



Making voices count

Reviewing practice in tenant involvement and empowerment

Report for the
Tenant Services Authority

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skills&projects

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Review of tenant involvement and empowerment

A report to the Tenant Services Authority

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Skills & Projects has provided consultancy services to the social housing sector since 1996. Skills & Projects specialises in customer satisfaction, resident involvement and benchmarking targeted towards smaller housing associations, plus research covering the sector as a whole.

HouseMark is the country's leading provider of support to social housing organisations for performance and service improvement. It works in a variety of ways with over 860 social housing organisations to improve their focus on customer needs, service and performance efficiency. HouseMark is jointly owned by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and the National Housing Federation (NHF), two not-for-profit organisations that reinvest their surpluses into the social housing sector.

HouseMark's dedicated consultancy team specialises in consultancy services for social housing organisations. We have a wide range of skills and experience, and our consultants have worked with numerous housing organisations, helping them to deliver improved performance.

HouseMark also works with selected strategic partners, allowing us to access skills and expertise to support our clients in a holistic way, to provide all the support and advice they need to promote continuous improvement.

Our project team included experts in research design and delivery, tenant involvement and engagement, policy analysis and development, customer satisfaction and insight, individual and organisational development, and project management.

Foreword

On April 1st 2010 the Tenant Services Authority's new regulatory powers were switched on. The regulatory framework for social housing has been transformed with tenants right at the heart of the new approach. Co-regulation means less top down regulation and more power for tenants to hold their landlords to account in delivery against local priorities. But to make this system work effectively requires significant cultural change. It won't happen overnight.

Tenants and landlords alike must question the existing approaches to tenant involvement and empowerment at a local level. Tenant empowerment requires access to information, the power to question decision makers and to have real influence on how local services are delivered. Access to relevant training is a must if tenants choose to be actively involved. Landlords must reach out to all tenants, not just to those who are already active. And tenants must be given a range of opportunities for involvement at a level that suits them.

This report, commissioned by the Tenant Services Authority, is a valuable contribution to the debate on how landlords can develop their tenant involvement and empowerment policies. It provides HouseMark's views on how landlords can question and improve their existing approach. We hope it will play an important role in delivering the new co-regulatory deal based on a deep and meaningful engagement with tenants from the doorstep to the boardroom. Our regulation requires that all landlords must have a strong practical approach to tenant involvement and empowerment. All the evidence shows this is central to raising service standards for tenants.

Peter Marsh
Chief Executive
Tenant Services Authority

Executive summary

The way housing providers obtain and make use of their tenants' views is changing. There is an increasing appreciation of the business case for using tenants' views to shape services, and this has been a key driver in the evolution of how providers approach tenant involvement. Within the past three years all the providers we interviewed for this report had:

- widened the range of means by which they obtain tenants' views; and
- developed approaches to ensure that tenant involvement clearly influences service delivery and supports a broader community impact

It is clear from our research that a combination of regulatory expectation, the impact of inspection and housing providers' own organisational drivers have been central to driving this evolution.

This broadly suggests a 'good news' story on tenant involvement. There are, however, a range of challenges and uncertainties about the way forward and the practical outcomes of what is being done. These are considered below.

Obtaining tenants' views

Providers house a variety of tenants, in terms of age, ethnicity and family type. Changing demographics and increasing social polarisation mean that tenants' aspirations and expectations also change over time.

Traditional structures of tenant involvement still have their place, but they also have their limitations – particularly in terms of involving the full range of a provider's tenants. Most providers have re-defined their approach to try to ensure they can call on a representative network of individuals and groups for comment and views. Hence they are:

- doing different things in different places to obtain feedback from as wide a range of people as possible
- developing more informal approaches to tenant involvement with fun days, family events and so on

Many providers are also advertising for tenant members of boards and scrutiny panels and then appointing through a competitive recruitment process in order to get a better mix of tenants from different backgrounds.

Acting on tenants' views

There is an increasing recognition that while obtaining tenants' views is important, it is crucial that there are mechanisms in place to ensure that providers act on those views.

There are two clear trends, with providers seeking to develop:

- a good set of standards for the delivery of key landlord services for all tenants, and having ways in which tenants can effectively influence and monitor those standards
- mechanisms for dealing with wider issues that arise in particular localities, many of which relate to matters beyond service standards alone

Most providers either have or are moving towards having some scrutiny mechanism tied into the organisational structure. For the majority this involves some form of scrutiny panel. Some organisations question the wisdom of this, however, preferring to use approaches such as tenant inspection to feed into existing service monitoring mechanisms.

Neighbourhood activity

The more providers become adept at obtaining their tenants' views, the more they realise the importance of dealing with the wider issues that may arise in particular localities. Some of these issues, such as anti-social behaviour or ground maintenance, relate directly to service delivery.

But they can involve wider matters, such as youth facilities, street lighting or policing, where responsibility rests with another body, or quality of life issues such as family support, housing advocacy or employment.

These wider issues pose a real challenge to providers. Involving tenants more effectively may lead to problems being identified more quickly and clearly but solutions often lie outside the domain of the provider. Nonetheless, most of the providers we surveyed have sought solutions to the problems identified, often involving advocacy on behalf of tenants in lobbying other bodies and/or partnership working.

Defining what is 'local'

We found that most strategy documents talk about neighbourhoods and communities in rather generic ways and often view them as broad geographical areas. In terms of defining the focus of local activity, however, most providers commented to us that tenants' concerns are generally with their immediate neighbourhood – the street or two around their homes, rather than a wider geographical area or estate.

Some providers are beginning to look at what is 'local' in a different way. Instead of seeing it as just a matter of geography, they are focusing on different parts of their customer base to identify individuals with particular needs or concerns who need to be treated, in a certain sense, as a specific 'community'. This relates particularly to the question of how to interact with 'hard-to-reach' groups, who can often now be more easily identified by customer profiling – a private sector technique used by to identify and categorise customers' key characteristics.

Strategy

One important subject with which providers are wrestling with concerns how tenants' views influence an organisation's overall strategy and priorities. This is clearly an area where providers are at very different stages of thinking and development.

Some providers argue that tenants are only interested in service delivery. They also make the point that a provider's board has to balance the views of tenants with those of a range of other stakeholders. The danger with this argument is that the views and interests of tenants might be marginalised when decisions are made about priorities.

One suggestion was that organisations should be clear about the role they see tenants having. This would help to determine which parts of the business should be **tenant-led** and which should be **tenant-influenced**.

Focusing on outcomes

Providers are seeking a range of outcomes from their tenant involvement work:

- influencing the business objectives of the provider
- widening the scope of tenant involvement
- providing improved delivery of services

However, many providers appear to be struggling to achieve all of these outcomes on a consistent basis and at times seem to focus on tenant involvement as an end in itself rather than a means to improve services and performance.

Tenant board members

Tenant board members seem to be most valued where the provider is clear about the drawbacks in having a fully professional board and understands the need for people with experience as tenants to be members of the organisation's governing body.

Tenants are also empowered when their board membership is the result of a competitive selection process and they are recognised as possessing relevant skills and experience.

The culture of an organisation

A key issue is how far tenant involvement is seen as the prerogative of specific employees or a particular section of an organisation or to what extent it is about embedding a culture of positive interaction with tenants across the whole organisation.

We identified three models for the way tenant involvement develops within an organisation:

- as part of a joint service development/customer feedback section
- as an 'internal consultant' supporting effective interaction of all staff with tenants
- being employed directly by the residents or residents' boards to influence and challenge the delivery of services

Where organisations involve tenants successfully, involvement is less about delivering preconceived tenant involvement outcomes and more about staff utilising tenants' views as a catalyst to drive forward involvement throughout the organisation. Effective internal communication, engaged staff and good corporate working are essential elements of organisational culture in this respect.

Tenant involvement, customer insight and service development

The make-up of a provider's tenant base is complex and some providers are seeking new ways of identifying and describing this complexity. Surveys and customer profiling and the insight this gives organisations about their tenants are becoming increasingly important to the providers we interviewed.

These developments raise some important questions about the role these play in relation to tenant involvement. In a small number of organisations these approaches are being developed as part of the tenant involvement process. In others it appears that they are being taken forward by the service development section and it is unclear how the two are related.

Our research suggests that there is scope for further development in understanding and making practical the relationship between performance management and tenant involvement as customer profiling and tenant insight mechanisms mature.

Impact assessment and value for money

The providers we interviewed have all adopted some form of impact assessment, which appears to have helped them to embed tenant involvement within the culture of their organisations and to assess the effectiveness of particular activities or events.

Some providers are starting to evaluate whether, bearing in mind the costs, they should be undertaking the full range of tenant involvement initiatives to which they are currently committed or if there is scope for more targeted approaches to achieve their objectives.

Providers have put considerable energy into expanding the range of their involvement activities in recent years. The next step might be to conduct a detailed analysis of the value for money of these initiatives to consider their efficiency and effectiveness.

Evolution: the next stage

Several key developments are likely to underpin the continuing evolution of tenant involvement:

- an increased focus on understanding tenants' experiences and aspirations through surveys and customer insight work
- using that understanding to link up with tenant involvement to focus services effectively for the benefit of customers
- a greater emphasis on determining the value for money of different approaches to tenant involvement
- an increasing awareness that the impact of tenant involvement will be enhanced where tenant influence is embedded in the culture of an organisation
- providers being clear about the mechanisms required to enable tenants to genuinely influence and challenge providers

The challenging requirements of the new TSA regulatory framework in terms of tenant involvement will no doubt accentuate this movement towards a more critical evaluation of what works best for landlords – and, most importantly, tenants.

Part One: The evolution of tenant involvement

Chapter One: An evolutionary process

It is clear that the way in which housing providers obtain and make use of the views of their tenants is undergoing a significant evolution. Tenant involvement is increasingly becoming embedded in the way that providers operate and organisations are striving hard to ensure that tenants' views influence the way they work.

Within the last three years, all the providers we interviewed for this report had:

- widened the range of means by which tenants' views are obtained
- developed approaches to ensure that tenant involvement clearly influences service delivery and supports a broader community impact

This has involved these providers employing some or all of the following initiatives:

- developing methods by which tenants can better scrutinise an organisation's service delivery
- applying different methods of involvement in different places to gain neighbourhood feedback and developing action plans to deal with the wider issues raised
- adopting more 'informal' approaches to tenant involvement, including fun days, family events and so on – often in order to engage with 'hard to reach' groups
- obtaining and utilising customer profiling data, information from targeted surveys and so on in order to understand the demography and aspirations of their customer base
- improving impact assessment in respect of current approaches to tenant involvement

It is also clear that steps are being taken in most organisations to make tenant involvement more integral to the way their businesses operate.

There is considerable variety, however, in terms of the approaches taken, the role of tenants in influencing business decisions and the overall strategy of providers in respect of tenant involvement. The evidence provided by the organisations we surveyed suggests that they are struggling to develop appropriate mechanisms for tenants to influence organisational strategy.

Overall there has been a shift towards a more focused dialogue with tenants and the effective use of information collected, emphasising the actual outcomes desired by tenants. Conversely, there has been progressively less emphasis – particularly amongst housing associations - on formal tenant involvement structures and documents setting out the process of engagement.

Key drivers

It is clear that the drivers for this change have involved a mix of – and interaction between – context, regulatory pressures and organisational development.

The importance of context

Providers we spoke to emphasised the importance of context – customer profile, geography, history, size and so on – in determining their approach to involvement. What works is likely to be different from one organisation to another, depending on the operational environment and the profile of tenants housed.

The role of regulation and inspection

To date housing associations and local authorities have had very different guidelines and expectations governing their approaches to tenant involvement.

For local authorities and ALMOs, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has focused on tenant participation compacts – collective agreements between local authorities and their tenants. The emphasis here, therefore, has been on developing collective approaches, having a clear document and action plan with defined standards, and focusing on tenant input to decision making rather than effective service delivery.

The CLG research into tenant compacts¹ found that they had provided a basic bottom-line standard for involvement rather than a real pressure to improve services. One of the report's central conclusions was that:

“The key aim should be to focus on the decision-making framework and on service outcomes, rather than getting too bogged down in elaborate processes or in finessing documentation.”

Housing associations have had a rather different approach stressed by their former regulator, the Housing Corporation. The Corporation's regulatory guidance² emphasised that associations must:

- *seek and be responsive to residents' views and priorities*
- *reflect these interests in their business strategies*
- *give residents and other stakeholders opportunities to comment on their performance*
- *enable residents to play their part in decision making*

The Corporation's approach left it more open to housing associations to determine their own strategies in line with their specific circumstances.

The policy was reviewed in 2007, with. As a result, all housing associations owning 250 or more units of social housing were expected to *“have at least one resident board member on each board or committee with a service delivery remit”*. The revised guidance also required that *“housing associations [should] publish an Involvement Statement which they have agreed with their residents”* and put a strong emphasis on the production of an annual Impact Assessment.

These different regulatory expectations may have been expected to drive housing associations and local authorities down very different routes, and to some extent that has been the case.

Both sectors, however, have been subject to inspection by the Audit Commission, which has developed a Key Lines of Enquiry approach to tenant involvement. This KLOE contains a considerable amount of description as to what an 'excellent' and a 'fair' service might look like in respect of tenant involvement. The importance given to the issue in inspection judgements has meant that tenant involvement has become even more central to providers' activity. However, some providers argue that having a detailed description of processes of involvement as the basis of inspection has encouraged landlords to adopt approaches to tenant involvement to gain a good inspection result, rather than developing methods that reflect local context and needs.

It is clear from our research that this combination of regulatory expectation and the impact of inspection have been central to driving the evolution in tenant involvement we have identified.

¹ See Appendix One

² HC Circular May 2007: Housing Corporation requirements in relation to resident involvement

One significant development over the past two years – particularly for housing associations – has been the Cave review of regulation and the emergence of the TSA. It is clear from TSA consultation on the new regulatory framework that there will be a greater emphasis on service delivery and tenants' views, and this has had a major impact on providers' recent thinking about the role of tenant involvement.

