



Developed in Consultation  
with Tenants

*South*  
**AYRSHIRE**  
COUNCIL  
Comh irle iorrachd Ir a Deas



# South Ayrshire Council **Tenant Led Assessment Housing Services Letting Standard**

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## **Acknowledgements/Thanks**

We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to everyone who helped us with various aspects of our assessment.

It allowed us to get to this point in our assessment and gives us a clear vision of what we would like to see happen going forward.

# Executive Summary

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**Tenant Led Assessors (from Left to right):**  
Eudora Tabor, Stewart Wallace, Elizabeth McNish, Anne Cameron

Since January 2018 we, as Tenant Led Assessors, have been involved in assessing South Ayrshire Council's current Letting Standard.

Our decision to undertake this assessment was based on reviewing performance which was regularly showing a trend of dissatisfaction in certain areas covered by the Letting Standard.

We conducted a lengthy but robust assessment which involved various stages such as; learning processes, skills development, property inspections, information gathering, carrying out interviews and data analysis. All of these steps allowed us to finalise the recommendations of our assessment and put these forward to the Service Leads for both

Housing Services and Property Maintenance. In summary our recommendations are:

- Review the current SAC Letting Standard and devise a new Letting Standard incorporating the suggestions laid out further within this report.
- Design the documents relating to the SAC Letting Standard in a more appealing and meaningful way.
- Establish a working group to devise the new letting standard which includes tenants along with staff from Housing Services and Property Maintenance.

Following a meeting with the Service Leads for both Housing Services and Property Maintenance on 22nd October 2019 we are happy to report that our recommendations were agreed. Our assessment also led to us making a number of suggestions

for items to be considered when devising the new letting standard and changes that may help tenants and the Council. It has been agreed that these actions and suggestions will be remitted to the Void Service Development Group to take forward. Details of these are found within the main body of our report.

Going forward we will work closely with Housing Services and Property Maintenance to regularly review progress against the recommendations and suggestions made within this report. It is anticipated that by working together the new version of the Letting Standard will be available in 2020.



## Tenant Foreword

**We, the Assessors, are a group of four tenants who have been involved in Tenant Participation with South Ayrshire Council (SAC) for many years.**

As part of our role we are involved in the Scrutiny and Performance Maintenance Group. The group actively reviews feedback tenants provide via satisfaction surveys and monitors Housing Services performance and trend data.

This report came about after we reviewed the satisfaction results of the Settling-In surveys regarding the condition of homes and gardens. The surveys showed

us that some new tenants felt that the conditions properties were presented in needed to be looked at, as the levels of satisfaction in certain areas suggested there was scope for improvement.



For us it was clear improvements needed to be made and we wanted to help the Council to improve the conditions of properties, including gardens and common closes. We hope this would then mean the number of properties being accepted first time will increase. We decided to carry out a Tenant Led Assessment (TLA) on the Council's current Letting Standard, which is approximately 20 years old, to investigate how houses are repaired and presented to new tenants and make recommendations on improvements to this process to benefit tenants and the Council.

## Purpose

**As a group we collectively felt that reviewing the current SAC Letting Standard would bring benefits to both new tenants and the Council.**

Housing is a human right and we feel that the condition in which properties are presented to prospective tenants could be improved. Research has shown that having a warm, comfortable home is central to all aspects of a person's wellbeing. Therefore, we strongly feel that by undertaking this assessment and making recommendations to Housing Services improvements could be made which could have positive outcomes, not only on reducing the number of refusals and supporting tenancy sustainment but on tenants health, financial stability and neighbourhoods in general.

Data submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator over the past few

years via the Annual Return of the Charter (ARC) has shown that SAC continue to experience a high level of refusals on offers of housing. This in turn has a knock-on effect on the amount of void rent loss the Council suffers. We, as assessors, believe that by accepting the recommendations detailed in this report Housing Services may be able to reduce the number of refusals as the properties would become more desirable. This would then have a positive impact on the void rent loss.

