

# Engaging and empowering tenants in council-owned housing



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## Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the Local Government Association and developed in partnership with TPAS. It was written by Emma-Jane Flynn, Tpas National Consultancy Manager. Tpas and the Local Government Association would like to thank all of the participants in this review. A list of these can be found at Annex 1.

# Forewords

The publication of the Government's Social Housing Green Paper and the lifting of the housing borrowing cap have opened up the real possibility of a renaissance in council housing. The opportunity here is not just about bricks and mortar, but to develop council housing as a vital part of local communities, and to make long term investment in places that people are proud to live in. The relationship between council tenants and landlords is at the heart of that renaissance.

We are pleased to show through this report how councils are working to involve and empower tenants of council owned housing. However, there is always room for improvement. This report explores what "good" involvement looks like from both a council and tenant perspective, and brings together examples of positive action. The simple act of sharing good practice and talking about tenant involvement was well received by the people contributing to the research. This is great to hear and the Local Government Association (LGA) will consider how we can build on this.

The report highlights the crucial role of local leadership in developing a culture of tenant involvement. This is a point we can all reflect on, as the solutions lie with us and our choices about the future of council housing and the way it is run.

I'd like to thank Tpas for their work on the project and their insights into tenant involvement. I hope you find it an interesting read and a practical help in your housing work.

**Councillor Martin Tett**

Chairman

LGA Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

## Tpas: the engagement experts

I am delighted to introduce this report into engaging and empowering tenants in council-owned housing and thank the LGA for commissioning this important piece of work.

The timing of this report is crucial as it provides valuable insight, best practice and challenges to help the sector respond to the Social Housing Green Paper. But more than that, it provides the sector with a clear picture of engagement in council-owned housing today and should spark discussions and ideas for what more can, and should, be done in the future.

Hearing and listening to the voice of tenants and communities has never been more important. We have an opportunity now to make far-reaching and innovative change to how we deliver engagement across council-owned housing. The key will be to put in place engagement practices built on mutual respect, trust, accountability and transparency.

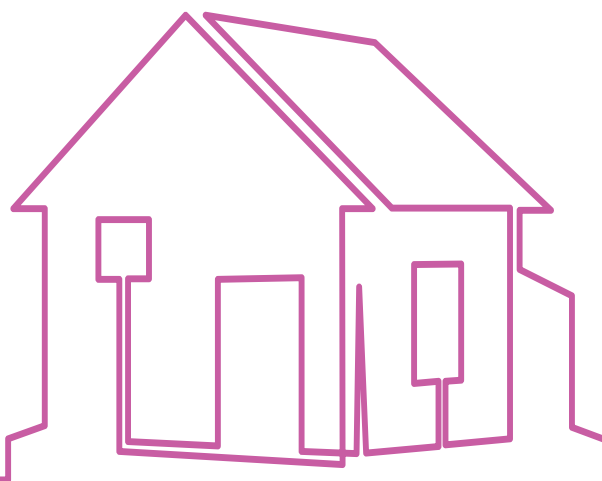
I am heartened to see the sector embracing the opportunities that digital can bring to encourage and enable more people to get involved, facilitating conversations quicker and in different ways, but at the same time keeping sight on the importance of face to face interaction.

We all want to live and work in safe, vibrant and thriving communities. Positive tenant engagement can go a long way to making that happen. But we need to see positive leadership too across the sector to make this happen, we need a culture in organisations that actively welcomes and acts on the views of the people that live in council-owned homes.

Let's grasp the opportunity today and let's make embedded and effective engagement and empowerment in council-owned housing the reality across England.

Enjoy the read.

**Jenny Osbourne MBE**  
Tpas Chief Executive



# 1. Executive summary

**Tpas have partnered with the LGA to investigate, capture and report on good practice in tenant engagement delivered by councils across the country. Tpas carried out four roundtable discussions and promoted a survey to capture feedback from residents, staff and councillors.**

Engaging and involving tenants is a core activity for council landlords and the LGA want to understand and highlight good practice, the challenges faced and any additional support required. Engagement, like housing, is under increased scrutiny across the sector presently, which is welcome and long overdue.

This review comes at a unique time as we await the outcome from the Social Housing Green Paper consultation and the consultation into regulatory standards that will determine how housing services are provided in the future.

Often we hear about good practice but what does it mean and how do we know something is good practice?

**Taken from the English dictionary, 'good practice' is:**  
"A working method or set of working methods that is officially accepted as being the best to use in a particular business or industry usually described formally and in detail"

## Feedback from review

One of the key findings from this review is that there is a need for more networking opportunities and good practice information regarding tenant engagement to be shared.

During this review, tenants, staff and councillors developed a set of key principles that would elevate an approach as an example of good practice so organisations can learn from each other.

Good practice principles for engagement:

- a clearly identified issue and a desired outcome as part of the activity set out at the start
- engagement activity is clearly set out so it can be easily replicated by other organisations
- engagement activity demonstrates responsiveness to the issue, showing good design and practice
- barriers to successful engagement activity have been addressed after being identified at the start
- activity actually provides a solution to the issue identified demonstrating good planning.