Organisational drivers

While regulation and inspection have helped to drive change, it is also important to recognise the organisational drivers are also encouraging organisations to be more responsive to their tenants' views.

The specific drivers involved are varied and depend on the circumstances and culture of an organisation. The Community Gateway Association, for example, was set up on the specific basis of its tenants being members of the organisation and driving a community-focused agenda. Other LSVT associations have developed tenant involvement on the basis of the need to gain tenant approval for stock transfer and to consult them on the subsequent improvement programmes. As these LSVTs were often working within traditional formal structures for tenant consultation inherited from the former local authority landlords, these structures have frequently continued to be the key focus of tenant involvement after the stock transfer and initial building improvements have been completed.

Effective tenant involvement has also led to greater identification of neighbourhood issues that need to be resolved. The fact that solutions often involve partnerships with other bodies has, in itself, widened the focus of tenant involvement. To deal with these issues effectively, it has been necessary to plug into other sources of funds, with tenant involvement often having a role as a lever for bringing in such finance.

For most of the providers we interviewed, there is an increasing appreciation of the business case for using the views of tenants to shape their services, and this has been a key driver in their approach to tenant involvement.

For traditional housing associations, in particular, there is an increasing inclination to look at commercial businesses for ways they might take their own organisations forward. This is evidenced by the establishment of call centres and one-stop shops, and an interest in the approach of retailers to obtaining and acting on customer feedback information. This feedback is generally elicited through customer surveys, focus groups and workshops and monitoring customer spending patterns.

Many of the providers we interviewed are trying to develop a more consumer-oriented culture within their organisations. Most recognise, however, that the sector is still grappling with the challenge of developing its culture of service delivery into one that prioritises a more responsive, individualised and flexible approach.

Several providers are, accordingly, developing a clearer emphasis on understanding and acting on the overall **tenant experience**, with tenant feedback and satisfaction being used as a proxy for market signals.

This approach seems to provide a good focus for developing a wider dialogue with service users, aimed at achieving an organisational culture and business objectives that deliver a more tailored and responsive service for tenants.

Peer group competition and comparison is also important for many providers. Some changes in tenant involvement appear to be driven by a desire to be recognised in some way as a 'top performer'. This might involve seeking some form of accreditation (TPAS accreditation was mentioned by some of the case study organisations), learning from housing Beacons or the impact of improved benchmarking results. Many organisations mentioned the boost to staff morale when they see positive results and how this helps drive further change.

We found evidence that one of the key areas on which associations in particular are focusing is tenant satisfaction. In the absence of market signals, providers and the regulator are increasingly trying to find mechanisms that record the effectiveness of service delivery and how far these service levels meet customer expectations.

Measuring customer satisfaction, therefore, has become a key issue for both the regulator and individual providers. This has been part of the motivation for many associations to focus on tenant involvement as a way of identifying tenants' expectations and showing that these are satisfied in terms of the service delivered.

Indeed, one concern expressed to us was that given the limitations of current satisfaction data, as identified in recent reports³, the expectations put on tenant involvement mechanisms to achieve increased satisfaction might be overestimated.

Differences between local authorities and housing association

We are not in a position to analyse fully the differences between the approaches taken by local authorities and housing associations. Our methodology relied very much on using the CLG review of tenant compacts to draw out lessons from the local authority sector. This meant that the majority of our interviews and case studies involved housing associations. However, of the providers that responded to the advertisement seeking volunteers to participate in this project, a quarter consisted of ALMOs or local authorities. We included one local authority and three ALMOs to try to get some level of comparison.

The different nature of the two types of organisation (local authorities/ALMOs and housing associations), particularly in terms of governance and their respective regulatory expectations, has undoubtedly led to different approaches as we have noted above. However, we found some evidence that stereotypes in this area were not necessarily borne out.

So, while geography and concentration of stock has an influence in terms of how far provider tenant involvement embraces neighbourhood activities, the difference between local authority/LSVT providers and traditional associations with a more diversified stock is becoming less accentuated with most associations now placing significant emphasis on neighbourhood activity.

Similarly, while the CLG report on tenant compacts shows that in general local authority providers have focused more on processes and collective tenant involvement structures, the local authority and ALMO providers participating in this research are increasingly engaged in 'customer driven' approaches to improving services based on more flexible tenant involvement models.

Terminology: tenants or residents?

The brief for this research was to look at 'tenant' involvement. It is important to note, however, that most of the providers we spoke to focus more on 'residents'. This is not a matter of language, but reflects the fact that most providers now have a mix of tenants and leaseholders.

It is also worth noting that those providers involved in neighbourhood activities are not confining their programmes to their tenants. Community Gateway and City West Homes (see profile page 14,) in particular, are involving other residents – both private tenants and owner occupiers – in their work.

³ Assessing residents satisfaction, Ipsos MORI, 2010 and Driving up performance, HouseMark 2009.

Good news but ...

Our research findings broadly suggest a 'good news' story on tenant involvement. But we need to introduce some caveats, which we will deal with later in this report.

In particular, the providers we interviewed all volunteered to take part and therefore tend to be to the fore in developing effective tenant involvement. This does have the advantage, however, of allowing us to capture their experiences and point the way forward. Discussions with consultants and others who work with providers on a regular basis suggest that while there is still a good deal of poorer practice, the positive trends we have identified are valid.

It is also the case that in the process of evolution now taking place there are many challenges and uncertainties about the way forward and the practical outcomes of what is being done.

What we have tried to do with the rest of the report, therefore, is to:

- examine the challenges presented by the evolution of tenant involvement policies
- consider what will be the key issues in the next stage of this evolution
- set out the questions that providers ought to be asking themselves when considering how tenants' views influence their activities

Provider profile
CityWest Homes (CWH) is an arms-length management organisation (ALMO) managing around 22,000 mainly estate-based homes for Westminster City Council, more than 9,000 of which have been sold to leaseholders.
Overall approach CWH has been set a series of financial and performance targets by the Council. To meet these targets the organisation believes it has to ensure that residents are at the heart of its service delivery and decision-making. To this end it has a comprehensive borough-wide tenant involvement compact. It has five tenants on its main board, 14 on its two area boards and another five on its service delivery advisory committee, along with a clear structure for involvement. Residents are involved in making major decisions about services and monitoring performance, including the development and tendering of the housing management and repairs service specifications, and in determining a service provider incentive scheme.

Provider profile

Key mechanisms

A housing panel is the key consultative body for housing issues and council services, consisting of 15 representatives, one from the Westminster Federation of Residents' Associations and others from the village residents' panels. There is an even split between tenants and leaseholders.

CWH's estates are grouped into 'villages', and CWH delivers services to tenants and lessees through 19 local estate offices. Each village has a consultative body that meets with village managers twice a year and reviews performance against local compact targets.

Local service improvement compacts (LSICs) were introduced in 2006 for each village area to give tenants much more influence over the level of local service delivery. The LSICs pursue issues that are specific to particular localities and are clear, short and to the point with a strong focus on action.

The emphasis is moving away from highly structured formal meetings towards multi-purpose events that demand less of residents but still allow for views to be expressed and captured, and for managers to be put on the spot. Each village is now able to define its own approach to suit the local context, including piggy-backing on other local events and joint events with neighbouring villages.

Chapter Two: Empowering tenants

At the heart of tenant involvement are concepts of accountability and tenant empowerment. However, definitions can be a problem here. Some of the organisations and tenants we spoke to found the term 'empowerment' confusing or misleading. This is a complex area: we are clearly considering a number of different aspects to this notion.

First, in the absence of clear market mechanisms such as the ability of the customer to take their business elsewhere, empowerment is about giving tenants some measures for holding their landlords to account. There is a lack of clarity, however, amongst regulators, landlords and tenants about how much this accountability is limited to influencing and monitoring service delivery and how closely it is linked with the governance and strategy of an organisation – and if both, the balance between the two.

As we saw in Chapter One, some providers are taking a more consumer-oriented approach. This may be appropriate if most tenants see themselves as customers wanting a good service but who don't want to be 'empowered'. But is that the case? This also raises the question: can organisations really be held accountable without a strong collective voice for tenants?

There is also the question of how far this concept of empowerment embraces wider issues around empowering individuals and communities and the whole issue of 'social capital' – the mutual values, understanding and networks that bring people together in collective or civic action. This is a much broader subject, that the scope of this study does not allow us to address in detail but is clearly something that providers will have to consider.

We will deal with some of the more specific aspects of tenant empowerment in the following chapters, but it is worth considering here some relevant trends in sector practice which relate to obtaining tenants' views.

Methods of obtaining tenants' views

As we saw in Chapter One, providers are now developing a wide range of methods of interacting with their tenants. Just how wide the range can be is evident from the options that New Charter Homes gives to its tenants, outlined in the box below:

Choose your role

A smaller part in the performance

- Attend our neighbourhood walkabouts
- Come along to our service review groups
- Attend a focus group
- Estate forum meetings
- Shared interest forums
- Mystery shopping
- Attend our training and information sessions
- Attend and observe a New Charter board meeting.
- Attend our annual residents showcase event

Or take a lead role

- A tenant board member
- A tenant management team member
- A resident inspector
- A representative on one of our improvement panels
- Part of a working group
- A formal residents' association

One key driver for developing a broad range of involvement methods is to obtain the views of as wide a spectrum of service users as possible. Some providers have analysed their interaction with tenants and found that:

- most services are organised and resourced to respond to a very small proportion of intensive service users
- a high percentage of interactions involve the reactive enforcement of the tenancy conditions rather than the proactive delivery of services

This means that feedback mechanisms based on these interactions only obtain the views of a limited number of tenants.

This situation can be compounded if the main means of obtaining tenants' views is via traditional participation structures such as tenants' and residents' associations when these structures only represent a limited range of service users.

The changing customer base

The providers we spoke to all made the point that the customer base is not fixed. Not only do most providers house a variety of tenants, in terms of age, ethnicity and family type, but changing demographics and increasing social polarisation mean that the tenants' aspirations and expectations also change over time.

One provider told us that:

“Internally the intake of new tenants has slowed, leaving the traditionally involved profile biased towards those aged 60-plus, male and white British, a significant concern in light of the accepted feminisation of social housing and the increasing BME and young person profile. We do have many tenants represented by the traditionally involved profile, but it was agreed that changes were required to make involvement attractive to the uninvolved profile of tenant, and to move towards direct consultation rather than representation from the same people.”

Some providers highlighted a significant cultural difference between older and younger tenants. Many older tenants had been brought up in an era when a sense of working class solidarity was strong and the models for influence and action were often drawn from the traditional labour movement. Conversely, younger people had been brought up in a more individualised culture and expected to be treated principally as consumers.

The makeup of a provider's tenant base is therefore complex and some providers are seeking new ways of identifying and describing this complexity. Customer insight, profiling and segmentation are increasingly being used to try to capture and act on this complexity.

While we were conducting our research the Hyde Group published an interesting report, *Where are tomorrow's heartlanders?*⁴, looking at the different types of tenants housed by the Group. The report uses a qualitative methodology to move away from traditional archetypes such as single parents, the elderly and the unemployed. Instead, it identifies four groups in the association's tenant population that tend to hold similar views or have had similar experiences:

- Heartlanders – who are highly active in their communities
- Disconnected residents
- Security seekers
- Future planners

The report's conclusions state that:

“There is no ‘single’ social housing resident. There are huge variations in terms of expectations, experiences and aspirations. Rather than seeking to answer the question of what the single purpose of social housing should be, we should acknowledge that it serves several purposes for the many different groups who rely on it.”

The importance of these considerations is not just the recognition that tenants are not a homogenous group, but also that there may be tensions between groups and individual tenants that need to be recognised and in some cases mediated.

Moving on from structures

This recognition that a provider's customer base includes a wide set of groups and individuals with different preferences, needs and aspirations, which cannot easily be represented by a single 'tenant voice', is key to the evolution of tenant involvement.

⁴ Where are tomorrow's heartlanders? Hyde Group 2010

The providers we interviewed were all clear that while the traditional structures of tenant involvement/participation may still have their place, they also have their limitations, which require other approaches.

The principal limitation of traditional structures is that they tend to restrict involvement to those who have the time and motivation to go to meetings. This means that they tend to be dominated by white people, often over 50, who cannot be expected to represent the views and experiences of all tenants.

Several providers in our study highlighted the fact that not all tenants have the skills, confidence or language necessary to engage with formal structures. Those tenants who become involved in formal structures can become the 'voice of the tenants' in a way that disempowers others unless they are encouraged and supported to take part. The CLG study into tenant compacts noted that: *"It was often the same people who appeared on the Board and a range of panels, sub-committees and forums."*

Some of the providers have encountered resistance to developing wider involvement approaches from tenants within their traditional structures because they believed, as one interviewee put it, "that people should have to show their commitment by coming to meetings". Some providers also feel that structures sometimes come to be seen as an end in themselves, with meetings becoming the focus of activity rather than a means of focusing the work of the organisation.

This echoes the findings of the TSA report, *Choosing Choice*, which found that: *"There is still a tendency among some providers for 'tenant involvement' to focus on process or to be treated as a 'bolt on' to service delivery rather than tenants' views being the driver of that delivery."*⁵

Widening the scope

The philosophy behind traditional structures is often based on tenant involvement in historic working class 'solidarity' structures, such as trade unions, in which activists represent their members in opposition to the employer – or in the case of housing, the landlord.

In contrast, many providers are now trying to cultivate a 'partnership' with their tenants based on a range of different approaches. These techniques include obtaining information, feedback and intelligence from a wider pool of tenants, which is then used to try to refine and develop services.

It was put to us, however, that some providers simply don't want well organised, well informed and vocal tenants' groups that can challenge them and hold them to account.

Many providers have decided to de-prioritise the role of representative accountability via formally elected resident bodies and focus on new ways to make services more accountable to tenants. In the case of three of the providers we talked to, their residents' associations had ceased to exist.

A key aspect of this change has been the development of customer profiling to get a better picture of who the tenants are. This enables organisations to develop specific methods to reach particular groups of tenants.

