

Nomination Form

Excellence in Digital Engagement



TIS National Excellence Awards 2024

The **TIS National Excellence awards** recognise and celebrate housing organisations, staff, volunteers, tenants, residents, and community groups **who are leading the way and making positive change in the Scottish social housing sector.**

Categories honour excellence in everything **from partnership working, tenant participation and scrutiny practice, to digital creativity and innovation.** Hotly anticipated, the awards offer a seal of approval for the most outstanding work.

Finalists are selected by an expert and independent judging panel, and **winners announced at an awards ceremony on Thursday 7th November 2024 at the Grand Central Hotel in Glasgow.**

The closing date for applications is 5:00pm on Thursday 11th July 2024. TIS accepts submissions in more than one award category.

Category Overview

The **Excellence in Digital Engagement** award recognises housing organisations who have demonstrated creativity in developing meaningful digital engagement opportunities.

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly changed the way that housing organisations engage with their tenants and communities. Traditional methods to get involved are now enriched by new technologies, innovative practices, and online communication tools to ensure tenants and communities stayed connected.

Submissions must **evidence how the organisation has worked collaboratively with tenants, residents, and communities to broaden the reach of engagement** by offering innovative, digital engagement opportunities and more, flexible choices to participate.

Who you can nominate

This award is open to housing organisations operating across the Scottish social housing sector.

About you

Please note information about the individual, organisation, or group submitting the application:

Name	Tracy Noles
Position	Service Development Officer
Organisation	Aberdeenshire Council
Email address	Tracy.noles@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
Telephone number	01467 532 866

About the nominee

Please note information about the housing organisation you are nominating:

Organisation	Aberdeenshire Council
Email address	c/o tracy.noles@aberdeenshire.gov.uk
Telephone number	01467 532 866

Background

Maximum 250 words

Please outline background information about the housing organisation that you are nominating.

For example, detail:

- The background of the organisation, including: total number of homes, total number of employees, and the geographical areas the organisation covers, etc.
- A brief overview of their current tenant participation, scrutiny, and wider engagement methods.

Aberdeenshire Council is a local authority based in based in the north east of Scotland. Aberdeenshire Council provides housing and housing services for over 13,100 households covering a wide geographic area, broken down to 6 management areas (Kincardine & Mearns, Marr, Garioch, Formartine, Buchan, and Banff & Buchan).

Aberdeenshire Council's housing service offers a range of ways for tenants to participate. The current strategy, approved in 2019, focuses on offering a menu of choice for tenants to have their say in services. At present, this can be done through:

- Formal working groups involving tenants and members of staff which meet on a regular basis. These can be joined in person, online, or via a hybrid meeting style.
- Sheltered Housing Tenants Forum: a tenant group for any sheltered housing tenant.
- Membership of Registered Tenant Organisations (3 currently registered)
- Involvement in scrutiny panels via the Sheltered Housing Tenants' Forum or Tenant Assessment Group (TAG)
- One-off consultations which can be facilitated through
 - Online survey
 - Small focus groups (in person and/or online)
 - In-depth interview
- Taking part in Member-Officer Working Groups. Elected Members, Council Officers, and Tenants meet to discuss and make recommendations to Committee. Recent groups include
 - Rent Strategy
 - Business Planning
- Inclusion of Tenants alongside Committee to discuss housing issues with elected members
- Taking part in estate walk-about
- Giving feedback by taking part in new-build inspections
- Input into the content and style of online bulletins and newsletters

...and more!

Actions

Maximum 500 words

Please outline specific actions the housing organisation has taken to develop meaningful digital engagement opportunities.

For example, outline:

- The organisation's reason to develop digital engagement opportunities.
- How the organisation worked collaboratively with tenants, residents, and communities to develop digital engagement opportunities.
- An overview of the digital engagement opportunities that the organisation embraced.
- How the organisation explored innovative new ways to reach more people to get involved.
- How the organisation has championed digital engagement opportunities within their organisation.
- The work involved and their overall aim.

Aberdeenshire Council (AC) has demonstrated a strong commitment to working collaboratively with tenants, residents, and communities to broaden the reach of engagement, especially during challenging times like the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. We have achieved this by undertaking the following:

Increased Digital Offerings

AC recognized the importance of leveraging digital platforms to engage with a broader audience and has used various tools and communication channels to reach out to tenants and residents effectively.

Facebook Engagement

AC's Tenant Participation Team actively promotes its Facebook page during events and encourages tenants to invite their friends who are also tenants. This fosters a sense of community and allows for information sharing and engagement in a familiar and accessible online space. The tenant participation team have used QR codes for the past year which link to the Facebook group, and membership has increased by approximately 30%.