In addition to the principles above our work in the sector and findings from this review tells us that good practice must also be part of a resident engagement approach that:

- has a positive resident centred culture; covered in chapter 6
- has firm foundations and strategic base for engagement; covered in chapter 7
- ensures residents and staff are trained and well resourced; covered in chapter 8
- ensures organisations know who lives in their homes; covered in chapter 9
- has a range of activities to involve residents; covered in chapter 10
- has an effective complaints service; covered in chapter 15
- has effective ways to measure and report on outcomes; covered in chapter 16
- has a wider role in improving communities; covered in chapter 18.

It is encouraging to see a number of approaches to tenant engagement going above and beyond regulatory requirements and demonstrating the above principles, ensuring that tenant engagement is valued, effective and delivering real improvement. The review also found that community engagement activity is an area of excellence for local authorities in their place shaping role, there is a real focus and body of evidence that demonstrates a commitment to improving quality of life and addressing health, financial and environment concerns.

Many tenants and staff reported to us that in their view a lack of leadership driving a tenant centred culture is a key barrier to effective resident engagement. We found that resident engagement is not embedded in many of the

organisations that participated in this review, these is scope for many landlords to do more.

## Feedback from review

75 per cent of the participants in this review were involved with their landlord

70 per cent of the participants in this review were aware of opportunities to be involved

30 per cent of the participants in this review were not aware of opportunities to be involved

Nearly 60 per cent of participants in this review were aware of landlord community projects

The key to tenant engagement is commitment from across the whole organisation, ensuring engagement is meaningful and having a clear strategy and purpose about what you want to achieve.

This report aims to present an overview of findings and themes that emerged from the review, alongside good practice examples, questions for self-reflection across some chapters and recommendations for improvement.

Overall a number of sector bodies, sources and evidence tells us that resident engagement brings a host of benefits to tenants, staff and organisations however what is unclear is why so many organisations do not value this and as a result are not enabling engagement.

Fundamental changes in the culture and local leadership of an organisation needs to occur before we see resulting improvements in practice and benefits to residents and organisations. We hope that this report helps you to understand the issues, helps you to reflect on them and positively address the barriers in your organisation.

# 2. Scope and framework for the report

**Tenant engagement means different things to different people; different approaches include other terms such as participation or involvement used interchangeably to mean the same thing.**

For the purpose of this review tenant engagement means involving tenants who live in social rented housing who receive services from their council landlord. Tenant involvement has a long history developing over time originally as a result of increasing dissatisfaction with services but towards many organisations today valuing the business benefits meaningful involvement brings.

The audience for this report are senior council officers and members. However this report will also be of interest to tenants, Arm's Length Management Organisations (ALMOs), housing associations and central government.

This reports aims to set out the issues and challenges within common themes reported alongside self-reflection questions for consideration and good practice examples to learn from. The themes agreed are based upon the Tpas national tenant engagement standards that were developed with the sector and principles developed by participants in this review.

Key learning from case studies can be found at Annex 3.

## Tpas National Tenant Engagement Standards [www.tpas.org.uk/standards](http://www.tpas.org.uk/standards)

### **1 Engagement strategy**

Make sure your tenant engagement links directly to business plan objectives

### **2 Resources for engagement**

Your engagement has got to be resourced to ensure it is effective in delivering planned outcomes

### **3 Information and Insight**

Provide access to information at the right level, at the right time, to the right people in the right way

### **4 Influence and scrutiny**

Ensure tenants, leaseholders and communities can influence appropriately

### **5 Community engagement**

Engage with communities and local stakeholders to develop projects and plans to meet jointly identified needs

### **6 Valuing engagement**

Ensure your tenant engagement outcomes will benefit stakeholder organisations, tenants, leaseholders and communities

The scope for the review was primarily focused on local authority engagement however was widened to include ALMOs as a key partner for many types of local authorities.

This report also includes some theory behind involvement and good practice from housing associations and information from outside the sector.



# 3. Why do people get involved?

“The challenge that faces us is: to make volunteerism a relevant, purposeful engine for democracy and sustainable communities today, and by doing so, to create a vibrant, purposeful society tomorrow.”

**Adam Fletcher (2003): Purpose, empowerment and the experience of volunteerism in community. Freechild Project**

## Feedback from review

### Why did you get involved?

The council helped me when everything went wrong and I wanted to give something back and feel useful.

I wanted to give something back. As a result I feel valued, I feel my opinions are listened to. I meet with councillors and managers.

To make a difference. Care for the environment. Improve diversity and to be listened to.

### Why do you involve people?

We get good ideas from our tenants.

Our customers are the biggest experts on their housing needs.

So tenants and residents have a voice and can influence positive change.

Examining all of the feedback, we found that ‘why tenants get involved’ falls usually into one or more of the following categories:

- personal or common interest
- want to make a personal difference
- self-development
- want to influence change and improvement.