Several providers in our research highlighted the fact that coming to meetings did not figure highly in most tenants' priorities. As a result, providers have been looking at other ways of obtaining tenants' views. All the providers we interviewed have been moving towards:

- doing different things in different places to obtain feedback from neighbourhoods and developing plans of action to deal with the wider issues raised

⁵ Choosing Choice Tribal Consulting 2009

- developing more informal approaches to tenant involvement with fun days, family events and so on

We asked tenants in the workshops we held about how ideas and feedback from tenants are encouraged by their providers. Tenants gave numerous examples of informal approaches such as 'gazebo days', Christmas, Halloween and similar events, barbecues, competitions and so on. Whether these represent the main feedback mechanisms being utilised or the ones that landlords and tenants found most useful was not clear.

A common development has been the establishment of a range of panels of tenants willing to be surveyed. Some of these involve significant numbers of tenants, and so have the potential to provide a representative sample of tenant opinion. Many providers also point to the importance of involving large numbers to avoid 'survey fatigue' as a result of having to keep going back to the same people.

We found that most providers are being much more selective about the number and type of surveys they use. For example, Bromford Housing Group has stopped anyone in its organisation sending out surveys other than those that are managed centrally and focused on the specific issues requiring customer feedback. Anchor Trust is moving away from an overarching satisfaction survey format and using more targeted surveys to explore specific service issues.

Tenant engagement can also be episodic and driven by particular issues arising in an area, while structures are ongoing and need consistent involvement.

Providers have to react to changing circumstances with regard to the properties they manage and the areas in which they operate. A particular notable example is anti-social behaviour, which may only affect a small number of a provider's tenants but can be a major problem to those affected. Quick-reaction mechanisms to identify issues, obtain tenants views and enable action to be taken are particularly important.

Hard-to-reach groups

A key driver in the development of a wider range of methods for obtaining tenants' views is the need to reach out to groups and individuals whose views have not normally influenced providers' activities.

The CLG report on tenant compacts commented that:

"There was still a long way to go in terms of engaging those groups which have traditionally been 'hard-to-reach': younger people, people with disabilities, members of black and minority ethnic groups and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people."

The researchers for that report said that even where providers had tried to reach out to other groups they had tended to use traditional forms of tenant involvement, particularly trying to get people to meetings.

This all suggests that traditional approaches to tenant involvement may need to be either radically changed or supplemented if the views of *all* tenants are going to be taken account in shaping and monitoring services.

This is an area where it is apparent that the providers we spoke to are making significant efforts. In some of the providers we spoke to we found that staff were looking at ways to involve tenants more informally to widen participation, particularly with young people

Further examples of such efforts are included in Part Two of this report.

Beyond structures?

Despite the perception among providers that many tenants are not interested in attending meetings this does not mean that – in practice - formal structures and meetings have been abandoned altogether.

Indeed, part of the positive evolution in tenant involvement that we have identified is the recognition that while obtaining tenants' views is important, it is also vital that there are mechanisms in place to ensure that providers act on those views.

Providers still see the need, therefore, to involve tenants in ways that build knowledge and skills to influence the service that is delivered. Rather than moving away from structures altogether, most have re-defined their approach to ensure they have a network of individuals and groups that can help deliver housing and wider objectives.

For some this is done by supporting existing tenants' representatives and tenants' and residents' associations. Shepherd's Bush HA retains residents' associations but has turned some of these into tenants forums (see profile, page 24). For most of the providers in this study it has involved developing new mechanisms. In either case providers are providing a wide range of support mechanisms, including training, mentoring and 'shadowing' to enable newer and less experienced tenants to learn from their peers.

Several providers have agreed criteria for individual representatives (who are variously termed 'village voices', 'street representatives', 'area representatives', 'local links', 'estate champions', 'block representatives' and so on) to act on behalf of tenants living in specific situations, including small rural areas and sheltered or supported housing. Many are also striving to ensure that they have a series of tenant panels or other bodies that match the profile of their overall tenant base. Some do this on a neighbourhood level and some also use this 'profiling' approach at a more strategic level.

In the section on service delivery and neighbourhoods (Chapter Four), we look in some detail at the way that providers have established new mechanisms for involving tenants in the scrutiny and delivery of services.

One of the key features of these new bodies is that tenant members are now more commonly recruited via appointment than by election. The aim here is to get a better mix of tenants and a wider range of skills.

Most providers that now appoint tenants to tenant bodies or boards select tenants from those that have replied to an advertisement – and there is no shortage of interest. For example, Bromford Group recently made use of an open advertising and recruitment process to select a tenant for its group board, which prompted 200 applications from a variety of ages and backgrounds.

Of course it is important that any such approach is transparent and seen to be fair and representative. Where places on boards and other bodies are filled by appointment we found that tenants were represented on the appointment panels and drawn from existing tenant representatives, quite often either tenant board members or elected tenant representatives

This move to appointment is not universal. Aldwyck HA, for instance, holds an election among all its tenants for its customer scrutiny panels. Cambridge City Homes uses a ballot of all residents to appoint tenants to each new housing regulation panel. While it can be argued that interviews make it easier to specify and select for a clear set of skills and competencies, elections give clear control to the wider tenant body – an important message to send to stakeholders.

In practice there are not necessarily two conflicting models of accountability – one based on elected residents’ organisations negotiating with landlords and the other based on consumerist models. Instead there exists a variety of mechanisms for accountability based on the culture of different organisations and the views, profile and ambitions of their tenants. Apart from the Community Gateway Association, which was specifically set up with tenants as members and owning the organisation, most of the providers we looked at used a hybrid of accountability mechanisms.

Just as important as the issue of election versus appointment is how resident-led bodies are located and influence the reporting and corporate structures of an organisation.

Again a variety of solutions have been adopted. We shall return to this later but it is important to note two points here:

- In most organisations there is a split between those tenants involved in the strategy of the organisation - normally tenant board members - and those involved in scrutiny. Although we also found examples of providers having specific groups at a strategic level who then report to the Board
- in many organisations there is a distinction (not always explicit) between the tools, techniques and approaches for engaging with residents about service (often a ‘consumerist’ approach) and engaging about neighbourhoods and place (more ‘collaborative’ and linked to capacity building/empowerment)

Empowering individuals

Becoming involved in the way a provider runs its services can have benefits for individuals, including the development of increased confidence and employability. Indeed, some providers highlight this as a positive aspect of tenant involvement. Chester and District Housing Association outlines the following benefits on its website.

- You can make new friends.
- You can get to know more about the Trust and the services we provide.
- You can help us improve our services to you.
- You can help us make real changes that will help make our communities safer and better places to live.
- You can learn new skills.
- You can feel better for taking steps to improve things for the better and increase customer satisfaction.
- Volunteering provides the opportunity to get to know more about social housing and gives you the opportunity to influence local and national policies.

Providers are increasingly supporting tenants who are getting involved. Impressively, in most of the associations we surveyed, the training of tenants is taking place alongside that of the organisation’s staff. Training is therefore seen as a key part of empowerment, developing skills and confidence for tenants and staff alike, which in turn affects the culture of the organisation.

It is important to emphasise that this is a two-way process; supporting people to become involved is a resource for the organisation itself. The aim is often to develop the capability to engage with organisational agendas. This sometimes poses the question of how far tenants are being empowered to challenge and indeed to actively define these agendas.

The question of payment

If tenants are taking on these roles, including decision making and scrutiny of service delivery, should they be paid for doing so?

Most providers we surveyed have developed some kind of incentive schemes to get tenants to take part. Some have set up 'reward clubs' in which tenants get points for their involvement – attending meetings, introducing a friend, being part of a telephone panel and so on – with different points being awarded according to the value that the provider places on particular aspects of involvement.

The tenants' workshop we ran highlighted a problem arising from the fact that in some cases it was felt appropriate to give tenants the same payments as board members. This caused difficulties for tenants who were on benefits, a problem that has also been identified in relation to tenant board members.

In most organisations the question of payment is tied up with trying to ensure that tenants are regarded on an equal footing with other board members. Chester and District HA board members are not paid but in developing its tenant board the association has decided that tenants should be given the same allowances as other board members.

The payment issue also relates to an organisation's attitude towards the balance between a voluntary ethos and paid-for involvement.

There appears, additionally, to be an emerging debate within some organisations about to what extent the governance role required of board members is different to that required on other bodies, and how far any financial incentives should be adjusted accordingly.

It is important to recognise that many tenants enjoy and want the opportunities for personal development that involvement can offer. Some providers have established funds that individuals and groups can bid for to undertake particular activities in the area where they live. For example, Great Places Housing Group offers a tenants' dividend and environmental funds to which tenants can bid for money to improve their lives and environment. This promotes individual opportunity and develops social capital.

Developing social capital

The tenant involvement staff we spoke to were keen to emphasise the benefits of an increased focus on neighbourhoods, developing community forums and informal mechanisms such as fun days. These were seen as useful not just in obtaining a wider range of tenants' views, but also as a means of helping to develop social capital. The tenant involvement workers emphasised the way that these activities helped to develop links, both formal and informal, among members of the local community.

One tenant involvement officer told us:

"It was decided to work intensively with geographically defined communities and use a grounded approach. This works with individuals to overcome their personal barriers and encourage them to get involved. It helps strengthen community networks by developing partnerships with local service providers and signposting tenants to these networks, and supporting their involvement in local issues. Focusing on locality helps overcome embodied differences, and focuses on issues that are of concern to the majority in the locality."

Several people we spoke to emphasised the importance of developing social capital but also said that results often took time to achieve and success was difficult to measure.

Supported housing

Two of the providers we interviewed, Family Mosaic and Anchor Trust, had a significant focus on supported housing. Interviews with them suggested that the way supported housing providers have to interact with their tenants may have lessons for the wider tenant involvement debate.

Involving tenants from diverse backgrounds/with diverse needs

Between them, Family Mosaic and Anchor Trust consult with and involve a diverse range of people, including:

- people with mental health problems
- people with learning difficulties
- older people generally
- vulnerable young families
- sheltered housing tenants who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual
- residents of care homes
- tenants, leaseholders or owner occupiers in retirement accommodation
- black and ethnic minority sheltered housing tenants
- misusers of alcohol in sheltered schemes

Personal consultation

The other approach that sets these organisations slightly apart from general needs providers is their use of personal consultation. This emerges as a combined result of the type of provision in which they are engaged and regulatory driving forces.

Scheme managers and support workers build personal relationships with tenants and, once the capacity, skills and experience are in place, these are central to successful consultation exercises. These can take place as part of one-to-one meetings arranged for other purposes within the context of the tenant's support plan. Support staff also act as advocates on behalf of some tenants with profound disabilities.

The Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework has individual consultation strategies as a cross-cutting theme. Providers are judged on their approach to this. This is interesting but it is important to stress personal consultation is probably not practical for many general needs providers.

Evaluation

An evaluation tool is provided by exit questionnaires for people leaving short-term supported housing. Feedback can be gauged on how the process of involvement affected them, along with the impact of their involvement their future prospects in terms of housing, lifestyle, ability to cope, to sustain a tenancy and so on.

Cost effective

Rather than viewing tenant involvement in this sector as problematic and difficult, Family Mosaic regards it as easier than in other sectors. A lot of consultation and involvement is undertaken by the front line support staff who work with tenants on a daily basis – particularly with supported housing tenants. This means that involvement can be undertaken at marginal cost to the provider.

Personalisation agenda

Family Mosaic mentioned the drive by government to divert the money given to organisations to the people who receive social, medical and housing support – to enable clients to decide from whom to buy their own care or support. Family Mosaic sees this as an added spur to get its tenant involvement and service provision right, so that its current clients will continue to buy their care and support from the organisation.

Consistency

Consistency is a problem for a provider of short-term supported housing. Just as a tenant is starting to make a meaningful contribution to a forum, panel or other body, they may move on to a permanent tenancy elsewhere. Family Mosaic Supported Housing Customer Panel now allows panel members to remain involved for 6 months after they 'move on'.

Shepherd's Bush HA (SBHA) currently has approaching 5,000 properties in west London, with the majority in the Hammersmith and Fulham, Hounslow and Ealing council areas.

Overall approach

A third of SBHA's board places are reserved for residents. This has been the case for two decades. SBHA has retained an open shareholder membership policy and actively encourages tenants and residents to become shareholders.

Tenants' and residents' associations still play an important role in SBHA's involvement strategy and in bringing communities together and developing relationships with staff and other local organisations. Currently there are six established residents' associations and a number of residents' forums where residents have opted for a more informal arrangement.

More recently SBHA has established the 'intouch' post. This is an independent officer working within the association but employed directly by the residents to facilitate resident involvement and the monitoring of services across the organisation with a direct line into the senior management team.

Key mechanisms

The Independent Tenants' Committee (ITC) is the main consultative body representing all residents. The ITC carries out mystery shopping and the monitoring of service standards and has been central to agreeing the most recent set of service standards with residents.

The ITC controls two funds where decision-making is now entirely in the hands of the tenants. These are the estate improvements fund of £26,000 per annum and the community grants fund of £10,000 per annum.

There are 19 tenant monitors, who assist officers to monitor local estate services and meet staff on a regular basis at quarterly joint inspections. Monitors provide feedback and attend briefing meetings to discuss what is good and what needs to be improved. The chief executive also meets with groups of tenants three times a year, with open agendas in locations close to tenants.

Tenants have a range of ways to be involved as can be seen from their involvement in relation to property management. Each quarter there are meetings of SBHA's maintenance forum, at which residents examine strategic and policy issues, and separately a repairs' focus group of 200 tenants who have had a repair done in the past quarter.

The results of these are fed into partnering panels of contractors, staff and tenants, which have responsibility for monitoring day-to-day maintenance performance and the cyclical and planned maintenance programme.

Chapter Three: Strategy and culture

Chapter 2 illustrated how providers are extending the ways they obtain their tenants' views. They are also more clearly focusing how those views influence aspects of their organisation's activities, particularly in terms of service development.

One key area with which providers are wrestling concerns how tenants' views influence an organisation's overall strategy and priorities. This is clearly an area where providers are at very different stages of thinking and development.

