



EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

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Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

A Briefing Note

July 2021

Background

Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) was launched in October 1990. It is formally recognised by the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) as the citywide negotiating body for CEC tenants.

The Federation is an umbrella organisation of local associations and Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) that represent tenants at a citywide and policy level. This complements and builds on the work of the associations at local and area levels dealing with day to day service delivery issues. The Federation aims to promote the improvement of the quality of life of residents and the housing conditions of all tenants of rented accommodation, in particular those at risk of exclusion. In 2018, ETF changed its legal status and became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, which brings new opportunities to ETF.

Resources

The Federation is a voluntary organisation with an office base in Norton Park. Much of our work is carried out by our office-bearers, Executive Committee (EC), activists, volunteers and staff. The Federation is funded by CEC through a Service Level Agreement which enables us to employ staff, run the office and support our main citywide business. As a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Federation office has been closed since last March to protect staff and service users. Staff have been continually working from home as a result.

Organisation and Decision Making

The Federation is a membership-based organisation and is run by its members. Memberships are renewed on an annual basis and ETF currently has 14 tenants' and residents' groups in full membership and 36 individual (non-voting) members. There is no membership fee to join ETF.

We provide many opportunities for members to be involved in our work. The key to involvement and participation is information and we regularly inform members of our activities. This is done through our publicity, reports and briefing papers. All major policy decisions are made by our members through regular Federation Meetings, the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Special Members Meetings (where appropriate). As the workload of the organisation is considerable and expanding, the Federation follows a detailed work plan. If you wish to receive a copy of the work plan please email info@edinburghtenants.org.uk or phone 0131 475 2509.

Our members elect the EC which meet monthly to take responsibility for the day to day running of the organisation and implementing policy. Specific city-wide groups are set up to deal with major areas of ongoing work, for example, repairs and high-rise flats. These are open to individual tenants and representatives of member groups from across the city

and are an opportunity to undertake detailed work on behalf of the Federation with CEC. The groups report regularly to the membership and EC, to whom they are ultimately accountable.

Over the last couple of years, ETF has adapted to changes in the approach to tenant participation in Edinburgh. These changes focussed on developing a more local presence, including EC members meeting with senior housing staff in their respective localities. These meetings have enabled EC members to find out what is happening in their individual localities and for CEC staff to find out more about the work of ETF.

A major piece of work for ETF in the last year has been carrying out a review of its governance. The Federation commissioned Tenants Informative Service (TIS) to support the Federation to ensure its policies and procedures and constitution. This will ensure ETF is fit for purpose and will assist us to develop and thrive in the coming years.

TIS has supported ETF and CEC to develop a Tenant Participation (TP) and Scrutiny Framework for Edinburgh. A Working Group consisting of ETF, CEC, TIS and Tenants' and Residents' groups representatives has a remit to:

- To undertake a review of current tenant participation and scrutiny activities to identify what works well and what needs to be developed and the support and resources required;
- To identify areas that need to be developed;
- To identify what needs to be in place to make tenant participation and scrutiny groups more effective;
- To identify how communication and learning can be improved looking at digital and non-digital approaches;
- To draft a TP and Scrutiny Framework.

Informing and Involving the Membership

Keeping the membership well informed and up to date on developments at all levels is carried out through a variety of methods. Interested parties and Member groups receive a bi-monthly newsletter, *Federation Matters*; members can also sign up to our monthly E-Newsletter. Over 3000 copies of our newsletter *Tenants Voice* is distributed three times per year in paper form or downloaded from our website. We produce an Annual Report which is approved at our AGM. Our website, Twitter and Facebook pages are updated on a regular basis. Ad hoc mailings are also circulated, which include publicity for Repairs, High Flats and quarterly members' meetings. Members receive quarterly Progress Reports on all areas of work and have an opportunity to determine future policy direction.

ETF developed a Communications Strategy for the Federation, which is a support tool for EC members, staff and all members to act as supporters, promote key messages, and champion the good work of ETF and its local communities.

Each of the citywide groups, currently Repairs and High Flats are in regular communication with the membership. These groups are the most successful way of involving the broadest range of the membership. They address everyday concerns and issues and provide an opportunity to participate directly with CEC and other landlords in developing and monitoring policies and new forms of service delivery that will make a difference to tenants throughout the city.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, all meetings are currently held online via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. As face to face meetings are currently suspended, it is likely that online meetings will continue for the foreseeable future.

Digital work has emerged as a key theme for ETF as we realise the need to support tenants and RTOs to get online. The outbreak of COVID-19 has only exacerbated the need for tenants to increase their digital skills to overcome loneliness, isolation and improve their mental health. ETF holds regular online meetings with CEC staff to discuss a range of topics and issues.

As well as formal meetings, ETF holds social and other events throughout the year to provide more informal opportunities for tenants to exchange views, advice and experience. ETF provides training on a range of topics from committee skills to negotiating with your landlord and public speaking. This can be done individually, with your RTO or as part of a wider ETF training programme. Please get in touch if you would like to take part in any ETF training activities or to find out more.

Outreach Work

The Federation provides development and practical support to local people who wish to set up new RTOs and those groups already established who wish assistance with strengthening their organisation. Intervention and the provision of support at a local level is undertaken on request. This development work is primarily for CEC tenants.

Current Work

The current workload keeps activists, volunteers and staff very busy and new activists and volunteers are always welcome. Our ongoing work includes areas such as:

- Carrying out a review of ETF's governance;
- Developing a TP and Scrutiny Framework for Edinburgh;
- Supporting the ETF Repairs and High Flats Groups;
- Supporting tenants on CEC's Housing Service Improvement Plan (HSIP) Group;
- Attending bi-monthly Business Planning Meetings with senior CEC officers;
- EC members' meetings with senior housing staff in their respective localities;
- Holding bi-monthly meetings with the Convenor and Vice Convenor of CEC's Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee;
- Keeping a close eye on the national scene, including responding to various housing related consultations where appropriate;
- Attending quarterly Stair Cleaning Project Board meetings to monitor the quality of service tenants receive from the stair cleaning contractors;
- Support to local groups, including the development of new groups;
- Supporting tenants and tenants' groups to get online.

We have been extremely busy already but there is a great deal more work to be done!

Future Work

ETF aims to work in partnership with CEC, ETF member groups, tenants and other stakeholders to develop tenant participation approaches that will enable tenants to participate safely during COVID-19 and thereafter. ETF will be responsible for carrying out a COVID-19 risk assessment of the proposed initiatives in the Work Plan before any activity takes place. Our future work includes areas such as:

- Finalise ETF's governance review;

- Implement a Tenant Participation and Scrutiny Framework for Edinburgh;
- Continue to support the HSIP Group;
- EC members continue to meet with senior housing staff in their respective localities;
- Respond to Scottish Government and Scottish Housing Regulator consultations where appropriate;
- Assist and encourage the establishment of new tenants' and residents' groups in localities with CEC tenants, encouraging them to join ETF and become an RTO;
- Develop a plan to enable younger tenants to become more involved in the work of ETF;
- Introduce a digital framework for ETF to engage with tenants;
- Carry out a review of ETF's Communications Strategy;
- Explore other social media and communication methods;
- Ensure long-term funding for the Federation;
- Prepare a Digital Transformation Plan for ETF office systems.