It is important to understand the reasons and aspirations for why people get involved to help inform your approach and activities for involvement.

### Why do people not get involved?

It is also important to note that many tenants reported that they want to get involved on their own terms, rather than through collective mechanisms. Many tenants are rightly getting more organised and engaging through social media for example or more recently Tpas have seen landlord reviews on Trustpilot.

“Behind every review is an experience that matters” Trustpilot

It is up to each organisation to check how they enable engagement through a variety of alternative avenues, both collectively and individually and to engage with and more importantly, respond to tenants. A lack of response or change as a result of tenants engaging with landlords is a key factor reported to Tpas that impacts on tenants’ willingness to engage further and taking up other avenues to give feedback.

# 4. Getting and keeping people involved

## Feedback from review

75 per cent of the participants in this review were involved with their landlord

70 per cent of the participants in this review were aware of opportunities to be involved

30 per cent of the participants in this review were not aware

Nearly 60 per cent of participants in this review were aware of landlord community projects

The feedback from tenants' shows that approximately a quarter are not involved with their landlord and there is a significant amount of tenants who are not aware of opportunities.

Recruiting and retaining tenants was raised as a key issue by staff and tenants and some wider solutions are set out above and below.

## Self-reflection

Do you ask tenants why they would get involved and how?

Do you regularly communicate and raise awareness of how you involve tenants?

Do you promote these opportunities at all times?

Do you feedback the difference involvement is making?

Do you make involvement easy and accessible to individuals and collective groups?

Do you recognise that people have lives?

Do you ensure your organisation is clear on the purpose of engagement and that tenant engagement is flexible, responsive and relevant?

Evidence suggests that having a voice and feeling listened to resulting in change and choice contribute to a greater sense of place in the community. We often hear about organisations struggling to recruit tenants and keep them involved, often people will stay committed **‘when an active interest is shown in their opinion and their engagement was influential and acted upon.’<sup>1</sup>**



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<sup>1</sup> What is community engagement guide, Homes and Community Agency

# 5. Involvement needs to be representative

**Good engagement reaches everyone not just those already involved, common sense tells us that people will get involved according to the activity and how the issue affects them. This is why a variety of methods used are good to promote accessibility and also a clear message as to why involvement will bring about an impact on people.**

## Feedback from review

Tenant voices

Sometimes it's who shouts the loudest rather than the majority view.

Need tenant involvement to be managed by someone who understands tenant involvement.

Need local decisions at local level for the benefit of tenants – transparency.

Need to make information available to tenants about what tenant engagement really means and what it's all about.

Need to get the right mix of tenants that bring skills to the table and create balance in a team.

Staff tend to rely on the same few tenants.

Young people don't get involved as can't be tenants until they are older.

Perceived view of 'usual suspects'.

## Self-reflection

Do you know the profile of your neighbourhoods and engaged residents?

Is there a particular 'group' of tenants that are not engaging with you?

Do you take steps to increase representation and target all areas of the community?

# 6. Positive resident centred culture

**Resident engagement works best when it is embedded across an organisation and truly at the heart of that organisational culture. Why would any organisation or business not listen to its customers and work with them to improve?**

The Tpas National Tenant Engagement Survey 2017<sup>2</sup> reported that two thirds of respondents felt tenant engagement was valued in their organisation, one quarter felt it was not valued or even a priority. Great customer service is driven by a customer centric mind-set, the private sector spends billions on an annual basis to understand what their customer needs and expectations are, before redesigning services to improve customer experiences. While the current consumer model has its limitations in that tenants just can't switch providers, a recent Digital Trends report stated that customer experience as their biggest priority. Sharing the importance of customer experience across departments and improving this optimises customer experience and satisfaction. The benefits of placing customer experience as a priority are endless:

- better communication
- better allocation of resources to services really needing them
- better employee motivation as more empowered to place the customer first
- reduced costs through optimising services that are needed and wanted
- improved customer experience and satisfaction
- better customer loyalty.

The Green Paper sets out proposals for making resident's voices stronger, tenant engagement more consistent, and consults on providing a national platform for tenants. Feedback from residents and staff at a recent Tpas event on engagement and regulation reiterates this:

- little support for league tables – residents can't just swap landlords if services are poor and they want to stay in the community they live in
- funding should not be tied to performance as residents will suffer the impact of this in the long term
- residents need to be involved in Key Performance Indicator (KPI) collection, monitoring and reporting
- a national resident group is needed with teeth.

## **When there is no positive resident centred culture**

Barriers and challenges reported by participants in this review would suggest that much more work needs to occur to enable some organisations to understand the benefits tenant engagement brings. Many participants, both tenants and staff, cited the absence of a tenant centred organisational culture as a major barrier to meaningful and effective involvement. Feedback from the survey and roundtables is set out below and underpins these findings, do you need to consider this feedback and reflect on the culture in your organisation?

2 <https://www.tpas.org.uk/ebooks>

## Feedback from review

### The lack of support for resident engagement from senior managers

Senior managers are not visibly involving residents making it more difficult to engage, making us seem like we are not resident friendly.