The fact that this is challenging for providers is understandable, particularly given the range of stakeholders that they have to consider. Additionally, for both housing associations and local authorities, accountability has traditionally been focused upwards – to the regulator for associations, to elected members for local authority housing departments/ALMOs, and to the inspectorate for both.

Several providers we surveyed seemed to see tenants as not being primarily interested in wider strategic decisions. The argument was put to us that most tenants are interested primarily in getting a good standard of service delivery, particularly in terms of maintenance and repairs. The board has to make decisions concerning the wider strategy and finances of the association, which go beyond service delivery and affect not only existing but future tenants.

One association chief executive told us that:

“All the findings from research into what tenants want – including from the TSA’s recent ‘conversation’ – is that their priorities are a good service in terms of repairs and maintenance and secure neighbourhoods. Time and resources should be put into ensuring that this is where we put our priorities.”

Other providers made the point that existing tenants may be principally concerned with ensuring that money is spent on existing homes, while the association as a whole has to look at its wider impact, particularly in terms of providing homes for those not able to access them at present.

One association trying to involve tenants in its business strategy said that:

“Few tenants are actually interested in the wider issues and therefore there is less scope for building knowledge and skills than there is in relation to service delivery, where there is a wider level of interest.”

It is clearly the case that the board of a provider has to balance the views of tenants with those of a range of other stakeholders. The danger with the argument that tenants are only interested in service delivery is that the views of tenants might be marginalised when decisions are made about strategic priorities. Other organisations involved in our study were quite clear that the views and experience of tenants should be a key factor in determining strategies and business objectives. Although opinions varied as to the appropriate level of involvement, all agreed that support and training were vital if tenants were going to be able to have a real influence.

One suggestion was that organisations should be clear about the role they see tenants having. If necessary, this might distinguish which parts of the business should be **tenant-led** and which should be **tenant-influenced**. A link was made to understanding tenant aspirations (what tenants want now might be different to what they want in the future, so it might be better that they influence rather than lead in certain areas of the business).

Linking tenant involvement to corporate strategies and objectives may be more complex for local authorities than for housing associations. Whether a council’s housing is directly managed in-house or by an ALMO, the strategy for tenant involvement needs to fit into not only the housing strategy but via that into the council’s overall community and corporate strategies. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to make sure the contribution tenant involvement can make to wider objectives is clearly identified, defined, and then included within the tenant involvement strategy. The opportunity is to link objectives for tenant involvement in housing services into wider community development objectives.

Tenant board members

The role of tenants in relation to the strategic decision-making body of an organisation is something that has sometimes been a matter of controversy for both local authorities and housing associations. In our research we have looked principally at the role of tenants in relation to housing association boards, although some of the issues are similar for local authorities.

The vast majority of associations have tenants on their board, and for many this is seen as the main way of ensuring that the tenant voice is represented when business decisions are made. For some, such as the Community Gateway Association and Shepherd’s Bush Housing Association, it is a central aspect of the accountability mechanism.

There can be, however, confusion about the role of tenants on the board. Sometimes tenant members seem to be considered as a separate - rather than integrated – part of the board. This was particularly pronounced in the case of some LSVT associations which differentiate between tenant, local authority and independent board members.

This confusion partly arises because some associations still see tenant board members as having a representative role, despite their fiduciary duty to the organisation precluding it. This has a variety of dangers, not least in the individual tenants on the board being regarded as the voice of all tenants, particularly if they are elected.

Tenant board members seem to be most valued where the association is clear that there are dangers in having a fully professional board and that there is therefore the need for people with the experience of being a tenant to be represented on the organisation's governing body.

Tenants also appear to be empowered within a board where they are clearly selected via a competitive process. This helps avoid tokenism as it emphasises the selection of people with particular skills and experience. It means that tenant board members are not selected because they are tenants per se, but because they have valued skills to offer.

Many associations see the participation of tenants in other aspects of their involvement strategies as being helpful in terms of training towards future board membership.

Focused approaches to tenants influencing strategy

One issue that is important here is whether an association is part of a group. In most organisations it is the individual member subsidiaries that tend to have responsibility for tenant involvement. The Bromford Group has tackled this issue via a combined approach whereby the tenant involvement strategy is a corporate one across the group as a whole - with each subsidiary responsible for its implementation.

Having group members responsible for tenant involvement need not preclude tenants from having an influence on overall strategy, as can be seen from the example of Westlea Housing Association, which is part of the Greensquare Group. Westlea has a residents' business plan – which feeds into the corporate business plan (see Part two) and district forums which meet monthly. These forums see and comment on board papers and some members can attend board meetings. At the tenants' workshop we held Westlea tenants cited the residents' business plan as resulting in real change.

However, tenants can feel disempowered if they have no access to decision-making at group board level. Circle Anglia has tackled this issue by establishing a resident and service users panel (RASP) to provide a voice in the governance of the group as a whole. RASP is comprised of two residents and service users from each of its ten business units (see Part two for details).

Outcomes

Most of the providers we interviewed said that they are now focusing more on how tenant involvement can influence outcomes. When questioned, however, it was not always clear what was meant by this, and many providers still struggle to differentiate between 'outputs' and 'outcomes'.

There appears to be some confusion as to whether the desired outcomes from tenant involvement involve all or just some of the following:

- influencing the business objectives of the provider
- widening the scope of tenant involvement
- providing improved delivery of services

Many providers still appear to be struggling to do this effectively and some still seem at times to focus back on having objectives for involving tenants as an end in itself rather than a means to improve services and performance.

Providers need to ensure that they have identified and examined the particular challenges facing their organisations, including whether or not they have clear objectives and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. If objectives are unclear, monitoring outcomes will be difficult.

The culture of an organisation

A key issue for the way that tenant involvement develops is how far it is seen as the prerogative of specific employees or a particular section of an organisation or whether it is about embedding a culture of positive interaction with tenants across a whole organisation.

In some providers support is provided for tenant involvement by front-line and other staff throughout the organisation, with a Tenant Involvement Team operating as a kind of internal consultancy. Some of Westlea HA's tenant involvement officers are called 'advisors' to reflect this role. In other providers, the Tenant Involvement Team is in the lead and carries most of the responsibility. Some organisations have a 'mix and match' approach with roles changing according to what is being done, especially when a 'project-based' approach is used.

For those providers working towards ensuring that interaction with tenants is embedded in their culture, involvement becomes less about delivering 'tenant involvement outcomes' and more about the staff responsible acting as a catalyst for driving forward involvement throughout the organisation. Organisational issues around better communication, getting staff engaged and links between different departments are key issues.

Some providers have taken practical steps to support this role. Four providers that attended our workshop had their tenant involvement sections reporting directly to the chief executive. The majority of the others reported to the director responsible for service delivery.

Some providers have introduced a requirement that all reports to the board or senior management team outline what consultation has taken place with tenants - alongside the equal opportunities and financial implications. Some require that each section within their organisation has involvement objectives, with the tenant involvement officers having a role in making sure that these are met. Soha Housing adopts this approach and stresses the importance of ensuring that these objectives are not too general but are focused on how each department's activities are influenced by tenants' views.

Bromford Group appears to have gone furthest in developing an 'organisational conscience', in order to ensure that the whole organisation is accountable for acting on its customers' views. To support this objective, Bromford seeks to recruit staff on the basis of attitude and customer service as well as technical skills and experience.

Resident-led self-regulation (RLSR)

Four of the providers we talked to for this project – Aldwyck HA, New Charter HA, Calico Homes and Cambridge City Homes (see profile, page 29) – have adopted approaches based on resident-led self-regulation (RLSR).

This is a concept developed by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) with the aim of giving tenants more influence over the priorities and performance of their landlords and embedding resident focus in the way a provider goes about its business. The approach is based on having a group of residents who:

- oversee a range of scrutiny activities
- integrate these activities with wider self-regulation work within the business
- use findings from these activities to challenge and shape the activities of senior staff and boards/committees

Meaningful RLSR is still very much in its development stage. In the four organisations we looked at it is focused mainly on the scrutiny of service delivery.

The new TSA co-regulatory regime will focus on provider self assessment of their performance. In light of this, RLSR could develop as both a means of channelling the way tenants' views influence a provider's strategy and service delivery and as a significant mechanism for a provider to demonstrate that it is effectively self assessing in relation to these standards.

Indeed, existing tenant-led service scrutiny mechanisms developed – such as Great Places' tenant services committee or Chester and District's residents' board – could play this role in future.

One of the recommendations of the CLG review of tenant participation compacts was that:

“Resident - led self-regulation panels should be introduced in those social landlords with mature and robust participation structures and processes.”

The TSA and CIH have recently published a report on this topic⁶, which examines the issues in considerable detail.

Provider profile
Cambridge City Homes manages approximately 8,500 homes on behalf of Cambridge City Council. The council provides services to approximately 7,500 tenants and 1,000 leaseholders.
Overall approach Cambridge City Homes has a long standing commitment to taking residents' views into consideration in its decision making. It has now developed changes to its formal structures to move towards a resident-led self-regulation approach that directs the landlord's internal self-scrutiny activities, including existing resident involvement activities.

⁶ Resident-led self-regulation: Enhancing in-house scrutiny and performance. CIH 2010

Provider profile

Key mechanisms

At the top of the involvement structure is the **Housing Management Board**. The board has the same status as the council's other scrutiny committees. It comprises 15 members, six from the ruling group, three opposition councillors and six residents. The residents are elected by all council tenants and leaseholders citywide, and serve a four-year term. All members have equal voting rights.

The board is the highest discussion forum between the council, its tenants and its leaseholders for all matters relating to the landlord function of Cambridge City Council. As with all the council's scrutiny committees, the board makes its recommendations to its executive councillor, who makes the final decisions.

There are various groups that sit below the Housing Management Board but greatly influence services, providing real scrutiny of services and activities. Among others, these groups have for years included:

- ROAM (the Residents' and Officers' Asset Management Group) – residents influencing the council's assets management strategy, including resident inspections of repairs, major works, voids and so on
- the Standards Group – residents monitoring the work undertaken on estates, including cleaning, grounds maintenance and so on

To complete the journey towards resident-led self-regulation, these two groups have now amalgamated to become the **Housing Regulation Panel** (HRP). The HRP will formally scrutinise all housing services performance on a cyclical basis, with powers to report up to the Housing Management Board on any problem areas.

Chapter Four: Service delivery and locality

As we have highlighted above, providers have been developing a much sharper focus on how the views of tenants can influence the design and delivery of services.

There appear to be two clear trends, with providers seeking to develop:

- a set of standards for the delivery of key landlord services for all tenants, and having ways in which tenants can effectively influence and monitor those standards
- mechanisms for dealing with issues that arise in particular localities, with many of these relating to wider issues outside service standards

Influencing the design of services

Standards

Most providers we interviewed had been through a process of reviewing their service standards. All utilised mechanisms that involved tenants. Great Places, for instance, has rationalised its service standards to just 12, which form the basis for its performance monitoring. More than 650 tenants were consulted in the course of its review.

The motivations for reviewing standards comprise a mixture of wanting to develop intelligible standards that can be clearly monitored, the move by the TSA to a more standards-based regime, and in some cases the desire of tenants for greater clarity of service standards to be applied to everyone.

Most of the core standards focus on services such as repairs, maintenance and lettings. Some providers with wider estate management responsibilities have different standards for caretaking and cleaning according to the wishes of residents living in different blocks.

Influencing the provision of services

All the case study providers and the vast majority of our interviewees have developed mechanisms by which tenants can influence the way services are delivered.

Great Places has recently set up a tenant-led and chaired board committee: the tenant services committee. This has responsibility for all housing and property services and will ensure that tenants can have influence at the highest level (see profile, page 31).

Chester and District has set up a residents' board with the aim of it taking responsibility, over time, for the budget and service delivery. The association's board will focus more on strategy.

The relationship between responsibility for service delivery and scrutiny differs among providers. Chester and District sees its residents' board as having overall responsibility for the service, with the scrutiny role being undertaken by its tenant inspectors and neighbourhood panels.

Bromford has a customer influence group, which is designed to be the 'forward thinking' part of the structure that debates priorities for service review and change. The group comprises Bromford's seven tenant board members plus three of its customer inspectors. The latter are there to ensure that there is feedback into that 'forward thinking' from the scrutiny process.

Provider profile
Great Places Housing Group (GPHG) operates across a wide geographical area, managing more than 15,000 homes in 31 different local authority areas in Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Merseyside.
The overall approach GPHG has recently consolidated its structure from three organisations – Manchester Methodist Housing Association, Ashiana Housing Association and Space New Living Housing Association – to just one. It has created a new customer involvement structure for the single organisation with a customer involvement strategy that has the aim: <i>“To ensure that all Great Places Housing Group’s customers have the same opportunities to influence the design and delivery of services provided in their homes and neighbourhoods at a level that suits them.”</i> GPHG has a corporate planning event each year – which includes senior staff and tenants – at which feedback from the customer involvement strategy is central to the discussions and informs the coming year’s corporate priorities and objectives.

Provider profile

Key mechanisms

GPHG has just set up a new tenant-led and chaired board committee, the Tenant Services Committee (TSC), which has delegated responsibility for all housing and property services. This is designed to ensure that tenants can influence and approve policy and strategy on service delivery at the highest level.

The recruitment process for the TSC attracted a wide range of applications from tenants. It targeted the black and minority ethnic community, females and people under 40 to ensure the committee was as representative as possible of the diverse communities in which GPHG works. The tenants who were recruited have a broad mix of skills and experience

GPHG also operates tenant panels, which feed into the TSC. The panels monitor performance via 12 group service standards, which include complaints, satisfaction, repairs and maintenance, and anti-social behaviour. The panels are also responsible for granting funding to tenants and tenant groups via the tenant dividend and environmental bidding funds, which amount to more than £250,000 between them each year.

As GPHG operates across a wide geographical area and its stock is very diverse, it is important that there are varying opportunities for tenants to get involved at a local level. GPHG holds open forums in each region where tenants can come along and meet housing staff and talk about issues on an informal basis. It held 40 events for the TSA National Conversation, attracting more than 900 tenants, and 27 events for the short notice inspection consultation, at which 360 tenants came along to give their views.

