equalities legislation and regulatory frameworks, including the Equalities Act 2010 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014.

We aim to:

- Remove barriers to participation
- Ensure that our Focus Group, Consultation Groups and any registered tenant organisations (RTOs) promote equal opportunities and are open and accessible to all tenants
- Proactively involve traditionally excluded groups
- Provide support and encouragement so that equal opportunities are at the centre of all our activities.