



Housing Services Armchair Panel

Contents

Contents.....	2
What is the 'Armchair Panel'	3
Why do we need an Armchair Panel?	3
OIC Tenant Participation Strategy	3
What do members of the Armchair Panel do?	4
How will members of the Armchair Panel take part?	4
What level of commitment will tenants be required to give?	5
What will be expected of me?.....	6
Reasons to get involved	6
Our commitment to equality	6
Join our register of interest.....	7

What is the ‘Armchair Panel’

By becoming a member of the Armchair Panel, tenants are given the opportunity to be consulted and informed from the comfort of their own home. We recognise that there are a range of reasons that can have an impact on an individual’s ability to partake in consultation opportunities and events. These include, but are not limited to:

- Time limitations due to work, family life and other commitments.
- Access to suitable transport.
- Living in a rural area.
- Limited mobility.

Why do we need an Armchair Panel?

Social landlords are required to facilitate tenant engagement through a variety of methods. This is known as Tenant Participation. Tenant participation allows tenants to engage with their landlord and work in collaboration to improve housing services. Tenant participation is a tenant centred approach that includes informing, engaging, and consulting with tenants. Tenant’s views and opinions are extremely important and allow the landlord to make the necessary changes to housing services with customer satisfaction in mind. The Armchair Panel is a means of tenant participation that provides tenants with the chance to actively engage with their landlord - Orkney Islands Council (OIC).

OIC Tenant Participation Strategy

Orkney Islands council developed a Tenant Participation Strategy that:

“... delivers clear benefits for tenants, staff and landlords alike. 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.

(Scottish Government’s Guide to successful Tenant Participation, 2019)”.

As part of the Council's Tenant Participation strategy, we aim to 'inform, engage, consult, - we will consider your views and feedback when making decisions. We will work to empower you, to shape what is important to you and show that you are making a difference' (2.2) The Council recognises 'the importance of working in partnership and offer[ing] individual and group options for [tenants] to choose...(2.4) Providing tenants with the option of joining the tenants panel enhances the choice of engagement opportunities. Tenants will have the chance to engage with one off consultation opportunities that appeal to them. Tenants will remain informed of any upcoming consultation opportunities and their feedback will be considered during the decision-making process.

The Armchair Panel will help to facilitate equality, communication, and participation, as per the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The Armchair Panel will make use of alternative methods of communication beyond face-to-face contact. We will consult and inform tenants using computer and digital methods, telephone, and post. This will help us to reach 'harder to reach' individuals, thereby facilitating equality.

The Armchair Panel will assist with our commitment to 'Increase digital opportunities', to inform, engage and consult our tenants. The Armchair Panel will also be in line with the Council's commitment to consult tenants as individuals, via our Residents' Panel, and through other community groups. This provides tenants with a choice in how they partake. Consultation opportunities for the Armchair Panel will be communicated using digital methods. This will help us to reach 'harder to reach' groups such as younger people and those who live in rural areas.

What do members of the Armchair Panel do?

Members of the Armchair Panel will be informed of upcoming engagement opportunities and will be given the chance to take part. These opportunities can be engaged in within the comfort of the member's own home and will not require any travel. OIC will consult regularly with members and gather tenant's thoughts and opinions on a variety of matters relating to housing services. Any feedback that tenants provide will be taken into consideration and will assist us in making improvements to the housing service. Members may also be invited to attend events and meetings specifically arranged for the Armchair Panel.

How will members of the Armchair Panel take part?

During the Coronavirus lockdowns, many people conducted their daily lives through alternative methods of communication, such as telephone and online. Some of the most popular online platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams provided individuals with the chance to meet virtually. In-order to maximise inclusivity, we would like to form an Armchair Panel that makes use of these online methods as well as telephone and postal methods. As

a member of the Armchair Panel, you will be invited to share your views on a wide variety of topics and consultations. Examples of armchair consultation opportunities include:

- Completing paper surveys and returning them via post.
- Completing surveys online.
- Reading the Housing Services Newsletter & other articles.
- Attending online meetings and events.

Orkney Islands Council are keen to offer individuals the chance to participate using a variety of methods. There are many benefits to offering tenants the chance to become members of the Armchair Panel, these include:

- Promoting tenant engagement.
- Facilitating equality and access.
- Tenants who can't attend in person are able to participate.
- Tenants from rural communities can take part.

As a member of the Armchair Panel, you can get involved in consultation opportunities with the knowledge that your feedback can make a difference. All of this can be done from the comfort of your own home. We will consult with you using one / or a combination of the following methods:

- Email.
- Telephone.
- Microsoft Teams.
- Post.

What level of commitment will tenants be required to give?

Tenants can choose a level of commitment to suit their circumstances. Members will be notified of any upcoming consultation opportunities and will be invited to take part. Members do not have to agree to take part in every consultation opportunity, but members will be asked to inform their Tenant Participation Officer if they wish to engage in a specific opportunity.

What will be expected of me?

You will be expected to inform your Tenant Participation Officer if you wish to take part in a particular consultation opportunity. For example, you may wish to complete a survey surrounding a subject that is of interest to you. You can take part in as many opportunities as you wish, or as little as once a year. You will be expected to take part in any events that you sign up to take part in. If you are unable to take part due to unforeseen circumstances, you can inform your Tenant Participation Officer.

You will be expected to maintain some level of communication with your Tenant Participation Officer. An example of this may be a telephone call to confirm that you would like to take part in a particular survey. You will be asked to stay up to date with events and opportunities by reading emails and post.

When you become a member of the Armchair Panel, you will be asked to agree to a Code of Conduct. This is simply a set of rules for members to follow to ensure a degree of professionalism and respect for staff and other members.

Reasons to get involved

Orkney Islands Council recognises the importance of listening to local people and working together with local communities. OIC is committed to providing high quality services to our tenants and Tenant Participation is a vital part of that process. It is important that we understand our tenants' views on the housing service they receive and their experience. Any feedback that we receive helps us to improve the service that we provide.

As a member of the Armchair Panel, we will consult, inform, and engage with tenants to obtain comments, suggestions and feedback. OIC will work to empower tenants and ensure that they remain part of the decision-making process.

Our commitment to equality

We are committed to access and equality and hope that the Armchair Panel will help more people to get involved. We encourage all individuals to get in part if they wish to, and we will assist to facilitate access where necessary. If you have any special requirements, please let us know when signing up.

Join our register of interest

Not sure if you want to become a member of our Armchair Panel, would you like more information before deciding? You can contact our Tenant Participation Officer for more details.

If you'd like to become a member of our Armchair Panel, please complete the registration form and return it to your Tenant Participation Officer. You can obtain this registration form by contacting your Tenant Participation Officer. If you need help completing this form, your Tenant Participation Officer can provide you with help.

To request a registration form, please contact Claire Pritchard on details below: Claire Pritchard | Tenant Participation Officer

Telephone - 01856 873 535 (extension 2179) Email: claire.pritchard@orkney.gov.uk

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