Scrutiny

All the providers we interviewed put a high priority on methods of scrutiny. There appears to be an increasing recognition that tenants are vital here because they can provide insight and understanding based on their day-to-day experiences.

All these providers utilise tenant inspectors and mystery shopping as part of a scrutiny process. Some have developed additional methods. For instance, Aldwyck has introduced 'customer observation', which is a cross between tenant inspectors and shadowing of staff.

As we saw earlier, there are also a variety of panels of tenants and focus groups that are used to get feedback.

Most organisations continually refine these methods, particularly in terms of ensuring that tenants are properly trained to know what to look for and that the scrutiny process is effective and formalised, activities are planned and processes are formalised..

Most of the providers we surveyed either have or are moving towards embedding the scrutiny mechanism into their organisational structure – mainly in the form of a scrutiny board.

However, some organisations question the wisdom of this approach. They see dangers in deploying another 'process' rather than using existing scrutiny mechanisms such as tenant inspection to feed into existing service monitoring mechanisms.

Many of the scrutiny mechanisms that providers employ have only been recently introduced and effective coordination within their organisations is still evolving and can be a bit haphazard. This report is not designed to look in detail at this important issue, which is covered in detail in the recent TSA/CIH report on resident-led self-regulation.⁷

Complaints

Most of the organisations participating in this research analyse complaints as a source of information on the quality of service delivery.

All employ a staged process for dealing with complaints, with those that reach the final stage being dealt with or reported to the board or committee. Increasingly, all complaints are being monitored and reviewed as part of the scrutiny process. At Bromford, complaints feed directly into their customer insight process.

HouseMark's work on complaints management has shown that many landlords now involve tenants in reviewing decisions where a complainant is not satisfied with the landlord's response or in advising the landlord on lessons that can be learned from patterns of complaint.

Face-to-face contact

Evidence provided by landlords and tenants indicates that increasing priority is being given to face-to-face contact with tenants. Some providers consider that getting individual feedback by 'going into people's homes' provides information that is as valuable as that obtained via the scrutiny process.

Some of the providers we talked to have initiatives in which they go out to talk to tenants. Others, however, are beginning to make regular visits to tenants as a key aspect of obtaining their customer feedback.

Examples of this approach include:

- Tristar has customer contact visits through which it seeks to contact at least 40 per cent of its tenants each year
- Bromford has developed a 'relationship check' which is carried out on the first, third, fifth, seventh, tenth, 15th and 25th anniversaries of a tenancy

What is not clear, however, is how this face-to-face contact seems to be a strong message coming from tenants and tenant involvement staff, it is not always clear how this approach fits in with the way many providers have in recent years moved to develop call centres.

Neighbourhood activity

As we have noted, the more adept providers become in obtaining their tenants' views, the more they realise the importance of dealing with wider neighbourhood issues that arise in particular localities. Several organisations, including Calico Homes and TriStar, have developed neighbourhood action plans to deal with these local issues.

Some of the issues that arise, such as anti-social behaviour and ground maintenance, relate directly to service delivery. However, equally prevalent are issues concerning youth facilities, street lighting and enhanced policing where the responsibility rests with another body, or 'quality of life' issues such as family support, housing advocacy and employment.

⁷ Enhancing in-house scrutiny and performance: Implementing resident-led self-regulation and developing its links to external regulation CIH/TSA 2010

These neighbourhood issues provide a real challenge to providers. Having effective tenant involvement means that neighbourhood issues are identified but the solutions often lie outside the domain of the provider.

However, most providers in our survey have sought solutions to some of these problems. This, in turn, raises the issue of how far providers should go in developing neighbourhood solutions. One argument put to us was that tenants' rents were paying for a housing service and many of these wider issues were the responsibilities of other bodies with their own funding mechanisms. It was argued that tenants' rent should not be subsidising the failings of others.

One solution being pursued by providers involves advocacy on behalf of tenants in lobbying other bodies. Another option is outright partnership. Westlea told us that: *"Partnership working has achieved results in regeneration areas and we want to roll this out across the organisation as a whole."*

To engage effectively in neighbourhood work, providers often have to plug into other sources of funds. Several interviewees highlighted the increasing role of tenant involvement in levering in such funds, because tenants have the local information that provides the basis for applications for funding.

This has also raised an issue in some organisations about the role of tenant involvement and community empowerment within the structure of an organisation. Calico Homes has set up Neighbourhood Action Teams involving staff from across the organisation. Another association has considered combining its resident involvement and community development strategies (see profile, page 37).

The importance of these wider issues can be seen in the responses from our tenant workshops to the question 'What changes/improvements have you seen as a result of tenants being involved?' For example, tenants in one association mentioned the employment of energy advisors and a benefits advisor.

Defining the neighbourhood

We found that most provider strategy documents talk about neighbourhoods and communities in rather generic ways and often see them as wider geographical rather than 'local' areas. Several of the providers that have been engaged in neighbourhood activity for some time take a more sophisticated approach. They commented to us that tenants' concerns are generally with the immediate neighbourhood – the street or two around their homes – rather than a wider geographical area or estate.

Providers also highlighted the fact that people in the same area often have different views about the area itself and the issues that need to be addressed. The task in some areas is about mediating these views.

The report *Where are tomorrow's heartlanders?*⁸ found that:

"On many occasions we interviewed people living within the same block, street or neighbourhood, and found that residents could hold radically different views of the same area. An 'us and them' dynamic could develop on a miniature scale, pointing to the existence of 'micro-cultures' within neighbourhoods themselves."

Some providers are beginning to look at what is 'local' in a different way. Instead of seeing it as just a matter of geography, they are focusing on different parts of their customer base to identify individuals with particular needs or concerns who need to be treated, in a certain sense, as a community. This relates particularly to interaction with 'hard-to-reach' groups, who can often now be more easily identified by customer profiling.

⁸ Hyde HG 2010

Several of the organisations we spoke to have set up or are in the process of developing internet-based 'virtual panels'. Wakefield has such a panel for younger residents, for example.

Provider profile

Calico Homes was formed in March 2000 following a stock transfer from Burnley Borough Council. It currently owns and manages around 4,500 homes across Burnley and Padiham.

The overall approach

Burnley is one of the most deprived areas of the UK and a lot of Calico's work is aimed at tackling the issues this raises. Calico's involvement strategy therefore focuses on not only engaging tenants in giving feedback on services, but also on tackling specific issues around deprivation at neighbourhood level and creating opportunities for people to improve their quality of life.

Key mechanisms

Calico Homes has developed a framework for resident-led self-regulation, which includes a scrutiny panel, which has autonomy to select any area or service to review. A formal link to the board has been established to ensure that findings from this panel are acted upon. The panel's initial priorities focus on areas that impact on the greatest number of customers, particularly those considered vulnerable, who are less likely to give their feedback through usual involvement mechanisms.

Corporately, every area's service plan includes a responsibility to identify how customers will be involved; customers are involved in setting annual key performance indicators and targets for all services; all service reviews must involve customers; and all board reports must describe how customers have been involved.

A key part of Calico's approach is via Neighbourhood Action Teams – cross functional corporate teams involving staff from across the organisation, developing specific action plans aimed at responding to particular neighbourhood priorities. An estate scoring system has been developed with residents to monitor visual quality of neighbourhoods. Community groups have overhauled the funding and support framework, creating improved working links that extend beyond the traditional scope of tenants' and residents' associations.

Tenant involvement, customer insight and service development

One of the key trends is the development of better mechanisms for the analysis of data collected on or from tenants. All the providers we spoke to are looking at improving ways of collecting information from tenants and, most important, using this information more effectively.

Providers have realised that they possess substantial data on their customers but make little effective use of it in understanding and meeting customer aspirations and expectations. Several providers have been influenced by the experience of commercial retailers and the way that surveys and focus groups complement a more direct focus on monitoring customers' spending patterns to work out what goods to sell.

Most providers have developed a database with details of which tenants are interested in what services and how they would prefer to engage with their landlord. Providers stressed the importance of ensuring that such databases include a comprehensive, continually updated tenant profile, although several are struggling to achieve this.

A key aspect of the current evolution in the way providers obtain and utilise their tenants' views is the development of profiling and insight mechanisms. For some organisations this is principally about using information that they already collect in a more strategic manner. For others the emphasis it involves a more intensive mapping of patterns of behaviour – such as the nature of tenant interactions, office visit “footfalls” and telephone communications.

Customer profiling and tenant insight work is resulting in an increasing attempt to focus services, so that more tailored service offers can be made to different individuals or groups of tenants.

Such work is still in its infancy, so it is difficult to judge its effectiveness. Indeed, it is clear that there is a considerable variation in the maturity and nature of such initiatives amongst providers.

These developments raise some important questions. How will tenant profiling and insight work complement tenant involvement? Will it form a more efficient alternative to some forms of involvement?

In a small number of organisations these insight approaches are being developed as part of and related to the tenant involvement process. In others, however, it appears that they are being taken forward by customer service or performance management teams with little involvement from tenant involvement staff.

Our research suggests that there is scope for further development in understanding the relationship between performance management and tenant involvement and connecting these work streams.

The organisation in our survey that has gone furthest in developing its approach so that performance management and tenant involvement are part of the same set of activities driving the association is Bromford Housing Group (see profile, page 37).

Choice

Choice is still perhaps a difficult issue for many providers, which is understandable given that they work in a situation where there are fixed rents and a rationed product.

Many providers often struggle to define what ‘choice’ means for their tenants. In the main it is viewed as being about three things:

- widening the range of opportunities for tenants to make their views heard
- giving tenants some choice in terms of the services – normally around repair times or types of fittings
- responding to the needs of different neighbourhoods in different ways

In the main, as noted above, providers are concentrating on obtaining profiling information so that services can be more easily focused on particular groups of tenants or individuals' needs and requirements. How far this information proves useful depends on how far providers become adept at using it to develop differentiated service options for those different groups and individuals.

Provider profile

Bromford Housing Group has five group members owning 26,000 homes across central England.

Overall approach

Bromford refers to resident involvement as 'customer influence' and the driver for resident involvement is its customer influence plan. To achieve this it has brought together customer feedback, including complaints, active resident involvement and community development in one department called Bromford Advance.

Bromford Advance operates as a service for resident involvement focusing on influence over local place and service across the group. Advance is the central hub where business intelligence about tenants and their influence is analysed and acted upon to drive service improvement. The approach is not about Advance 'doing' resident involvement but more about this department acting as a catalyst for driving forward resident involvement throughout the organisation.

Bromford has put a very strong emphasis on changing its culture. Its approach is now firmly based on meeting customers' individual needs and very focused on recruitment of staff for their attitude to customers and customer service as well as skills and experience for the job.

Key mechanisms

Bromford has a **customer influence group**, which is designed to be the forward-thinking part of its business structure and discusses priorities for service review and change. This comprises its seven tenant board members plus three of its customer inspectors, the latter being there to ensure that there is feedback into that forward thinking from the scrutiny process.

Your voice is a 'one-stop shop' programme for customer feedback designed to obtain the views of 4,000 residents each year by feedback from a range of sources, including care call telephone surveys, relationship check anniversary cards and other free-flow feedback .

Chapter Five: Impact assessment and VFM

The providers we interviewed have all adopted some form of impact assessment. Most of these assessments have been developed over the past couple of years, mainly in response to Housing Corporation guidance. In terms of the evolution of tenant involvement, impact assessment is therefore still in its early stages.

The tenant involvement staff we talked to generally felt that impact assessment has helped them embed tenant involvement within the culture of their organisations.

Impact assessment certainly seems to have moved providers towards an evaluation of the effectiveness of particular activities or events. Most providers had something in place whereby each activity or event had to be assessed for its relevance and in most cases in terms of its costs. Some providers were making that assessment on the basis of the intended outcome, others in a more general way.

Some organisations, such as Bromford and City West Homes, have sought to identify tenants' specific priorities, either across the organisation or in particular areas, and have undertaken a detailed feedback process to assess the success of their actions in meeting these priorities.

For the majority of providers, moves to develop more strategic approaches are rather sporadic, although most are beginning to develop a clearly defined 'audit trail' of the outcomes and impacts of these activities.

Most providers we interviewed had approaches in place whereby each activity or event had to be assessed for its relevance and in many cases in terms of its costs. Some providers were making that assessment on the basis of the intended outcome, others in a more general way.

This contrasts with the findings of the CLG's study of tenant compacts, which found *"little evidence that authorities are undertaking cost benefit analysis in terms of either the compact process as a whole or particular methods of gaining tenants views."*

Where costs were considered they are likely to be the surface costs, such as the production and materials etc rather than considering the overall cost of the processes involved. There was little consideration of the opportunity costs involved and the options of developing other methods."

One factor that may impact on this is that, according to HouseMark's analysis of its resident involvement benchmarking, local authority expenditure on tenant involvement for is less than for either ALMOs or housing associations.⁹

Several providers benchmark the VFM of funding and resources (including dedicated tenant involvement workers) either against other parts of their organisation or other providers.

Some are clearly thinking beyond this, evaluating the impact of tenant involvement on the organisation as a whole. This may be seen in terms of:

- prioritising which particular tenant involvement activities are most effective
- conducting a wider assessment of the impact of involvement on business objectives

Analysis of HouseMark's benchmarking information on resident involvement¹⁰ shows that there has been an increase in the number of services changed, implemented or withdrawn as a result of resident involvement. This also suggests that there is a direct link between expenditure on resident involvement and outcomes. Those organisations investing the least tend to report lower resident satisfaction on both the 'views taken into account' and 'being kept informed' performance indicators.

⁹ Resident Involvement Benchmarking Service: Analysis of results 2008/09, HouseMark 2009

¹⁰ Resident Involvement Benchmarking Service: Analysis of results 2008/09, HouseMark 2009

Some providers are also starting to evaluate whether, bearing in mind the costs, they should be undertaking the full range of tenant involvement measures to which they are currently committed or there is scope for more targeted approaches to achieve their objectives.