Sometimes questions are asked of residents and if the answer does not fit, then views are ignored.

Resident engagement is not a key part of our culture and sometimes there seems a barrier to higher-level management support.

### Not a leadership priority

There is a lack of political will to involve residents in our organisation.

People don't trust the political structures.

Need a culture that wholly supports engagement

Politics can get in the way – lack of understanding what resident engagement is and what it can do for them and our organisation.

Need buy in from management and councillors. They need to understand the value of engagement and how it can link to business objectives.

Need to change the perception of what resident engagement is.

Responsibility of resident engagement should be everyone in our organisation – all service and corporate heads and councillors:

- cabinet
- portfolio holder
- management team / head of service
- service teams

Need staff and councillors to understand the benefits of resident engagement.

### No clear objectives

We only communicate what we want to communicate and not what needs to be communicated.

Our organisation does not finish key work projects properly eg following up on STAR survey results and using the feedback to improve.

Recommendations from resident engagement are not always embedded into the services.

### Not all staff role

Not recognising engagement is everyone's role not just the resident engagement officers. Need staff to understand that resident engagement is part of everyone's role.

Not recognising engagement is everyone's role.

Lack of training for staff.

<b>Too formal as residents not involved in design</b>
Need to stop using jargon and think about the language we use. Tend to describe things in a way that people don't understand and it puts people off.
Formality and bureaucracy.
<b>It's them and us</b>
Officers are reluctant for scrutiny to question them – get very defensive.
Not managing expectations of residents and not being honest.
Staff need to know how handle receiving criticism. How to have difficult and open conversations / discussions.
Need better relationships between residents and staff.

Residents can be the best advocates for their landlord and able to articulate what that organisation does well and not so well. Poor customer experience can cost you reputation and money.

## Feedback from review

They are not the worst normally but in the last year they have become appallingly bad at pretty much everything. The government cutting funding hasn't helped no doubt and I understand that all councils are struggling.

Our landlords have very little to do with TARAs (Tenant and Resident Associations) or with tenants.

If we are talking at estate management level it's ignore any problems and repairs that need doing

In regards to listening, helping and fulfilling upon their duty of care to residents – my landlord completely fails at that. What my landlord does well is, abusing its authority and evicting tenants.

Avoids democratic tenant participation/ information.

“Organisations are losing sight of why engagement is important. Need to constantly say why it's important and keep pointing out the benefits to inspire.”

**Tenant participant**

## When there is a positive resident centred culture

Many residents did feedback that they felt the landlord worked positively with them and that engagement made a difference.

## Feedback from review

They are good at listening. They are focused into making home better for the future. Also they are diverse and promote inclusion for all not the few.

Makes a good effort to try and get tenants involved at a variety of levels.

Very timely repairs- excellent, working with Local schools ie clean up around the area, excellent newsletters. Good communication.

Takes adequate care of the building I live in. Supports a TARA (Tenant and Resident Association) that I've been to once or twice since I moved into the area 10 months ago.

Chasing rent arrears. Paying to remove rubbish from repeat offenders.

Works well with disabled and homeless.

Community engagement with TARAs – Housing Income Management & Financial Inclusion Team with tenants

A general sense that the housing stock is managed reasonably despite central government spending cuts.

They help residents who are having problems.

Proved support for elderly.

Whenever a new system or any changes that affects residents, Barnet ensures that information is sent well in advance (as well as reminders are sent closer to the time) and a dedicated team is available for any queries. This is a brilliant as residents gets a sense of involvement.

It tries it's best to reach out to tenants, but then it's up to the tenants to do the same.

They do the best they can with so little money.

Has started to listen to the tenants and there is improvement on the estate where I reside due to the estate housing manager and new ideas from the council.

Various types of engagement allowing residents to spend what time they want in being involved.

Good follow through when reporting damage to block.

It does well in planned programs ie windows, doors, kitchens and bathroom replacements.

Look after the property and keep the tenants safe.

Supports and advice for community groups.

They offer value for money properties and ensure the level playing field at all times, they carry out repairs and work with tenants to ensure the safety and concerns that they may have.



Supporting tenant led groups and initiatives.

Tenant engagement is really moving forward.

Listens and engages with customers and supported involved customers.

Are there frameworks that link customer engagement activity to other core functions of the business (eg ASB, Procurement, Health and Safety) that are available to councils and are they implemented?

How much resident engagement exists within the current complaints process?

## Self-reflection

Does your council have a governance framework for resident engagement that informs all aspects of the business?

How is your council leadership and performance held to account by residents?

How open and transparent is your council?

Do councils have clear quantitative and qualitative performance data and is this communicated to residents in a frequent and transparent way?

Do councils have a clear communications strategy that enables all customers to be aware of the opportunity to influence services

How are outcomes of resident engagement tracked and monitored?

Is the resident engagement approach linked to the council's business objectives?

Are staff and councillors aware and trained on the benefits of effective resident engagement to the business?