In our opinion, by giving new tenants a good quality home which they can move straight into with minimal work required would be setting tenants up to have a home and not just a property. Tenants would hopefully take pride in their new homes by viewing it as somewhere to settle and not somewhere that requires a lot of work and expense

to make their own. This would then lead to an increase in tenancy sustainment for SAC. Through the learning opportunities given to us during our assessment of the current SAC Letting Standard, it is evident that SAC officers are very keen to put in place practices that will help to support people to access and sustain a tenancy. We are of the view that the work we have done, as assessors, and the future outcomes of the TLA will enhance the reputation of SAC as a good, caring landlord with a modern day standard of properties.



## Recommendations

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After carrying out an extensive assessment of the current SAC Letting Standard it is recommended that Housing Services:



- Review the current SAC Letting Standard, in conjunction with Property Maintenance staff and the assessors to allow for it to be enhanced and better reflect the processes that are undertaken and required during the void repair period. It is envisioned that there would be a fully detailed comprehensive Letting Standard incorporating all void repair processes along with an accompanying condensed version. An updated Letting Standard should take into consideration the proposals and suggestions laid out within this report.
- Design the documents relating to the Letting Standard in a style which is more appealing and meaningful to tenants. This should be similar to other tenant documents such as the Tenants Handbook, Newsletter or tenant event leaflets.
- Establish a working group comprising of representatives from Housing Services, Property Maintenance and the Scrutiny & Performance Maintenance Group, to devise the new/updated Letting Standard.

**It is believed that by accepting these recommendations Housing Services along with tenants will take forward the actions and suggestions laid out further within the report.**



## Background

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**In order to ensure that we were fully equipped to carry out a Tenant Led Assessment (TLA) we attended the Stepping Up To Scrutiny training course developed by the Scottish Government, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Housemark Scotland, which gave us the knowledge and understanding of performance data and the processes involved in scrutiny.**

We used the skills we developed through the training to review the performance information that was provided to us at the Scrutiny and Performance Maintenance Group. It appeared to the group that there was a continuing trend where new

tenants were on occasion dissatisfied with the condition of their home and garden when they moved into a new property (appendix 1).

A TLA working group was established with the initial meeting taking place on 16th January 2018. As part of the initial process we entered into the planning stage on how to take forward the assessment. The first action we undertook was reviewing the current SAC Letting Standard (appendix 2), which we discovered was developed approximately 20 years ago.

It became clear to us through evidence gathering that although

internal practice and procedures have changed over the years along with various regulations and legislation, the Letting Standard document that SAC use has not changed. We met with various officers from Housing Services and Property Maintenance to gain an overview of the stages involved in bringing a void property up to the SAC Letting Standard including how a void property is inspected and repairs work identified.

Using this newly formed knowledge and further understanding of the processes involved we, as assessors, devised an inspection process for void properties which incorporated an assessment checklist.



## Inspection Process/Evidence Gathering

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Before moving onto inspecting void properties and assessing to what extent they met the current SAC Letting Standard we did some onsite visits to three properties which had just been handed back to Housing Services by outgoing tenants to assess the condition they were left in.

These properties were then revisited once they were ready to be allocated. During the follow-up visit we were given details on the works undertaken by Property Maintenance. This exercise allowed us to develop knowledge and understanding on aspects of property condition that should be looked into and assessed during the inspection process.

It was important that prior to undertaking any property inspections we were fully prepared and all health & safety equipment was made available to us by the Tenant Participation Team. In order to ensure that we gathered

evidence that represented all SAC stock types and neighbourhoods we inspected a sample of 20 void properties once all void repairs had been completed and the properties were ready to be tenanted. Each property that was visited underwent rigorous inspection including visual and physical aspects. A checklist was completed for each property and photographic evidence was obtained.

As a group we decided that by only assessing SAC stock it didn't give us any comparisons against any other local landlords when making informed

recommendations to Housing Services. Therefore, contact was made with Ayrshire Housing, a Registered Social Landlord operating in South Ayrshire along with Toner and McCartney, a Private Sector Letting Agent who have a portfolio of properties in South Ayrshire. Once contact had been established, visits to both Ayrshire Housing and Toner and McCartney void properties were undertaken. Both properties were at the stage where they were ready to be tenanted. Information was shared on the processes both landlords carry out prior to the property being reallocated. In addition to these inspection visits tenant led assessors were given the opportunity to visit an SAC void property which was being used in the Housing First Pilot, which is part of the SAC Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and decorated to an enhanced standard in line with the aims of this project.