This is an important development as it is clear that duplication and lack of clarity can bring confusion, which damages support for and satisfaction with involvement. It was not always clear from our interviews, however, how far providers are really being 'hard-nosed' about discontinuing things that do not work.

A key challenge in making this kind of overall assessment is, as we have noted, being clear about objectives and desired outcomes.

It is also important to take account of the timescales necessary to assess what has been achieved. Many outcomes will not be realised within a 12-month period and effective longer-term monitoring arrangements need to be in place.

Providers have put considerable energy into expanding the range of their involvement activities in recent years. The next stage in their evolution might be to consider how efficient and effective the various interactions and their impacts within the business actually are.

Tenants' views on VFM

Most of the staff we interviewed believed that tenants are not interested in the detailed financial planning of an organisation. Some providers talked about moving to participatory budgeting but few have actively pursued this. It seems to be difficult for providers to understand that whilst tenants may find it difficult to contribute to the detailed budgetary process they are competent to engage in the setting of financial priorities and VFM assessment.

However, work undertaken by HouseMark into what tenants want in terms of performance measures¹¹ found that: *"Tenants prioritised an underlying theme – value for money – which they felt was important to receive information about."*

The tenants who attended our workshops considered that good tenant involvement could save money by helping to avoid or solve problems. However, they felt that some activities carried out in relation to tenant involvement were not good value for money, in that there was too much paperwork. They also saw VFM benefits where residents were involved in contract selection and other equipment tendering.

This suggests that it is important that tenants are given clear information about the costs of tenant involvement and indeed of the services in general. This will help them make choices about which approaches and activities deliver real value for money.

VFM for tenant involvement is a crucial area for providers and tenants and HouseMark will shortly be producing a detailed report on the subject. Its early conclusions point to the importance of having set clear, business-related objectives and being clear about the outcomes that are to be achieved if VFM is going to be monitored effectively.

¹¹ *How to develop and monitor local performance measures* (HouseMark 2008)

Chapter Six: Evolution: the next stage

We have noted the importance of regulation in supporting the development of tenant involvement. With the change in the regulatory system, drivers and incentives for both housing associations and local authority providers will change and organisations will adapt to these changes.

It is not the purpose of this report to comment in detail on how the new TSA regulatory framework might affect the development of tenant involvement.

However, there are a number of trends taking place within providers that we think will fuel the continuing evolution of provider interactions with their tenants.

Four overarching themes will be central to this continuing evolution:

- a concern with understanding tenants' preferences and experience rather than focusing on tenant involvement per se
- using that understanding to focus services effectively for the benefit of customers
- embedding the need for positive interactions with tenants in the culture of organisations
- being clear about the mechanisms required to enable tenants to genuinely influence and challenge providers

We anticipate that the emphasis of the new regulatory regime on providers defining their own approaches and undertaking robust self assessment will, when combined with increased efficiency pressures, increase the focus of tenant involvement in the following areas.

Value for money

Providers have put considerable energy into expanding the range of their tenant involvement activities in recent years. We expect the next stage will be about considering which of these approaches are most effective, which should be curtailed and whether new initiatives are required to replace them.

The use of the information gained from tenant interactions to shape the priorities of service delivery will be particularly important, in terms of delivering services to meet tenants' needs but also in stopping doing the things that tenants do not value. Bromford Housing Group said that:

"Our profiling has shown us that customers are more likely to recommend us when they have fewer contacts with us. The more interaction they have with us reduces advocacy. It's a bit like your car – you value it when it never breaks down. However, this isn't true of all customers, particularly vulnerable groups or highly engaged residents. So for us we need to make sure that our performance measures support this: 'right-first-time' delivery, less customer contacts per year, a reduction in repairs visits per household, more complaints resolved without escalation."

Tenant involvement and business development

Providers are developing their ability to obtain and analyse information about their tenants. They are increasingly using data to tailor their services to meet the varied needs and requirements of their diverse customer base.

Our research suggests that as interactions between performance management, service development and tenant involvement mature, providers will increasingly focus on how profiling and insight mechanisms complement tenant involvement and where they form a more efficient alternative to some forms of involvement.

It was suggested during our research that insight mechanisms will increasingly inform the delivery of landlord services, with tenant involvement mechanisms focusing on the wider neighbourhood activities. This does, however, create a real danger of undermining the 'challenge' and 'accountability' aspects of tenant involvement in relation to service delivery.

As we said in the previous chapter, one of the key ways forward is likely to be further development in understanding and making practical the relationship between performance management and tenant involvement.

The future role of tenant involvement

These developments will have implications for the culture of tenant involvement within providers.

If the aim is to for interaction with tenants to be embedded in the culture of an organisation, then questions arise such as:

- should all staff have responsibility for promoting effective interaction?
- should those in specialist tenant involvement roles facilitate rather than deliver involvement?
- does this mean fundamental changes for all organisational roles/functions?

One of the themes emerging from this report is the way that, although there are clearly similar developments in tenant involvement across all the organisations we have surveyed, these have occurred in different ways depending on the specific context and culture of the organisation concerned.

This will continue to be the case and we see three potential models for the way that tenant involvement develops within an organisational context:

- as part of a joint service development/customer feedback section within the organisation
- as an 'internal consultant' supporting effective interaction with tenants
- being employed directly by the residents or residents' boards to influence and challenge the delivery of services

Which of these models an organisation adopts, it will still have to think through to what extent the role of wider neighbourhood activities fits within the organisation and to what extent it is driven by tenant involvement.

Tenant peer review

Most providers we surveyed have developed informal means of tenants exchanging views with other tenants and organisations through TPAS forums, regional events and so on. Some providers have taken tenants to other providers to exchange information about their respective organisations. One way forward might be to formalise some of these approaches to develop a form of tenant peer review.

Peer review by professionals is difficult given issues of commercial confidentiality and the inevitable conflicts when one professional looks at another's work. Tenants do not have those issues.

Shepherd's Bush HA is working with two other providers to develop a social enterprise company providing tenant inspectors to scrutinise provider operations. The Audit Commission and housing associations and ALMOs already use trained inspectors. It would not be difficult for these arrangements to be adapted so that the tenant inspectors of one provider take part in peer review of those of another landlord.

Part Two: Practical steps

Key questions for providers reviewing their tenant involvement policies

Meeting the new TSA Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard will involve providers in undertaking a thorough review of what they are currently doing in relation to tenant involvement. This section of the report draws on our research to help providers ask the right questions in undertaking such a review.

We have found that providers are not always clear about how tenant involvement and customer views influence the overall strategy of an organisation. If you are embarking on a review of your tenant involvement, therefore, you should start by considering where you are at present and how you want tenants' views to influence your organisation's strategy. It is important to be clear on a number of key questions:

Where are you now?

- What are your strategic objectives?
- Do you have a shared understanding – board/committee, executive, officers and customers – of what the outcome of those objectives will be?
- Are the outcomes you are trying to achieve clear in terms of:
 - influencing the business objectives
 - having clear objectives for tenant involvement
 - improved delivery of services?
- How do you measure, review and evaluate the impact of tenant involvement outcomes on overall business strategy?
- Do you obtain tenants' views to help ensure that these objectives are being met?

Where do you want/need to get to?

It may seem obvious, but providers need to develop an approach to involving and empowering their tenants that suits their organisation's circumstances and the needs and views of their tenants. This is particularly important as we move into a new regulatory regime that emphasises providers defining what they do and then assessing its effectiveness.

Providers need to achieve stakeholder consensus on how tenants' views influence their organisation as a whole. We suggest that the key questions here are:

- how can tenants' views influence your objectives and strategy?
- how do you balance the views of tenants with those of other stakeholders?
- do you need to distinguish which parts of the business should be tenant-led and which should be tenant-influenced?
- how can you be challenged and held to account by your tenants?
- how do you plan for the outcomes that you want to achieve from tenant involvement?
- how can the culture of your organisation encourage effective interactions with tenants?

After considering these questions in terms of strategy, providers need to look at how the strategy will be implemented. Set out below are some ideas on the key questions providers should be asking themselves, together with examples of approaches adopted by participants in this review that they might wish to consider.

This part of the report is not designed to be any kind of definitive statement of good practice, merely to offer some pointers on some of the key issues involved and how some organisations have gone about tackling them.

Chapter Seven: How does your organisational culture need to change?

What steps are you taking to make involvement more integral to the way your business operates?

At Tristar Homes, resident involvement is headed by an assistant director who is part of the executive team. The resident involvement team act as facilitators and back-up support to housing management and service heads who must deliver involvement. Formal details of what steps have been taken to obtain tenants' views must be included in all reports to the board.

Should all staff have responsibility for promoting effective interaction?

At Soha Housing every member of staff has a resident involvement objective to deliver each year and in a recent staff survey 90 per cent said resident involvement was relevant to their job. To embed this further within the culture of the organisation, six resident involvement champions are being trained for key service areas.

Should those in specialist involvement roles facilitate rather than deliver involvement?

Shepherd's Bush HA has established the 'intouch' post. This is an independent officer working within the association but employed directly by residents to facilitate resident involvement and the monitoring of services across the organisation - with a direct line into the senior management team.

Does this mean more fundamental changes for all organisational roles/functions?

Bromford Housing Group has developed an 'organisational conscience', which ensures that the whole organisation is held to account for acting on customers' views. To support this, the organisation is focused on recruiting for attitude to customers and customer service as well as skills and experience for the job.

At Soha Housing every section of the organisation has involvement objectives, with the tenant involvement section making sure that these are met. Soha Housing believes it is important that these objectives are not too generalised and are focused on how each section's activities are properly influenced by tenants' views.

Have you considered implementing resident-led self-regulation (RLSR)?

New Charter HA has adopted an RLSR approach. This involves setting up a 10-member tenant management team consisting solely of tenants. The intention is that this will scrutinise all aspects of the association's business. This team is starting with 'what they know', so that the initial scrutiny is on service delivery, but the commitment is to move on to other areas.

Chapter Eight: How can you be challenged and held to account by your tenants?

How might tenants influence your strategy?

For housing associations: is it important to have someone on the board who has experience of being a tenant?

For local authorities that do not have ALMOs: are there mechanisms in place within your structure that allow tenants to have a voice?

Aldwyck HA has reorganised its board structure so that there is a division between strategy at group level and having a much clearer focus on delivery of services at regional level. The group board focuses on strategy and finance and does not have tenant representatives.

Aldwyck has set up two regions. In each region there is an operational board, which includes tenant representatives, and a customer scrutiny panel with two key objectives: to hold the board to account, and to monitor customer-facing performance indicators.

The tenants on the scrutiny panels are elected by a ballot of all tenants in that region.

Do you have clear approaches to appointments and/or elections for tenant places on the board or other bodies within the organisation?

Yorkshire Housing

Board membership

Yorkshire Housing has three tenants on the main group board and the nomination procedure is the same for both independent and tenant board members. A separate procedure exists for local authority board members who must be appointed by the local authority.

Inviting tenants to become board members

Board membership is open to all tenants of Yorkshire Housing. A wide range of methods is used to reach as many tenants as possible, including a newsletter, mail shots and small meetings.

Applying to become a tenant board member

Any tenant who responds to the invitation to consider becoming a board member is sent an application pack, with a letter describing the whole process, a simple 'tick-box' application form and details of the closing date. Tenants are also invited to attend an information evening with staff, board members and other residents to meet people and find out more about the board and Yorkshire Housing.

Selecting tenants to become board members

Once the closing date has been reached, all applications are considered by a small selection panel, which must include tenant representatives. Tenants on the selection panel must have signed and abide by Yorkshire Housing's code of confidentiality and code of conduct.

The selection panel is responsible for making a final recommendation to the board, which puts the details of any proposed appointment to shareholders at the annual general meeting.

Shepherd's Bush HA has retained an open shareholder membership policy and actively encourages tenants and residents to become shareholders. A third of its board places are reserved for residents who are elected.

If your organisation is part of a group structure how can tenants' views influence the objectives of the group as a whole?

Circle Anglia has established a residents and service users panel (RASP) to provide residents and service users with a voice in the governance of the group as a whole. RASP is comprised of 20 residents and service users, two from each of its ten business units. It reports to Circle Anglia's annual group assembly and its members report back to the residents and service users of the business units that nominated them.

RASP is involved in the development and review of group strategy, policy and practice. It evaluates and reviews service standards and the resident and service user involvement policy, strategy and practice, including annual impact assessments. RASP scrutinises strategies before they come to the group strategy board. RASP considers key performance indicators and scrutinises overall performance of the group, oversees the work of the resident involvement benchmarking group and ensures that the resident and service user voice is heard throughout the organisation.

What training and support mechanisms do you have in place to ensure that tenant experience is used in the most effective way?

Circle Anglia recognised that in setting up RASP (see above) it required the development of a different set of skills and a shift in focus from the local level to higher-level strategic understanding. To this end the organisation has engaged a tenant-led consultancy to carry out a thorough and empathetic needs analysis and begin the process of developing personal development programmes for all RASP members. Key to this process will be early effective support for individual members and an eye on continuity planning. (The chair can only hold office for two consecutive years and one of the nominees of each business unit is changed at least once every three years).

Have you considered undertaking a tenant scrutiny exercise of the organisation's governance arrangements? If not what other methods do you have in place for feeding tenants' views into the development of strategic objectives?

Westlea HA produces a residents' business plan. This is based on a process that includes holding public workshops, having a residents' working group to drive the process, telephone surveys and focus groups.

The plan is subject to wide consultation, after which it becomes part of Westlea's overall business plan.

The aim of this process is to inform residents of performance to date and the current challenges facing the association, and to obtain feedback from residents on their views of the future priorities for the business.

What role do federations of tenants play in holding you to account?

Estuary HA has a residents' federation as a keystone of its involvement strategy. All tenants are members of the federation and elect nine representatives to a members' committee. This comments on policies, agrees spending on estate improvement and has a veto over certain policy areas. There is a 'resident approved stamp', whereby nothing is published without the approval of the residents' committee.

How can tenants influence the design of services?