## How can you improve?

You need to ensure that all senior managers and councillors understand the role of resident engagement in the housing service and communities and the benefits it brings.

You need to ensure that all staff understands the role of resident engagement, the role they play in making it work for them and their service area and the benefits it can bring.

You need to ensure that outcomes from resident engagement are monitored, measured and reported consistently and regularly.

You can start by ensuring all staff and councillors have resident engagement included in recruitment, induction, training and performance appraisals- this should be part of your strategy.

You must celebrate and publicise achievements in resident engagement.

## Learning from others

**Homes in Sedgemoor** (ALMO - Sedgemoor District Council) has a 'Customer First' model that sets out a clear mission, vision and values. The corporate strategy clearly emphasises 'customer first' culture and ways they will achieve, measure and celebrate it.

The culture of resident engagement is embedded throughout **Dartford Borough Council**, they have a Housing Service Customer Charter that sets out:

- standards of accessibility and information
- standards across all services.

Dartford has a resident engagement agreement developed with tenants and leaseholders which is a partnership model setting out their commitment to involvement in design, delivery, monitoring and review.

# 7. Firm foundations

**Experience tells us that when resident engagement activities lead to the achievement of corporate objectives then it brings value to the organisation. In fact, the Tpas National Tenant Engagement Survey 2017 found that involvement delivers a range of benefits such as elimination of waste, fewer complaints and improved customer focus.**

If the right strategic foundations are in place that informs the approach to engagement and firmly sets out clear aims and objectives and the importance of involving tenants then other services also benefit from outcomes as a result. Often referred to as the golden thread, firm foundations and purpose ensure that resident engagement activity directly links to wider corporate plans enables a more joined up approach within that organisation and better outcomes for residents.

Our findings from the roundtables and the survey found that three per cent of local authorities do not have such foundations in place, combined with a lack of key corporate objectives that drive resident engagement. Both staff and residents report this is a key factor that hinders their ability to involve effectively and also that as resident engagement is not highly valued in their organisation they are not listening to residents.

Many participants, both staff and residents also felt that staff without engagement responsibilities are not clear about what resident engagement is do not understand or advocate the reasons for it or the benefits it can bring.

## How can you improve?

In our view the right foundations sets out service policies, standards and procedures detailing what residents can expect, helps to embed the right culture and enables improved measuring and reporting of outcomes. You need to:

- ask and capture what resident priorities are
- ask and capture how residents want to be engaged
- ensure residents are able to influence corporate strategy and that a key aim 'switches on' engagement setting out the organisation's commitment, purpose and reasons for resident engagement
- ensure all service strategies include reference to involving residents in service improvement and how this will be measured
- ensure residents are enabled and empowered to monitor performance of strategies and regularly review objectives
- ensure this is widely publicised.

## Learning from others

**Dacorum Borough Council** has a Tenant Involvement Strategy, which sets out a clear definition of what tenant engagement is 'the involvement of tenants and leaseholders in the management, design and delivery of our services'. The strategy also establishes four outcome-based commitments for tenant engagement. The strategy makes clear links to achieving the corporate vision '...working in partnership to create a borough that enables Dacorum's communities to thrive and prosper".

**Hull City Council** has a key document relating to resident engagement and empowerment - 'The Key to our Future - Hull City Council Tenant Compact and Involvement Strategy'. The strategy sets out key principles and was developed in partnership with tenants as a result tenants work in partnership at Hull City Council across all services.

**Oxford City Council** evidence strong links and the golden thread from all activities directly delivering objectives in their Resident Involvement Strategy and corporate commitments and objectives very robustly validated by staff and residents. Staff at all levels are committed about using the resident feedback as a mandate and buy in to effect change. There is a real sense of ownership from all teams about working with residents and clear outcomes to be achieved.



# 8. Training resources and support

**Residents do have the skills, knowledge and confidence to be involved, as they are the experts in living in social housing. Good training is a necessity to ensure that residents are able to participate on an equitable and equal basis.**

An example of training offered to residents is on interpreting performance data and information, critical for residents on any group to be able to confidently and impartially contribute their view and challenge effectively. There are a number of examples below where local authorities and other landlords are offering more opportunities to obtain qualifications and wider courses.

Equally, staff must also have access to robust training about resident engagement. In an Institute of Customer Service survey in 2016 ([www.instituteofcustomerservice.com](http://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com)) more than 10,000 customers were asked what their top priority for great customer service was; employee competence was the number one answer followed by staff doing what they say they will do, alongside other factors such as attitude and behaviour, quality and efficiency, problem solving and complaint handling.

In the Tpas National Survey 2017 nearly 70 per cent of respondents said their organisation has a dedicated staff team whose primary role is engagement and 14 per cent reported just one person or no dedicated staff. This was reflective of this review findings.

It is not only training that is on offer, many landlords offer more such as:

- expenses for travel
- expenses for care/childcare.

Some offer:

- network opportunities and access to conference and events.