Once our property inspections were completed an exercise was undertaken to collate and analyse the information which highlighted common themes, areas of good practice and areas for further information and evidence gathering (appendix 3). From this each assessor selected an area to focus on finding additional information. This information was sought by contacting officers within SAC who are involved in the void process along with making contact with other social housing providers and researching policies and processes carried out in other local authority areas. It was important to capture a

sense of how operational staff and senior management viewed the condition of SAC stock that was being let to new tenants. We also wanted to speak to staff in an informal setting to gauge how they undertook the void process in their day-to-day duties. We gathered informed opinions which are reflected in the recommendations submitted as part of this report. To move forward with this part of the TLA a schedule of interview dates was devised along with which members of staff were invited to attend. Interview questions were made ahead of each session in order to inform each discussion.

By this stage the amount of information gathered was overwhelming. It took a number of meetings to drill down on the information to establish what it all meant in theory compared to what it meant in practice. It was essential to balance the information gathered against the current SAC Letting Standard but also use it to inform the findings within this report. We have used this information to make our recommendations which we feel would be meaningful and beneficial to both tenants and the Council.





## Actions/Suggestions/Proposals

Proposals to be considered for new elements to the void process and letting standard	Update to be provided on proposals by Housing Services/Property Maintenance - 3 monthly review
<p>Lock on the bathroom door should be able to be opened from the outside as well as the inside, in case of emergencies.</p>	
<p>Closes - implement a new routine for when any member of staff is visiting a void property within a block of flats they carry out an inspection in relation to cleanliness/paintwork/banisters etc should be undertaken with any repairs reported.</p>	
<p>Housing Services to reconsider the process for decoration allowances. Look at alternatives such as decoration packs from a paint company, vouchers to be used at a decoration supplier or in-house resources carrying out basic décor to bring void properties into a more presentable standard and provide better quality housing. Ensure that all staff follow the same instruction and have a consistent approach in the decision making process when awarding decoration allowance.</p>	
<p>Have a checklist/document that tenants can fill-in with the Housing Assistant at any accompanied viewing of issues they highlight in relation to the condition of the property/garden. This will be signed by the prospective tenant and the housing representative. Housing Assistant to follow-up on the issues with Property Maintenance and tenant to receive copy of document within the sign-up paperwork as evidence that work requested by them has been completed.</p>	
<p>Ensure every ceiling/wall light fixture has a working light bulb in place.</p>	
<p>Where possible have all pre-payment energy meters with £5 credit.</p>	
<p>Thorough inspection of the external condition (footpaths and walls) of properties during a void inspection to be undertaken with any identified repairs to be logged. New tenant to be advised of timescales for any identified external repairs or dates of future external maintenance programmes.</p>	

Proposals to be considered for new elements to the void process and letting standard	Update to be provided on proposals by Housing Services/Property Maintenance – 3 monthly review
<p>Outside boundaries where a new tenancy is within a block of flats should be clearly defined/ marked out. Consideration of maps of external layouts.</p>	
<p>In terms of cleaning responsibilities within common closes, Housing Services to be more stringent with prospective tenants on their responsibilities at accompanied viewings/ sign-up.</p>	
<p>Remove all general waste/recycling bins as soon as a property becomes void and re-instate when a new tenant signs up. This would stop these bins being filled and gardens being filled with rubbish whilst the property is void. Possibility of having an agreement with Waste Management – store/ recycle/wash bins rather than always new bins.</p>	
<p>Involve organisations such as the Seascap Pass It On in the clearance of void properties in order to give the opportunity to recycle any goods/ furniture left by outgoing tenants.</p> <p>This would work well where the Council have a property which has been abandoned or where a tenant has passed away and has no family to deal with the clearance.</p> <p>It would be further beneficial to promote any organisations that offer such a service of recycling goods to tenants when they submit their 28 days notice to prevent items being left and having to be cleared by Housing Services and Property Maintenance.</p>	
<p>New tenants to be given a list of the void repairs undertaken within the property – in their sign-up documentation.</p>	
<p>Could SAC properties be annually or biennially (every 2 years) inspected internally and externally, similar to the private sector? In order to review the condition, highlight issues that could be dealt with at the time rather than left to deteriorate further and it then becomes a major void repairs/ cost. A process like this could potentially be preventative work which would be cost saving.</p>	