Have you reviewed the standards of service you provide in a way that obtains customer feedback?

Great Places undertook a review of the full range of its service standards. This involved a consultation in which more than 650 tenants contributed their views. It resulted in moving to a suite of 12 service standards. The performance of these standards is monitored by two regional tenant panels.

Do you monitor and benchmark service standards in a way that is clearly visible to tenants?

Soha Housing actively communicates with and involves a cross section of residents to set service standards. The organisation manages service expectations by providing residents with skills and training that includes a focus on value for money. The resulting service standards are monitored by surveys, tenant inspectors, mystery shopping and so on. The results are published and any actions are monitored. Soha Housing's annual report compares key performance targets against other providers.

Do you have a formal mechanism within your structure by which tenants can influence the way services are delivered?

Chester and District has set up a residents' board, which will initially have responsibility for the repairs and maintenance service. The aim is that over time it will take responsibility for the budget and all aspects of service delivery. The association's board will focus more on strategy.

Do you have mechanisms in place for tenants' views to influence the specification of contracts and the appointment of contractors?

When Yorkshire Housing moved to having a small panel of large contractors to undertake its maintenance work, it also set up an assessment group involving four tenants. This group went to other associations using the same contractors and talked to their tenants. The four tenants then sat on the formal appointments committee.

How can tenants scrutinise an organisation's service delivery?

Do you have a range of mechanisms for tenants to actively scrutinise the service?

Coastline HA has trained a team of 12 tenant inspectors, who work to identify any service failings and to find examples of good practice. Their reports are taken to the monitoring and review panel, which has the power to bring any member of management to the meeting to be held accountable for their service area. A final report is then written to the board with recommendations.

Shepherd's Bush HA currently has 19 tenant monitors, who assist officers to monitor local estate services and meet staff on a regular basis at quarterly joint inspections. Monitors provide feedback and attend briefing meetings to discuss what is good and what needs to be improved. Monitors also meet the chief executive three times a year, with open agendas in locations close to tenants.

Do you see complaints as a major source of information to be used in assessing the service being provided? If so, do you have mechanisms in place to link complaints to scrutiny?

At Chester and District HA, each complaint is used by its resident inspectors to monitor recurrences and confirm measurable improvements to services.

At Calico Homes, complaints – both formal and informal – are monitored via their business improvement team. Details are monitored against service standards and both corrective and preventative action is checked.

How do you ensure that tenants' views are fed back fully into the service delivery mechanisms?

Gentoo has service improvement groups made up of tenants, with a 'customer chair' and lead officer for each service. There are two formal meetings a year, which receive performance information, including levels of tenant satisfaction and customer feedback. Each service improvement group has postal and online members. The groups look at 'design and delivery' of services and levels and effectiveness of tenant involvement. They receive details of costs and of any complaints as well as levels of satisfaction. They agree the questions to be used on surveys for postal and online members.

Chapter Nine: What methods can you use for capturing your tenants' views?

Do you have a range of methods of involving tenants?

Yorkshire Housing Group defines its approach as having three levels of involvement:

Armchair activist

This is the easiest level to get involved at. Not a high time consumer and not a high level of commitment needed.

This level would be perfect if you already have skills as a volunteer but don't want to take on lots of extra commitments. Some examples:

- Take part in surveys
- Join our Talkback panel
- Join our Readership panel
- Give our leaflets and other written communication the once over so they really make sense
- Take part in an estate walkabout
- Attend a local meeting about your area or scheme

Arms-length enthusiast

Step it up a notch – with training given for the more in-depth involvement areas. Definitely worth adding to your CV!

Here are some of the things you can do:

- Become a mystery shopper
- Join a Tenants and Residents group
- Join the editorial panel for HI! and/or Grassroots customer magazines
- If you are under 25 years old, get involved in Take Over Day and take over someone's job at Yorkshire Housing
- Set up a community project – support your local youth club; grow your own flowers, fruit and veg
- Join the youth magazine panel or the website project group
- Monitor our estate services, such as grass cutting

Up close and personal

The top of the table – roll up your sleeves with the best of them!

- Use your skills and enthusiasm and work with us to develop our services
- Represent yourself or your community in strategic and operational decision making
- Monitor local services and performance

Do you have a matrix setting out the scope and process of your customer feedback mechanisms and is it clear how tenants use particular methods to air their views?

Bromford Housing Group has developed **Your voice** as a 'one-stop shop' programme for customer feedback designed to obtain the views of 4,000 residents each year.

Feedback is collected through three streams:

Relationship check

Surveys are carried out at specific milestones on the first, third, fifth, seventh, tenth, 15th and 25th anniversaries of a tenancy. They ask open questions about neighbourhood safety and appearance, quality of homes, value for money, whether the organisation takes into account customers' views and overall relationship advocacy.

Care calls

Proactive calls are carried out at specific service interaction points. These are designed to 'have a conversation' with the customer – to see how it left them feeling.

Free-flow feedback

This is unprompted/unsolicited feedback given by customers when it matters most to them. A range of channels are opened up to enable them to do so, including text, web, phone, post and 'rantline'. These are heavily advertised in the group's magazine, locally at schemes, and via the website.

All negative responses are immediately forwarded to 'champions' across the business for lessons to be learnt and followed up with the customer. All specific compliments are also forwarded across the group to share as 'best practice'.

This is linked to a customer profiling system, which allows Bromford to ensure that all sections of its customer population are covered. Particular emphasis is put on obtaining a representative gender split, age and ethnicity.

Do you use informal approaches to tenant involvement with fun days, family events and so on?

Estuary HA coordinates the 'Essex Extravaganza' annually on behalf of 12 associations and other organisations (colleges, charities and so on). In 2009 it attracted more than 1,200 visitors.

Entertainment includes a tea dance, quizzes, bouncy castles, circus skills workshops, magic shows and arts and crafts. Staff from the associations involved use the event to talk to tenants about a range of issues. There are advisors on site dealing with a range of issues, including benefits advice, training opportunities, accessing housing and leasehold issues.

Have you tried 'blitzing' particular areas?

High Peak Community Housing undertook an 'Xpress Tour 2009', which involved visiting every area where it has accommodation. Employees knocked on doors, held street 'sofa chats' and rang tenants they had not made contact with.

In October 2009 Calico Homes organised a 'Community Day' on one of its most challenging estates. The aim was to meet with customers, find out what they think about their neighbourhood and what issues should be focused on to make their community a great place to live. Eleven other partner agencies took part, including the police, the fire and rescue service, Sure Start, the primary care trust and the local council. Activities included a community tidy up, face painting, door-to-door surveys, advice sessions and a pie-and-peas lunch in one of the void properties, enabling the organisation to engage with more than 60 residents. The feedback is being used to shape the local lettings plans, good neighbour agreements and neighbourhood plans, and a follow up is planned to show residents how their feedback is being used.

Do you undertake regular face-to-face interviews with tenants?

Tristar operates customer contact visits where they try to contact at least 40 per cent of their tenants each year. These visits inform its service delivery and community plans and also provide advice to tenants.

Have you considered developing panels of tenants willing to be surveyed?

Anchor has a national tenant panel, the 'Anchor 500' – a resource of interested tenants who receive questionnaires, reply to surveys online, in writing or on the phone.

Wakefield and District Housing has developed 'Community Talkback'. This scheme encourages residents to identify and set their own priorities each month, which are then followed through into action. Answers on what is being done locally are published on plasma screens in each of the appropriate service access points, on the organisation's website and under the 'You said, we did' section in its tenant newsletter. This demonstrates to people that the organisation is listening and responsive to customer feedback.

Have you considered recognising particular individuals to provide feedback from specific areas?

Several providers have agreed criteria for the recognition of individual representatives ('village voices', 'street representatives', 'area representatives', 'local links', 'estate champions' and 'block representatives') to act on behalf of tenants living in specific situations, including small rural areas and sheltered or supported housing.

Are you clear about how you use and target surveys?

Bromford has stopped everyone in its organisation sending out surveys so this can be managed centrally and focused on the issues on which they need customer feedback.

Obtaining the views of everyone

Are you using customer profiling to identify sections of your customer base that might have particular needs and concerns?

Tristar uses other agencies (including the council's youth group), networks and groups to help it reach black and minority ethnic communities and young people. It has also set up its own Facebook page.

Do you offer a more tailored service to individuals or groups of tenants with particular concerns/needs?

Anchor has a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual support group that it says has been a great success. This emerged from one attendance by a lesbian sheltered housing tenant at a panel meeting to talk about the difficulties of being gay in this type of housing. A support group was established that also included staff.

Shepherd's Bush HA has developed a disability strategy in consultation with people with disabilities and established a disability group. It is also working with a disabilities action group, which provides a welfare benefit and advice service to disabled residents.

Have you developed any specific initiatives aimed at obtaining the views of particular groups?

Coastline has set up a youth residents' association and launched a popular dance initiative in partnership with local schools.

Wakefield and District Housing has set up a young persons' virtual panel for younger people to exchange views and comment to the organisation via email and the internet.

Tristar has developed tailored social and cultural activities for Asian women. These have proved so successful that a similar event was run for Asian men via the mosque. Asian men and women are now taking part in training events tailored to meet their needs.

Great Places Housing Group holds 'open invite' forums. The events vary in each of the group's regions depending on the stock profile and have included 160 tenants being consulted on their views at an Indian restaurant. This proved successful as tenants could bring their children, which is particularly convenient for families.

Obtaining and using customer profile data and other available information on/from tenants

Have you set up a database with details of which tenants are interested in which services and how they would prefer to engage with their landlord?

Gentoo has a database of tenants and residents who are interested in engaging with the association. The database captures areas of interest, methods of involvement and preferred ways of engaging. It also holds personal profile data, so staff can target people based on topic, method, person type, or a combination thereof.

Do you have a comprehensive, continually updated tenant profile?

Have you undertaken an audit of what information you collect and considered how you might best use it strategically?

Calico's information and feedback showed the need to reach specific disadvantaged groups in the community (disabled people, older people, young people, people receiving floating support and so on). Mapping has been completed to enable comprehensive profiling of who is being reached, who is getting involved and so on against Calico's tenants and the overall make-up of the wider community. A new involvement database is being developed that will tie in to the housing management system.

Have you considered the interaction between performance management and tenant involvement and how these develop as tenant insight mechanisms mature?

Bromford Housing Group refers to resident involvement as 'customer influence' and its principal driver for resident involvement is its customer influence plan. Bromford Advance operates as a group service for resident involvement, focusing on influence over local place and service across the group. Advance is the central hub where business intelligence about tenants and their influence is analysed and acted upon to drive service improvement. It acts as the 'central consciousness' about residents' views for the group as a whole.

Do you have the IT capacity to record and respond to your customer feedback activity?

This would appear to be an important issue for the future evolution of tenant involvement. However our research did not illicit examples of current practice in this area.

Chapter Ten: How do you respond to neighbourhood issues arising from tenant involvement?

Are you doing different things in different places to gain feedback from tenants in all neighbourhoods?

Mount Green Housing Association designed its 2009 residents' conference around a questionnaire that explored three themes chosen by their residents' forum and that delegates completed in stages during the event. The data from the questionnaire has provided Mount Green with valuable insight and feedback. Around 10 per cent of Mount Green's tenants attended the conference along with board members, members of staff and contractor representatives.

Have you defined the focus of local activity? Are your tenants concerns generally with the immediate neighbourhood – the street or two around their homes? How do these concerns relate to a wider geographical area or estate?

Tristar Homes has developed a system of neighbourhood plans designed to address the issues raised within particular areas. These are local documents that outline the issues that customers have raised and how the organisation intends to solve them. The documents are updated regularly to ensure that the neighbourhood plans accurately address issues currently affecting customers.

Tristar also has four customer-led 'Reaching Out Area Panels' or ROAPs. These panels are made up of 'patch champions', who represent each of the 44 'patches' within the different areas and bring forward local issues and concerns. The panels also have the ability to fund small local projects that can make a difference to the community.

Are you developing action to deal with the wider issues raised from tenant feedback?

The Community Gateway Association has a community empowerment strategy with a team of six staff and a budget of more than £400,000 per year. This pays for things such as newsletters, membership meetings, workshops, community options studies, support to community groups, setting up tenant management organisations, grants and sponsorship, salaries, tenant expenses, training and, crucially, to support all other staff to empower their communities.

The association expects all its staff teams to contribute to empowerment. This ranges from property services staff supporting resident involvement in delivering the improvement programme via local scheme panels, to community services staff working with residents on environmental issues, to the internal admin team helping to organise and support community events.

What is your role in relation to the provision of collective and neighbourhood services – are you the deliverer or the coordinator?

Wakefield and District Housing's neighbourhood approach includes action in relation to a range of activities, including financial exclusion, unemployment and anti-social behaviour. This includes five health inequality workers provided by the primary care trust and police officers provided by West Yorkshire Police working directly for the organisation from its offices.

Estuary HA's tenants act as volunteers helping run the Dallas Sure Start Children's Centre. Estuary helps to deliver a variety of activities and courses with the aim of increasing self confidence, encouraging learning and motivation – which helps in developing their own skills.

What partnerships have you developed to deal with particular problems in particular areas?

Calico Homes has developed several partnership activities at a neighbourhood level. These include:

- a partnership agreement with Burnley Football Club, which has provided diversionary activities for more than 800 young people during the 2007/08 school holidays, armchair fitness sessions for older customers living in sheltered schemes and more than 100 young people undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award
- a formal partnership with the Burnley Youth Bus, funding a part-time youth worker to provide support and diversionary activities for young people in areas where customers have identified concerns regarding lack of provision for young people. The partnership also provides an opportunity to consult with young people in their own environment.
- links with local schools to engage with students and parents, particularly on Neighbourhood Action Team projects

What do you know about the changing demographics and local circumstances of the areas you operate in?

This would appear to be an important issue for the future evolution of tenant involvement. However our research did not illicit examples of current practice in this area.

Chapter Eleven: How do you assess the impact and value for money of your tenant involvement?

Do you know what the cost and outcomes of your tenant involvement work are?

