

# Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland Annual Conference 11 June 2022

## Background and participants

TPAS supports tenants to gain the skills, knowledge, and experience to engage effectively with their landlord to make things better for them, their home, and their community.

Two sessions took place. A parliamentary awareness session where we gathered basic information about participants understanding and awareness of the Scottish Parliament and a second session on Barriers to Engagement.

Fourteen people took part in the workshop.

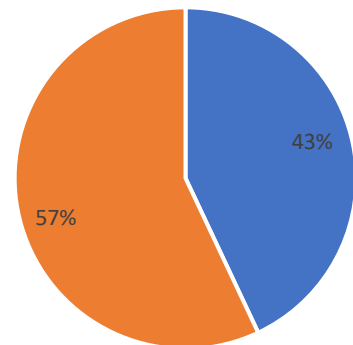
Participants had experience of a disability and/or living on a low income and live in social housing from across Scotland.



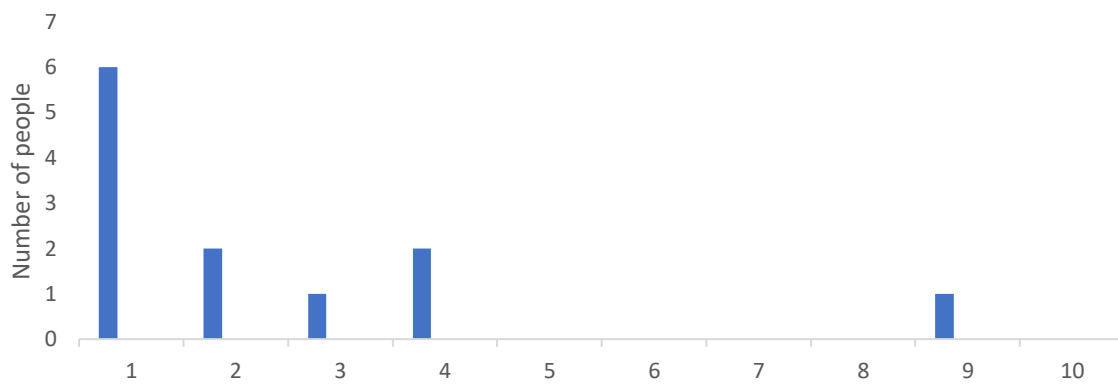
### Have you ever engaged with the Scottish Parliament before?

Yes 6

No 8



### How connected to the Scottish Parliament do you feel?



If 1 is not connected at all and 10 was very connected.

The results show most people do not feel connected, with six people scoring themselves at number 1 and the rest low scores apart from one person at 9.

## **Discussion**

### **If you have engaged with the Scottish parliament before? What have you done?**

- I feel more engaged through the networks like TPAS.
- Very much aware of it see on tv, vote and feel connected.
- I have been involved with MSPs and attended meetings and taken part in committee meetings.
- I feel very connected as they had been involved in Cross Party Groups and invited to attend Committee meetings. Harder to connect as an individual. (Retired director Federation of Small Business owners one of the biggest lobbying bodies in Scotland. Here now as a tenant representative living in supported housing.
- I met an MSP at an unrelated event and had a chat with the MSP and they invited me to go to CPG and got more involved.

### **What is getting in the way of you getting involved?**

- Time - the amount of emails I go for further consultations was just too much.
- The reason I have not been involved is through lack of knowledge. And I would feel intimidated going into that building. I would have a sense of imposter syndrome and would not feel that I have something valuable to say. I have disabilities. Would that be catered for? I really don't know. It's imposing and intimidating, full of clever people and MSPs. It's not for me.
- "Not everyone feels like that. I don't feel like that. My attitude is that they work for me".
- I have been involved in a climate change thing at local level. I felt oh my god these are middle income, people involved in changing the plant. I don't fit here as I am on benefits and am disabled. That is a big issue for me walking into that place.
- Your impression is, it's a huge building that you feel you are not allowed to go in.
- Separate what Parliament does and the politicians. You can still be part of that despite all the politics. Once I got involved. I sit on A CPPG you can be

part of decision making and what is going on. That is inspiring. Take the politics is out of it.