Proposals to be considered for new elements to the void process and letting standard	Update to be provided on proposals by Housing Services/Property Maintenance – 3 monthly review
<p>Clerk of Works to be re-instated/employed and held by Housing Service to oversee current SAC stock (not new builds or non- HRA properties). Clerk of Works would require technical knowledge.</p>	
<p>As per agreement during interview, Housing Services (Service Lead) to look into separating the capital work completed during voids from standard void repairs in order to monitor how capital programme works impact on void timescales and budget expenditure.</p>	
<p>Consider the stages of the void works undertaken i.e. first cut &amp; tidy, number of times grass is maintained during void period and the timescale of accompanied viewings.</p>	
<p>Random spot checks of the Sparkle Clean to be undertaken whilst the contractors are on site and in process of doing the clean, routinely to monitor performance of the 3 companies.</p> <p>Ensure that floors are fully swept/cleaned and free of rubbish. Consider monitoring performance of windows being cleaned.</p>	
<p>Review the current agreements for garden works within a void property, i.e. – contractual agreements/service level agreement/defined service requirements &amp; responsibilities/value for money. Consider other options for the contract of these services i.e. Property Maintenance.</p>	
<p>Ensure all plastic coatings are properly removed from any newly installed sinks/baths/toilets.</p>	
<p>Ensure that all windows with locks have working keys – major impact on tenant safety and security.</p>	
<p>Visual check need to be accompanied by physical inspections for all aspect of the letting standards.</p>	
<p>New tenants to be given a floor plan of the house with floor and window sizes to help with getting carpets and curtains (and also to gauge if present furniture and beds fit the rooms).</p>	

## Links to Council Plan

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### South Ayrshire Council has a Council Plan 2018-2022, Our People, Our Place.

Within it the Council states that:

*“Our people and places make South Ayrshire and we have a clear and ambitious vision of what we want to achieve for them and what we will do as a Council to support them.*

*We want South Ayrshire to be the best it can be and for all people and places to have the opportunity to reach their full potential.”*

As Involved Tenants who have undertaken this assessment process we strongly feel that by taking on board our recommendations and suggestions, Housing Services would be supporting the Council to achieve its vision. Furthermore it would help to continue to improve the reputation of the Council and the quality of homes they are providing to people across South Ayrshire.

The Council set out a number of strategic objectives within Our People, Our Place, Council Plan 2018-2022. Our assessment and findings as laid out throughout this report contribute to the following Council objectives:



### **2.3 Increase the number of affordable and warm homes for those on limited income**

**2.3.1** We will work with our partners to build around 1,000 new social houses over the next five years. Our Strategic Housing Investment Plan identifies potential spending of around £68.5 million from 2017-2023.

**2.3.2** Working with Registered Social Landlords, communities and the Health and Social Care Partnership, we will ensure that housing meets the needs of older people as well as those with learning disabilities, mental health issues and people leaving the care sector.

**2.3.3** We will also continue to exceed current energy efficiency

standards and help tenants reduce their energy bills.

### **5.2 Improve trust and confidence in the Council and increase customer satisfaction with services**

**5.2.3** We will strengthen the service user voice in all of our performance reporting to ensure we get our service delivery right.

### **5.3 Work with partners and communities to improve ‘place-making’ across South Ayrshire, especially in relation to the built environment**

**5.3.1** We will work to improve our places and ensure they are places we can be proud of by tackling public realm streetscape, redundant buildings, signage and litter.



## Conclusion

The TLA has been a long and challenging process which has been undertaken with precision and enthusiasm. It has taken approximately 22 months to fully understand current processes, educate ourselves on various other impacting factors, research alternative methods to certain areas of work and analyse a lot of different information.

It is very much hoped that by undertaking this TLA on the current SAC Letting Standard that we, along with Housing Services and Property Maintenance, can work together to continue to make positive changes which will benefit both tenants and the Council.