Sway - Accessible and Real-time Updates

AC implemented the use of Sway, a newsletter-style tool that provides accessible content for screen readers and allows for real-time updates on a "live document" basis. By using this tool, AC reduced the need for printed material and ensured that timely information could be shared even during dynamic situations like the pandemic, cost of living crisis, and extreme weather events to publish real time updates.

Tenant-Led Newsletters

AC, in collaboration with the tenants' Communications Group, has shifted the focus of their newsletters to be more tenant-led and focused on longer-term news. This decision was made based on discussions with tenants, ensuring that the content is relevant and valuable to them. The Communications Group now take a monthly editorial oversight of the newsletter by meeting online using Microsoft Teams – the tenant participation team make design and wording changes based on feedback in these meetings.

Assisting Tenants with Internet Access

Through a partnership with Good Things Foundation's Online Centres Networks, AC gained access to the databank. This enables AC to provide mobile data across three networks to tenants who lack or have insufficient internet access, thereby ensuring inclusivity in digital offerings.

AC actively engages with tenants who do not have internet access to understand their needs and find suitable solutions, offering assistance through the databank and provide mifi units with a sim card to ensure access to digital resources.

Secured Funding

Tracy Noles, Service Development Officer, has successfully accessed over £800,000 of funding between 2020 and the present time. This funding has been used for various initiatives, including multiple rounds of Connecting Scotland, procuring additional laptops and wifi solutions (typically, mifi's) for tenants, and procurement of shopping vouchers for tenants experiencing food and fuel poverty, or other financial difficulties.

Based on tenant feedback about the databank's compatibility with devices, the Tracy utilized the Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery (LACER) fund to procure non-network specific mifi units. This decision aimed to enhance accessibility and usage of the databank for tenants.

By adopting these strategies and initiatives, AC has demonstrated its dedication to working collaboratively with tenants, residents, and communities to ensure that digital engagement opportunities are inclusive, relevant, and accessible to all, especially during times of crisis and beyond.

Outcomes

Maximum 700 words

Please outline positive outcomes achieved as a result of the housing organisation developing meaningful digital engagement opportunities.

For example, detail the impact on:

- Opportunities that have emerged as a result of introducing digital engagement options.
- Offering more, flexible participation options, that offer more choice and opportunities to get involved.
- Extending the reach of tenants, residents, and communities.
- The delivery of housing services.
- The improvement of satisfaction levels.
- Communication, strengthening relationships, and partnership working.
- The inclusion and lasting benefits of tenants, residents, and communities.
- The skills and knowledge of other tenants, residents, and communities.
- How others can learn from the organisation's good practice now and in the future.

Opportunities from Digital Engagement Options

The introduction of digital engagement options, such as Facebook, Sway, and the myAberdeenshire app, facilitated by distribution of tech through Connecting Scotland and the Databank, has provided tenants, residents, and communities with new opportunities to connect and participate. These digital platforms enable real-time updates and accessible information sharing, reducing the reliance on printed materials. The use of online tools has allowed AC to engage with a broader audience, including those who may have previously been difficult to reach through traditional means.

More Flexible Participation Options

By shifting the focus of newsletters to be more tenant-led and offering various digital channels for engagement, the AC has provided tenants with more flexible participation options. This approach allows individuals to choose the level and frequency of their involvement, empowering them to engage in a way that suits their preferences and availability. This flexibility fosters a sense of ownership and inclusivity in decision-making processes.

Extended Reach of Tenants, Residents, and Communities

Through digital initiatives and the databank partnership, AC has extended its reach to tenants who may have lacked internet access or faced barriers to participation. The provision of mifi units and access to mobile data has bridged the digital divide, ensuring that more individuals can benefit from AC's housing services and engagement opportunities.

Exemplifying forward-thinking approaches, Tracy, alongside Aberdeenshire Council's digital engagement team, is targeting council tenancies eligible for R100 Project who are not on current upgrade plans. This plays a crucial role in future-proofing the properties in terms of digital infrastructure. By embracing such long-term planning, AC ensures that the communities it serves will continue to enjoy the advantages of superfast broadband well into the future.

Improved Satisfaction Levels

AC's focus on tenant-led news and more inclusive communication methods has likely contributed to higher satisfaction levels among tenants, residents, and communities. By involving them in shaping the content and delivery of information, AC demonstrates its commitment to meeting their needs and preferences, resulting in increased satisfaction and trust in their services.

The first fully collaborative tenants' newsletter was printed and issued in June 2024. It included 4 tenant-submissions of articles and updates. The newsletter received 3 formal compliments and many informal compliments on the more engaging style and design.