- Two people described positive experiences of being invited to be involved in Cross Party Groups.
- They don't intimidate me in the slightest. I have never been given the opportunity. It is never communicated that is possible.
- I used to be really intimidated – One thing, when you phone now there is no signposting on the switch board to tell you what department, or MSP you can contact. Politicians are just people that went to primary school.....; an MSP would be no where without the aides that work from them. If you want to lobby and MSP make friends with their staff.'
- For people who work full time. No opportunity to get to Parliament through the day. There should be, like on a jury, support travel. I have an expectation that someone else will do it for me. I've looked before at online consultations. Looked at other people's responses and that makes me think they have done it better and then I think they have done it anyway.
- If it's anything like getting tenants involved. 'What's the point and they won't do anything anyway, its already decided.
- The main reason is people will get involved in something that directly affects them. Looking to see what it is that people care about and asking them.
- If you think someone is listening to you. Or even someone saying thank you. Then in the months ahead getting something to acknowledge.
- There was a discussion over the confusion over who the consultations are from. Scottish Government or Scottish Parliament and many in the group, even those involved in Cross Party Groups sometimes had found it hard to distinguish.

**There were comments about the perception of MSPs being on holiday and not listening.**

- The long holidays, they are never there.
- Lack of listening.

**A discussion about the format and amount of information provided:**

- The documents, there is a lot of verbiage. You could precis it down. You lose interest in a couple of minutes because the language is way out there
- It's a lot of reading at a volunteer level. Wading through treacle.
- It needs to be put more simply.
- Do you not have a plain English policy?
- Too many abbreviations.

## **Solutions**

### **How can we change to make you more likely to get involved?**

#### **Education**

- Politics should be introduced into the curriculum at an early age for all.
- It's about a generational thing if you start to teach people about it earlier on.

#### **Provision for more engagement staff or mentors**

- Have mentors – a bit like a community engagement officer, a named person if you feel intimidated to help you and guide you through the process.
- For each of the 32 councils have somebody from Parliament in each council to provide a bridge in each council/community.
- Make a commitment to have more staff to do engagement or train people to do it.

#### **Involve the public more directly in decision making**

- Have less politicians on the committee and more members of the public on committees. Pair them up with the member of the public and people have to engage and be a strong partner and both have to listen to each other.
- Have citizen forums running in parallel.

#### **Value 'lived expertise' and nuance the description and discussion around it**

- Language – 'lived experience' for example. Language is key. People who have lived experience have never thought before that was valued.
- How can we manage personal experiences in scrutiny. For example every house that is the same as mine that has the same issues. My personal issues are universal.
- Lived experience – needs a definition. Its not just a blah. Drawing the line with lived experience – between sharing personal experience

- The committee has to be informed from the start with respect for lived experience. The term has now evolved to lived expertise. That is wisdom that we need.

### **The Parliament should be more accessible and communicate that it is**

- Solutions to time – digital is a great way. If I could hear that read out rather than read it. I would love to get more involved digitally.
- I find Zoom meetings difficult. I need to read lips and read the body language.

### **Contacting by telephone**

- Signposting on the switch board – get a human on it. A link system to who you actually need to speak to.
- Advice on who you need to speak to when you call up. When you leave a voice mail someone will get back to you. (This person did not get a response)

### **Provide user friendly and simpler reports**

- Summarise documents into community friendly versions.
- If it is simple to use its simple to understand.

### **There were a number of suggestions that related to changing cultural perceptions and building trust**

- My problem with engaging is that my mother, father, grandparents, talked about the council in a way that it was the enemy. Scottish Parliament, UK Parliament are the the enemy. My friend think politics is boring, and there is no point in voting.
- People at home don't want to know about it.
- Give people pride in their communities.
- You have to train yourself to think in a different way. Our council are trying to improve. We made the same mistakes by having that attitude as well.
- It's a mindset we have to change for ourselves.
- If you have a positive experience you are likely to do it again.

## **Engage through issues**

- People are disengaged with politics. Take the politics out if it.

## **Transparency**

- Show what politicians do in their day, It's a universal solution.

## **Feedback during session 1**

24 people took part in session 1

During session 1 The group were asked at the start of the session about their awareness of the Scottish Parliament and they were asked how close they felt to it.

### **Lack of clarity of the role of Scottish Parliament and the difference to the Scottish Government.**

A key point that came out of both sessions was the lack of clarity of the role of the Scottish Parliament and the difference to that of the Scottish Government. Despite both groups being very well informed, committed and active as tenant representatives.

### **Lack of awareness and understanding of the role of 8 MSPs**

A barrier people felt was the challenge of having both a constituency and regional MSPs result of having 8 MSPs. The majority were not aware that they had regional MSPs. They felt that they were invisible.

Questions of how to find out who to contact and what MSPs interests are.

### **Understanding who is responsible for a matter when it may fall between a Devolved and Reserved responsibility.**

When an issue is reserved and devolved and MSP or an MP does not want to deal with it.