## Next Steps

	ACTION	TIMESCALE
1	Review progress against the recommendations within the report.	May 2020
2	Report to be made available publicly.	February 2020
3	Establish a working group comprising of members from the TLA, Housing Services, Property Maintenance and other relevant services to progress the recommendations.	November/ December 2019
4	Process for Garden Services to be considered along with alternatives to current arrangements prior to formal agreement being implemented.	April 2020
5	Consideration to be given to various options to replace the current redecoration allowance policy such as paint packs, vouchers or pilot in-house décor service. New scheme/system to be implemented once agreed.	April 2020
6	Property Maintenance and Housing Service to consider how to fully capture the external condition of properties, including closes and common areas into the void process in order to make properties, letting areas and neighbourhoods more desirable and presentable.	April 2020
7	Tenant Led Assessors to carry out an assessment of 5 void properties to review progress against the actions and recommendations submitted within this report.	October 2020
8	Continue to monitor the satisfaction levels submitted through the Settling-In surveys at the Scrutiny & Performance Maintenance Group to see if the recommendations made by the tenant led assessors have a positive impact on the process.	Ongoing

## Appendices

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1. Scrutiny & Performance Data
2. Current Letting Standard
3. Common themes highlighted by inspection process



# 1. Scrutiny & Performance Data

Settling-In Survey	Jan-Mar 2017	Apr-Jun 2017	Jul-Sept 2017
Q1 - Offer of housing received	● 100	● 100	● 100
Q2 - Helpfulness of staff	● 93	● 100	● 100
Q3 - Information given when viewing house	● 79	● 100	● 94
Q4 - Standard of new home (ARC 9)	● 79	● 82	● 90
Q5 - Condition of Garden	● 69	● 88	● 69
Q6 - Time between getting keys and settling-in visit	● 100	● 100	● 93
Q7 - Advice and Information at settling-in visit	● 100	● 100	● 100

Settling-In Survey	Oct-Dec 2017	Jan-Mar 2018	Apr-Jun 2018
Q1 - Offer of housing received	● 89	● 95	● 91
Q2 - Helpfulness of staff	● 96	● 98	● 100
Q3 - Information given when viewing house	● 81	● 89	● 95
Q4 - Standard of new home (ARC 9)	● 69	● 80	● 73
Q5 - Condition of Garden	● 68	● 66	● 76
Q6 - Time between getting keys and settling-in visit	● 89	● 88	● 90
Q7 - Advice and Information at settling-in visit	● 91	● 95	● 95

Settling-In Survey	Jul-Sep 2018	Oct-Dec 2018	Jan-Mar 2019
Q1 - Offer of housing received	● 100	● 88	● 97
Q2 - Helpfulness of staff	● 94	● 92	● 97
Q3 - Information given when viewing house	● 94	● 92	● 94
Q4 - Standard of new home (ARC 9)	● 75	● 76	● 67
Q5 - Condition of Garden	● 41	● 78	● 69
Q6 - Time between getting keys and settling-in visit	● 84	● 92	● 91
Q7 - Advice and Information at settling-in visit	● 97	● 92	● 91

## 2. Current Letting Standard for Council Properties

This standard is a statement of the condition that all void Council properties should meet before they are re-let.

The standard has been developed with the assistance of, and in consultation with, the South Ayrshire Tenants Group, Housing Services and Environment, Land & Property.

### Safety Checks

1. The Council shall carry out safety checks on an empty property as follows:
  - Gas Safety Check (where appropriate)
  - Electrical Safety Check
  - Asbestos Safety Check
  - Solid Fuel Enclosed Fires

### External Condition of Property

1. The garden shall be cleared of rubbish and garden refuse. The grass and hedges shall be cut to a presentable standard at the point the property is let.
2. Paths and steps shall be checked and repaired where they are in an unsafe condition.
3. The external condition of the property shall be checked through visual inspection of roof, rainwater goods, chimneys etc.
4. External doors and windows shall be in a sound condition as determined by inspection.

### Decoration Allowances

1. Ordinarily, decoration shall be the tenant's responsibility. Decoration allowances shall be awarded at the discretion of the Area Housing Manager and in accordance with the Council's policy.