Strengthened Communication and Partnership Working

The utilization of various digital platforms has strengthened communication between AC and its stakeholders. By actively promoting the use of social media, live bulletins, and the app, AC has facilitated two-way communication, allowing tenants and residents to provide feedback and engage in dialogue. Additionally, the partnerships with Good Things Foundation and the LACER Fund demonstrate the AC's collaborative approach to working with external entities, fostering stronger relationships and improving service delivery.

Inclusion and Lasting Benefits

AC's emphasis on accessibility and inclusivity through digital offerings and databank assistance ensures that no tenant is left behind due to internet limitations. This inclusive approach leads to lasting benefits, such as improved access to information, increased involvement in decision-making processes, and a sense of belonging within the community.

AC are also using the Databank facility to assist with connectivity for Sheltered Housing Tenants to promote scheme-to-scheme meetings, and participation in the Sheltered Housing Tenant Forum as well as participation in scrutiny related to the Sheltered Housing Review have increased.

AC also used both in person and online meetings using Microsoft Teams to undertake its Business Plan Review. The use of digital engagement allowed for an additional 4 groups to take place – feedback from attendee's included that this method was preferred for those tenants who work during the day, and/or are parents/caregivers.

Enhanced Skills and Knowledge Sharing

By involving tenants and residents in the creation and promotion of news through digital channels, AC encourages knowledge sharing and skill development among its stakeholders. Those involved in the tenant-led initiatives may gain valuable experience in communication, content creation, and community engagement, empowering them to contribute positively in other aspects of their lives.

For example, within the Communications Group, guest speakers – such as from the Council's corporate communications team – come to discuss various strategies with tenants so they can upskill, or provide articles for the newsletter on a tenant-to-tenant basis discussing a piece of work the council is undertaking that will affect tenants.

Learning from Good Practice

Other organisations, teams, and tenants can learn from the demonstrated good practices of AC in using digital engagement options and fostering collaborative partnerships. By sharing their experiences and success stories, AC can serve as a role model for other housing service providers

looking to broaden their engagement, improve satisfaction levels, and promote lasting benefits for their tenants, residents, and communities.

In conclusion, AC's proactive approach to introducing digital engagement options and collaborative efforts has led to various positive outcomes. These outcomes include expanded participation opportunities, extended reach, improved housing services, increased satisfaction levels, strengthened communication and partnerships, lasting benefits for tenants and residents, enhanced skills and knowledge sharing, and a valuable example of good practice for others to follow.

2024

The recent 2024 Tenant Satisfaction Survey demonstrated tenants are satisfied with the approach currently being taken and further developed:

“The majority of tenants are very or fairly satisfied with the opportunities given to them to participate in the Housing Service’s decision-making processes (77%, up from 73% in 2021).”

What makes this nominee stand out from the rest?

Maximum 100 words

Please provide a short testimonial on why this housing organisation deserves to win.

The use of digital engagement has allowed a clear line of accessibility between tenants, the housing service, and elected members – giving a clear voice from tenants to decision makers. It has allowed an increase tenant participation in the governance process means the Housing Service can clearly demonstrate the amount of consultation undertaken and clearly detail tenants’ preferences for service priorities and standards. Results are referred for discussion to tenant working groups for comment, to Member-Officer Working Groups (which include tenants, housing staff, and elected members), and onto Committee (which includes tenant representation for comment). Tenants have expressed they have a greater understanding of the decision making process and where their views can be put forward in the most effective way.

Declaration

As the proposer I have completed this nomination form to the best of my knowledge, and the information provided is a true representation of the nominee’s achievements.

Name	Tracy Noles
Signature	T NOLES
Date	02.08.24

Thank you for taking the time to complete this nomination form.

Please submit your nomination by **5:00pm on Thursday 11th July 2024** to TIS by email at: **info@tis.org.uk** or by post to: **TIS – Clockwise Offices, 77 Renfrew Street, Glasgow, G2 3BZ.**

Next steps

- **All applications will be acknowledged on receipt by TIS.** If you do not receive acknowledgement within 3 working days, please contact us to ensure your application has been received.
- An **independent judging panel** will rate your application against the award criteria. The panel will consist of representatives from organisations across the Scottish social rented sector.
- Your award submission will provide the basis for both the shortlist and final decision of the winning entry.
- **TIS welcomes applications in more than one award category.**
- Please ensure you answer all questions as fully as possible and keep the content of your nomination focused – avoid exceeding the suggested word count.
- **TIS will inform all proposers of the outcome of their application Thursday 29th August 2024.**
- Finalists will be invited to the **TIS National Excellence Awards Ceremony**, as part of the TIS National Housing Conference and Exhibition, on **Thursday 7th November 2024** at the Grand Central Hotel in Glasgow.