Calico Homes' impact assessment is designed to make sure the organisation is collecting all details of change and improvement, including the information wanted by tenants. Calico asked tenants how they wanted this information presented and this resulted in a totally different format for the impact assessment. Details include value for money, covering resources and costs and both staff and resident time.

Are your tenants able to see how you are using resources to ensure service delivery or to support community development activity?

Wakefield and District Housing's resident involvement performance and value for money is challenged through its resident involvement monitoring group, comprising board and local management committee representatives, and tenants from across the district. By the quarter ending September 2009, £8.500 savings had already been identified. Performance against indicators is also reported through a 'performance challenge' process involving the senior management team. A tenant-led inspection programme challenges other service areas against set service standards. All resident involvement impacts are reported against Wakefield and District's strategic objectives in the annual resident involvement statement.

Do you benchmark the value for money of funding and resources for tenant involvement either against other parts of the organisation or – via HouseMark -with other providers?

Coast & Country monitors value for money across all activities; it includes staff time for tenant involvement but not for other activities. The organisation has tried to apportion staff time but it proved to be very inaccurate. The details regarding tenant involvement are included in the impact assessment and there is a 'score card' for the corporate resident involvement action plan.

Have you undertaken a wider assessment of the impact of involvement on business objectives?

Circle Anglia has developed a neighbourhood activity-based costings approach that considers activities and costs. Staff and tenants are asked about what would work better. Changes have been made to methods as a result of this process.

Have you evaluated whether you should be undertaking the full range of your current tenant involvement measures – bearing in mind the costs involved – or is there scope for more targeted approaches?

Gentoo has a community and customer involvement monitoring group, comprising between 20 and 30 tenants plus about 100 'postal members' who monitor all involvement to make sure it is effective. They work together with staff to develop the involvement strategy, budgets and action plan. They also then assess impacts to help plan for the future.

Chapter Twelve: What training, support and incentives should you provide?

What training are you providing for those tenants who are regularly involved in your tenant involvement processes?

All members of New Charter's new scrutiny panel, its tenant management team, took part in all aspects of the first review, 'the moving-in experience'. Each team member has a personal training plan and each of them has a one-to-one appraisal with the organisational development section of New Charter.

Tenant members have received training with New Charter staff on ICT, presentations and confidence building, as well as on their individual needs, and attending external courses.

All tenant management team members have received staff induction training.

The Calico Academy

Calico Homes has set up a new training programme, designed to build residents' confidence give them new skills to influence the way Calico provides services in the community.

The nine-week course was developed through a customer steering group, which ensured that the formal content was exactly what residents wanted – simple two hour sessions in a non-pressured environment.

The course itself covers a range of services, such as repairs, investment, neighbourhoods and anti-social behaviour, through to projects that provide jobs training and support to help people live independently.

Residents who graduated from the nine-week pilot said that they now had the confidence to 'take on anything'. One is looking to become a volunteer with Calico's floating support team and to get involved in the RAISE group, a new venture where residents help monitor how Calico performs.

Do you support residents in running their own events and training?

In 2008 residents of Soha Housing ran their own conference to show how resident involvement can make a difference to housing services. This included residents running workshops on what value for money means to residents.

Do you give incentives to tenants to participate in involvement activities?

At Westlea HA, all residents involved in meetings, groups and so on are entitled to claim the following:

- travel expenses
- carer and childcare expenses
- out of pocket expenses
- gift vouchers (for residents attending focus groups)

Mystery shoppers are paid £50 for each 'round' of shopping (£40 for making the calls and a £10 phone bill contribution).

Resident Inspectors are paid £10 per activity (such as a meeting, visit or drafting a questionnaire). They are also provided with laptops, printers and broadband connections, or paid a contribution towards an existing connection.

Scrutiny panel members receive a laptop and broadband access, if required, and can claim travel expenses. They can also receive £1,000 a year remuneration if they take on a portfolio. Not all members take on a portfolio.

Estuary HA is taking part in the Chartered Institute of Housing Active Learning for Residents programme. Evidence of their community involvement activities allows them to gain a level 2 qualification in community action.

Is it possible to develop informal rewards that support particular activities?

At Family Mosaic, 'rewards' have been given to groups to recognise their work, such as sending young people on a go-karting trip and providing older people with a Christmas meal. Also, some payments have been made to people attending particular events after the event and without them knowing of the payment beforehand. Family Mosaic also operates a £50 draw each month for tenants who return satisfaction surveys.

Coastline has designed and printed special certificates for all customers who complete one of their free training courses. It also offers an annual social event to all involved customers, gives them a special Coastline Housing Christmas card, and publicly thanks involved customers in its newsletter and other documents.

Have you considered setting up funds for which tenants can apply to develop personal or community empowerment?

Great Places has set up to funds through which tenants can bid for money to improve their lives and environment.

The Tenant Dividend, which amounted to £150,000 in 2009, is open to all tenants and is allocated by the tenant panels. It aims to help tenants and tenant groups make positive impacts on their communities and to give tenants life-changing experiences. Over the past few years funds have been given to tenants for many different reasons, which include:

- educational courses to improve tenants' lives where they cannot access funds elsewhere
- setting up local small businesses
- enabling relatives to visit unwell children
- youth schemes which build stronger communities in an area

The environmental fund of just under £130,000 allows tenants to bid for money that improves their local area, such as security lighting where there have been issues with anti-social behaviour and new landscaped areas for the community to use where there are 'grot spots'.

Appendix 1

Review of tenant participation compacts for CLG

A focus on process and inputs

The report found that overall tenant participation compacts (TPCs) had brought “*a degree of clarity to the tenant participation process*” and raised the profile of tenant involvement. In the case studies tenants were strongly supportive of retaining the TPCs, albeit under a different title.

One of the key messages that comes out of this review, however, is that there is a strong focus on processes and structures without a clear emphasis on outcomes, particularly in relation to service delivery.

This was partly a function of the format of the information presented to tenants. The report says that:

“Main documents are often too wordy and can create barriers from the outset for those who are less engaged and experienced. Concise statements can be presented publicly and backed up separately by more detailed documentation.”

The research also found that:

- there were problems in maintaining the momentum for involvement after the initial introduction and development of a TPC, which often raised unrealistic expectations
- *“in some cases TPCs can be seen as a ‘bolt on’ to the organisation and only ‘owned’ and delivered by the few”*
- more than 40 per cent of respondents surveyed felt that TPCs lacked sufficient teeth to be taken seriously by tenants

While the researchers did find that the better providers used TPCs to focus tenant involvement on how it could improve services and inform decision-making, they were not sure how far this would have happened anyway in those organisations, as they had a culture of trying to improve performance.

ALMOs were more likely to have a focus on outcomes than stockholding authorities. The researchers felt that this may well be to do with the very process of setting up an ALMO with a strong refurbishment emphasis so that inevitably it has to engage with tenants.

Overall the researchers said that TPCs had provided a basic bottom-line standard for involvement rather than being a real pressure to improve services. One of the report’s central conclusions is that:

“The key aim should be to focus on the decision making framework and on service outcomes, rather than getting too bogged down in elaborate processes or in finessing documentation.”

The report is also clear that as providers develop their involvement processes they need to produce clear mechanisms for scrutinising the way services are delivered. One of its recommendations, therefore, is that:

“Resident- led self-regulation panels should be introduced in those social landlords with mature and robust participation structures and processes.”

Collective and consumer approaches

By their very nature TPCs are designed as collective approaches to tenant involvement. This collective approach is often seen to contrast with the more 'customer-driven' approaches adopted by some providers, which focus on gaining information from tenants and then using that to target services more towards individuals and groups in the same way that many commercial organisations use consumer data.

The report identifies only one organisation that appeared to be adopting such a customer-driven approach. This is Milton Keynes, which had adopted a process mapping approach to its management of service delivery.

It needs to be borne in mind, however, that the focus on TPCs meant that the researchers were not specifically looking for such approaches. We know from our research that other ALMOs and local authorities are moving down that route, including City West Homes, Cambridge City and Tri Star Homes.

There is a significant challenge for the TSA in how it regulates these different approaches and what the interactions between them are.

Widening involvement

The report says that while progress has been made in widening involvement, and TPCs have played a role in this, *"a 'hard core' of tenants would be far more involved in the various activities than the majority"*. In terms of formal representation, *"it was often the same people who appeared on the board and a range of panels, sub-committees and forums"*. It says that:

"There was still a long way to go in terms of engaging those groups which have traditionally been 'hard-to-reach': younger people, people with disabilities, members of black and minority ethnic groups and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people."

It is, therefore, still older, white tenants who are dominating the involvement process.

To try to widen involvement a quarter of respondents had developed a themed compact on leaseholder issues and one in five had supplementary compacts for older people, black and minority ethnic groups and younger people.

The researchers said that it was still the case that even where people had tried to reach out to other groups they had tended to use the traditional forms of tenant involvement, particularly trying to get people to meetings. In some providers, staff were looking at ways to involve tenants more informally to widen participation, particularly in the case of young people.

The researchers also pointed towards the way that tenant engagement can be episodic and driven by particular issues arising in an area, while structures are ongoing and need consistent involvement.

This all suggests that traditional approaches to tenant participation may need to be either radically changed or supplemented if the views of *all* tenants are to be taken account in shaping and monitoring services.

The report recommends that:

"A Tenant Involvement Strategy needs to be developed by all social landlords, with a marketing strategy and a plan outlining how they will regularly promote opportunities for involvement."

The importance of individuals

The report made the important point that despite the emphasis on structures, the importance of individuals – both tenants and staff – *"was central to the development process and should not be underestimated"*.

Service delivery or community empowerment

The report highlights how there are two different approaches to widening involvement in TPCs:

- an all-embracing approach that emphasises resident involvement as opposed to tenant participation
- a narrower idea of tenant participation focused on the delivery of the social housing service

It makes the point that authorities now have a 'duty to involve' citizens following provisions in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and that there may be an issue about how this wider emphasis might interrelate in the medium term with TSA regulation. Here the report says:

"This review of TPCs is therefore particularly opportune given the twin demands of cross-sectoral alignment in social housing and the need to take further proposals to develop community empowerment in all policy spheres that affect the quality of life in local communities."

This is an important potential tension in the new TSA regime. The emphasis of the regulator itself is very much on service delivery, yet it has also undertaken in its memorandum with the Audit Commission to ensure that "the TSA supports the Audit Commission in the delivery of CAA".

Value for money

The researchers found little evidence that authorities are undertaking cost benefit analysis in terms of either the compact process as a whole or in respect of particular methods of obtaining tenants' views.

Where costs are considered they are likely to be the surface costs of production and materials and so on rather than the overall costs of the processes involved. There was little consideration of the opportunity costs involved and the options of developing other methods.

The interviews the researchers undertook with officers also revealed that: *"the cost of developing and producing the (compact) document was also viewed negatively in some responses."*

There was considerable disparity of opinion regarding the issue of incentive payments to tenants. The report recommended that:

"Information should be provided to incorporate expectations about the levels of budgets to be set to support tenant involvement, and to acknowledge that this may include incentive payments."

Impact assessment and quantifying the value of involvement

Only two-thirds of retained stock authorities monitor the use of their TPC document. The most common means of monitoring is through tenant feedback, primarily consisting of tenant surveys

The report says that *"a good indication of the effectiveness of a TPC is the extent to which it is used by tenants and stakeholders."* Over the past three years the use of the TPC has decreased in nearly a third of cases, compared with 15 per cent of respondents who reported an increase in TPC usage over the period.

There were suggestions from some of the participants in the research that landlords should be under a clear requirement to monitor and regularly review the impact of tenant participation on service development and direction.

Overall the researchers felt it was not always easy to answer the key question: what difference has TP made? They made the recommendation, therefore, that:

“Good practice in impact assessments of TPCs should be disseminated more widely and a cross-domain approach advocated for all social landlords.”

Moving away from TPCs

One key theme of the report is the issue of the actual term ‘tenant participation compact’. The report recommends that this *“should be abandoned and replaced by a tenant or customer involvement agreement and strategy”*.

The report’s recommendations for change go well beyond the issue of the name. Its overall conclusions in relation to TPCs state that:

“TPCs have been seen by both tenants and staff as a bedrock for developing clear standards for tenant involvement but they now need to adapt to recent institutional changes, notably the introduction of the Tenant Services Authority and the National Tenants Voice. The TSA’s role as regulator across all social housing domains is an ideal opportunity to incorporate the national framework for TPCs into the tenant involvement standards.”

The intention here is clear. The report’s second recommendation states that: *“A Tenant Involvement Strategy needs to be developed by all social landlords.”*

Appendix 2

Methodology

The methodology for this project involved three stages:

1. **Analysing the review of tenant participation compacts produced by Ian Cole for the CLG**

This involved:

- a desktop review of the report to bring out the lessons relevant to this research
- a meeting with the authors of this report from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University
- a review of examples of approaches to tenant involvement available from the HouseMark Knowledge Base

2. **Identifying organisations who should be interviewed**

This involved advertising for volunteers through the HouseMark newsletter, which resulted in 73 replies.

All of the respondents then filled in a brief questionnaire on their organisations' tenant involvement activities. This was designed both to provide information for the project and to allow us to choose the appropriate organisations to interview.

We then chose 23 organisations to interview on the basis of the following criteria designed to get a mix of relevant experience:

- Type of involvement activity
- Organisational size
- Organisational type
- Geographical location

3. **Fieldwork**

We undertook the 23 interviews with the organisations chosen (a list of these can be found in the acknowledgements section of this report). We then held follow-up interviews with six of these organisations to look at their approaches in more depth.

We then produced some early findings, which were tested out in two ways:

- a workshop attended by 19 of the organisations we had interviewed
- two workshops with tenants, who were drawn from the following providers: Bromford, Westlea, Sanctuary, Shaftesbury, Guinness and Western Challenge

Further information

For further information visit our website

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About HouseMark

HouseMark is the leading provider of performance improvement and value for money solutions to the social housing sector and is jointly owned by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation; two not-for-profit organisations which reinvest their surpluses in the social housing sector.