## Feedback from review

**Staff and tenants who participated in the roundtables and surveys gave us the following feedback:**

**We don't have enough support and resources**

Need dedicated staff for engagement – it can be resource intensive keeping people engaged and interested.

Lack of resources and buy in.

Lack of understanding of the value we get from engagement.

Need appropriate resources to deliver meaningful and effective resident engagement.

Lack of resource and capacity with other officers.

Spreading ourselves too thin.

Not doing things efficiently.

Resources – IT training need a budget to support engagement activity and meaningful engagement.

Need access to grant funding.

Need improved internal communications.

### **We don't train and support our tenants**

Unsure of the capacity of residents. If not staff will steer residents.

Provision of training and appropriate forms for residents and staff.

Lack of time.

## **How can you improve?**

You need to ensure resident engagement has the right staff, budget and support, whether you have a dedicated team or not – if part of all staff teams roles, which it should be then all staff need support.

You need to ensure residents and staff have access to the right training to build understanding.

You need to ensure your approach encourages and manages volunteers.

You can only do the above well if you have firm foundations and a positive culture.

You need to ensure that resources, training and support are regularly reviewed for effectiveness and that activities are helping to achieve your outcomes.

## **Learning from others**

**Dacorum Borough Council** Tenant Academy was established with a number of stakeholders to offer a wide range of free courses, including practical skills, fun, leisure and exercise.

**Hull City Council** The Housing Academy was developed to give customers a broad insight into how the housing service in Hull functions to give residents the confidence, knowledge and skills to be able to effectively participate and influence housing decisions.

**St. Leger Homes** (Doncaster) opens up training to the whole community.

### **Further reading:**

Investing in Involvement

<https://nationaltenants.org/investingininvolvement/>

Tpas National Engagement Survey 2017

<https://www.tpas.org.uk/ebooks>

# 9. Knowing who lives in your homes

**Tenancy audits are a way of gathering, checking and recording information about who lives in a property and provide a direct opportunity to gather insight to review services. Audits are a key way to engage tenants and understand needs to inform services particularly around tenancy support, income advice, anti-social behaviour concerns, adaptations and repairs.**

Tenancy audits can help engagement and recruitment to an involvement framework as well as provide valuable insight that enables a greater understanding of tenants. Tenancy audits are only one way to gather information however, what is important is how this is turned into insight to improve services. Other ways reported include start of tenancy applications, frequent surveys or questionnaires and customer journey mapping.

**Insight:** the capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of someone or something

**Journey mapping:** mapping out a customer journey helps organisations to understand how their service improves customer experience.

## How can you improve?

1. Ensure you draw up tenancy audit plans with residents, dovetail audits with other insight gathering activity to avoid duplication.
2. Ensure you know who your residents and communities are.
3. Plan and prioritise your approach and resources using insight and profiling data.
4. Use appropriate technology to enable easy feedback and information sharing, including social media options.
5. Adopt appropriate methods to understand resident opinions, needs and aspirations.
6. Use insight to influence service and policy change and improvement.
7. Share evaluated outcomes with staff, residents and stakeholders.

## Learning from others

**Colchester Borough Homes:** as part of their tenancy audit policy they carry out regular tenancy audits funded by Colchester Council. This policy was developed with a task and finish group of tenants. The audits identify residents who need support, dangerous works that needs to be put right, tenancy fraud and empty homes.

**Gedling Borough Council** decided to strengthen its face to face engagement with residents to help teams develop more customer centred service plans and get a deeper insight into the needs of local people. The 'Gedling Conversation' is a campaign run every year that provides face to face opportunities for questions and solutions. They report this helped staff teams understand communities more building relationships and confidence. The project was supported by the chief executive officer, leader and service leads from across the organisation.