### Internal Condition of Property

1. The property shall be clear of rubbish (including loft spaces) and be in a reasonably clean and tidy condition.
2. Kitchen units and fittings, including drawers, hinges and cupboards shall be in working order and fit for the purpose. They shall be clean and hygienic.
3. A suitable cooker connection point shall be provided.
4. Bathroom fittings (bath/shower WC/washhand basin) shall be in working order and in a reasonable condition.
5. Internal pass doors, skirtings, facings, floors, stairs and banisters shall be sound and secure.
6. Glazed panels/screens (in pass doors etc) shall be fitted with safety glass.
7. Polytiles shall be removed and ceilings checked for damage and repaired accordingly.
8. Fireplace/ hearth shall be retained if in reasonable condition.
9. Central heating systems and other heating appliances shall be in full working order.
10. Defective plasterwork shall be repaired

### 3. Common themes highlighted by inspection process

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This document collated our thoughts and feedback from the evaluations of the 20 properties we have assessed against the current SAC Letting Standard.

#### COMMON THEMES IDENTIFIED INSIDE PROPERTY

- Locks for windows and keys – numerous keys missing and different keys needed for different windows in the property
- The bathroom door locks – no insert in the door facing for the lock to slide into, holes made in the wood rather than proper fittings
- Standard of the sparkle clean has been very poor throughout the inspection
- Blue plastic round newly fitted kitchen sink
- Kitchens not all to the same standard – doors hanging differently, drawers sticking (issues to runners) or shelves in cupboards missing
- Gas/Electric meters in debt
- Lack of light bulbs

#### COMMON THEMES IDENTIFIED APPEARANCE OF THE GARDEN FOR THE PROPERTY

- Unkempt
- Broken slabs, concrete, paths
- Handle rails in disrepair
- Unsafe on many occasions (all incidents reported at the time of visits and rectified by the relevant team)
- Bins not in situ or in situ and full
- Not enough attention paid to the outside of the property
- Fencing – tenants responsibility which is fair enough for previous tenant however if it is broken or in disrepair it should be made good for the new tenant and then it becomes their responsibility
- No clear boundaries to identify whose garden is whose in 4 in a block properties.

#### COMMON THEMES IDENTIFIED COMMUNAL AREAS

- The difference between blocks solely owned by SAC and mixed tenure blocks in relation to the secure entry doors/screens etc
- Dirty
- Unkempt
- Banister paint chipped
- Cracks and chips in plaster work on the walls and steps
- Loose banisters
- Bin stores very unkempt
- Bin stores used to store bulky items
- Not easy to identify area for flats, i.e washing lines, garden boundaries
- Lintels were cracked and chipped



## COMMON THEMES IDENTIFIED NEIGHBOURHOODS

- Exterior condition of SAC properties was very unattractive and looked to be in poor condition
- Maintenance of certain areas could be better managed, i.e concrete areas could be kept tidy by the road sweepers
- Safety issue of secure entry across neighbourhoods not being secure

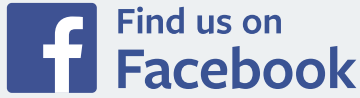
## ONE-OFF SEVERE ISSUES IDENTIFIED

- Leaking shower
- Blocked sink
- Lack of lighting within common close
- Unsecure door handle
- Unsecure kitchen sink
- Damaged radiators
- Positioning of door/radiators together
- Over hanging walk way was in very poor condition
- Loft-hatch missing
- Ventilator on very high ceiling with switch beside same
- Sure-stop in a cupboard

## ANY AREAS OF GOOD PRACTICE IDENTIFIED

- Condition of close at McMillan Court, Troon was a very good example of a neat, tidy and clean common close
- Properties were in a good tidy state, very little/no rubbish in voids
- Replacement of internal doors - majority of properties had new internal doors
- Woodwork repairs of a good standard
- Plaster work of good standard
- Modernisation done at void when able
- Level of new tenant repairs are very low





**South Ayrshire Council  
Housing Services**

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可按要求將本資訊翻譯成其他語言和轉變為其他格式。

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### **Interested in getting involved?**

We hope that our Tenant Led Assessment of South Ayrshire Council's Letting Standard has shown you that by being an Involved Tenant you can become part of projects that can really make a difference.

For more information, why not give our Tenant Participation team a call on 01292 612968.

Alternatively you can email the team at [tp@south-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:tp@south-ayrshire.gov.uk) or visit our Tenant Participation webpage at [www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/tp](http://www.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/tp)

We also have an active Facebook page providing information about the good work the Housing Service is doing in our communities.

Why not 'Like' our page at [www.facebook.com/sachousingservices](http://www.facebook.com/sachousingservices)