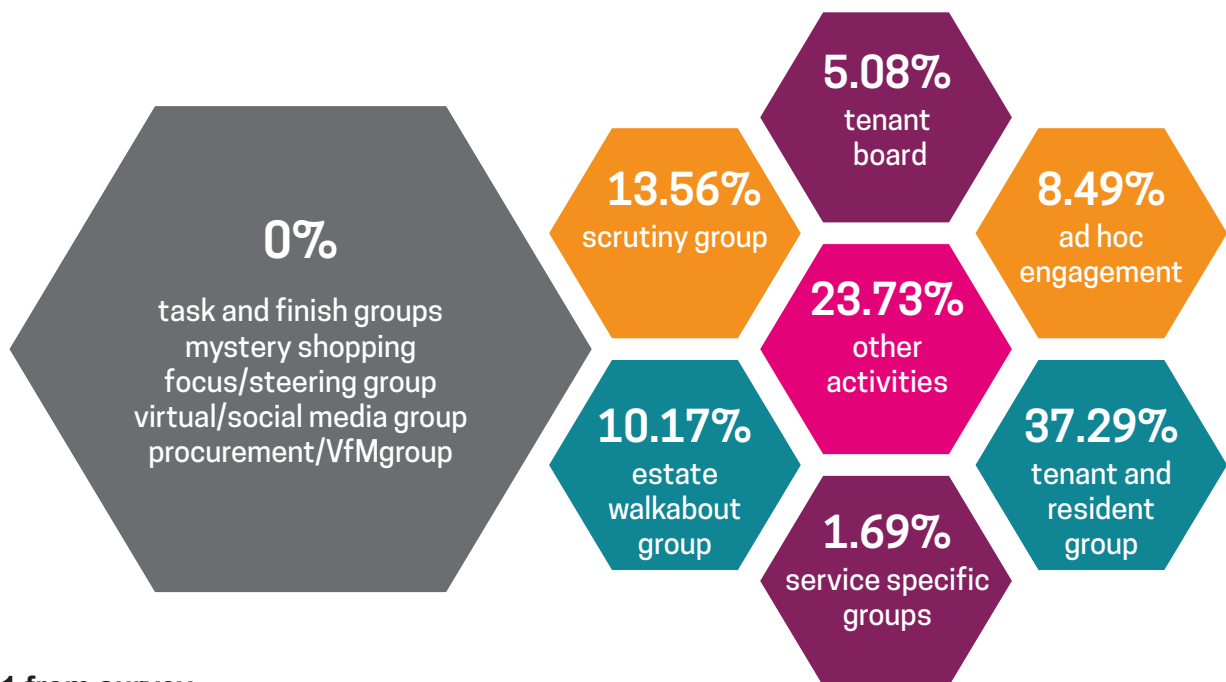
**Tower Hamlets Homes (THH)** recognises loneliness and social isolation are serious problems in the borough for people of all ages, loneliness and social isolation are harmful to health leading to poorer physical and mental health increasing the chances of developing dementia, depression and early death. THH developed a programme of audits to gain insight required to address the issues and develop interventions, with partners. Every six weeks staff call identified tenants to see how they are.

**Citywest Homes** carry out a survey of involved residents each year on survey monkey (7/8 questions). Feedback from the survey is shared with staff and residents. Key issues arising from the survey are addressed and changes reported.

**Hull City Council** collect profile information of active tenants on a quarterly basis, and compare findings with the overall customer profile. This is then used by the Tenant Performance Panel to identify gaps and develop an action plan of areas for improvement. By comparing profile data, resident engagement officers are then able to target and work with groups that are under-represented, this may mean working with individuals or by working with partners and stakeholders.



# 10. Having a range of activities



**Fig. 1 from survey**

Many organisations offer a wide range of activities to engage and to obtain resident feedback. The benefits of this approach ensure wider ranges of views are captured rather than the same few influencing on behalf of the many.

It's not about just having a lot of different activities, but having the right ones at the right time and in the right place that enables more choice and access to give feedback to a landlord. Activities must be evaluated regularly to see if they are effective and benefitting tenants and the organisation, if not then change your approach.

The most popular local authority activities identified from this review are estate/area or locality based with support for community and tenant and resident associations and estate walkabouts. Some are moving to a more ad hoc approach and inviting tenants to join a group, similar to a task and finish approach.

What is important is that activities need to be linked to the achievement of key aims and objectives as set out in an engagement

strategy. In the absence of a suitable diagram to summarise the range and aim of activities we have included a summary of one from the report 'Tenant Panels; Options for accountability' produced by the National Tenants Organisations 2012, which categorises activities across four areas for example:

- involved in decision making
- involved in shaping services
- involved in monitoring and scrutinising
- involved in complaints.

We would include those activities; involve both strategically and locally.

It is not a prescriptive list however and your health warning here is to consider that many tenants want to have a say on their own terms and not be part of a formal group or panel or be represented by a formal group or panel. This is becoming a challenge that needs to be addressed in the way organisations engage and involve in the future.

We have included four main areas below identified from feedback during this review, highly relevant and vitally important to get right; digital involvement, scrutiny, involvement in procurement and high-rise involvement.

## How can you improve?

Review what activities you have in place and how effective they are in engaging residents and bringing about change.

Consider in partnership with your residents other activities as part of a menu that enables choice to be involved individually or collectively increasing access.

Ensure activities enable resident involvement in service reviews through co design/ production.

Ensure appropriate opportunities for residents to monitor and scrutinise services and performance.

Ensure appropriate activities to enable residents to influence or be involved in decisions.

Ensure everyone knows about them.

## What is co design/production?

It is an approach to creating and designing services with residents to ensure the result meets their needs.

### Further reading:

Tpas Future of Engagement Ebook 2018  
<https://www.tpas.org.uk/ebooks>

Tenant Panels Options for Accountability  
<https://nationaltenants.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/tenant-panels-options-for-accountability.pdf>

# 11. Digital engagement

**Many organisations are embracing channel shift, alternative ways to engage and communicate with residents. With technology evolving at a rapid pace many traditional ‘in person’ involvement activities are moving to online activities through a digital approach.**

Examples provided during this review include the use of:

- online forums
- online surveys
- virtual groups
- email communications replacing postal
- use of social media platforms.

The benefit of enabling greater opportunity for digital involvement broadens the reach and sometimes quality of engagement. Going digital will mean you are able to involve more tenants on their own terms, provided you are committed to engaging in this way and responding as you would to a collective group.

“If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might each tell 6 friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends.” **Jeff Bezos**

How you approach digital engagement links to your knowledge of your residents as mentioned above in section 12.4. It is worth remembering residents may well be connected on line but not connected to their landlord, as there is no platform or approach to enable this. There is an issue still with lack of access to the Internet that remains a concern.

“You’ve got to start with the customer experience and work back toward the technology, not the other way around.”  
**Steve Jobs**

## Self-reflection

Do you know which areas and neighbourhoods have access to broadband?

Do you know of areas and neighbourhoods without access to broadband?

Are you aware of residents who have email?

Are you aware of residents preferred communication / engagement channels?

Have you got a digital engagement/inclusion strategy that addresses the barriers to on line engagement?

Have you approaches in place to engage with residents without access to broadband or technology?

## How can you improve?

Ensure you understand the benefits and limitations of a digital approach by ensuring you know your neighbourhoods and residents preferences and access capability.

Ensure you include digital channels for engagement, even if you start small, but also combine with face to face activities.

Ensure you get the right balance of social media engagement and plan for involvement this way.

Ensure you monitor and measure the effectiveness of all channels.

## Learning from others

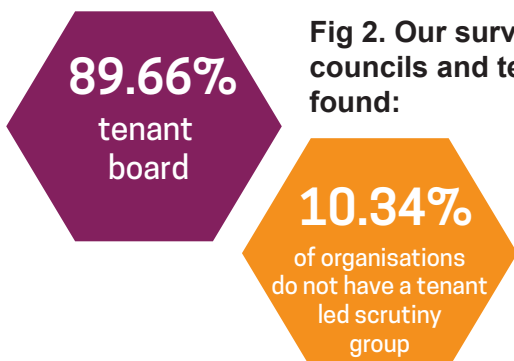
**Dacorum Borough Council** can show that the organisation understands it's 'tenants profile' and adapts engagement methods to reflect these findings. To further support residents with their communication preferences Dacorum have rolled out digital skills classes in sheltered schemes. This was a result of 60 per cent of older people not being active on line. One tenant is now a digital champion and can explain how 'getting digital' has improved his access to a number of opportunities he never had before and meeting up with old friends via Facebook has reduced his sense of isolation.

# 12. Scrutiny

**Many organisations have a resident led scrutiny framework in place that compliments the democratic scrutiny process and councils managing governance group. Many do not have scrutiny in place however, which is a key requirement of the regulatory standards.**

Evidence tells us that good quality; properly resourced resident led scrutiny can act as a vital business improvement tool and independent driver to make many changes, which can include:

- more robust and effective mechanisms for positive challenge and influence
- making sure that the resident voice as a critical friend is heard
- driving change, increasing efficiency, effectiveness and tenant satisfaction
- providing evidence based recommendations through a formal mechanism into both the type and design of services
- better understanding of resident priorities to tailor services to meet the needs
- giving greater opportunity to influence, and the ability to hold the organisation to account for its performance
- an opportunity to develop partnership working to ensure the delivery of excellent services.



**Fig 2. Our survey of councils and tenants found:**

## How can you improve?

Ensure you have a scrutiny approach that is outcome focused, improves services, builds productive communities and achieves value for money.

Ensure scrutiny is able to influence strategy, policy, standards, approaches and performance targets.

Ensure that engagement for residents is enabled for monitoring and learning from performance.

Ensure there are area-based performance engagement methods to ensure local accountability.

Ensure there is high awareness of engagement and scrutiny at governance and senior management levels.

Ensure resident scrutiny is well resourced and funded.

## Learning from others

**Swindon Borough Council** has a panel of five resident members who decide which areas they think suitable for scrutiny, using data provided from managers then use a six-stage process of review. They aim to ensure services provide value for money without compromising quality.

**Homes in Sedgemoor** held a one-day boot camp facilitated by Tpas to scrutinise the resident newsletter (value for money and readership). The report and the recommendations were included on the board agenda.

**Croydon Council** has a Scrutiny group are given complete autonomy on what they can scrutinise. There is a training programme, which helps residents acquire transferrable skills and a resident panel that is involved in the procurement of contracts.

**Oxford City Council** are moving away from a single stand-alone resident scrutiny panel and have panels that replicate the housing department structure, allowing three different groups to scrutinise at once.

**Solihull Community Housing** has a scrutiny panel but no other formal groups. Instead they use pop up groups to improve services recently they:

- Did a survey of the cleaning service in low and high-rise blocks and were able to recruit 350 block champions. They regularly fill in a simple form feeding back on the standard of the cleaning service. Issues raised are passed to the contractor who has to respond.
- Held DIY workshops focused on things that are the residents' responsibility.

### Further reading:

Latest Tpas Research Documents

<https://www.tpas.org.uk/knowledge-hub?category=&type=&search=scrutiny>

# 13. Procurement

**Some examples of how councils involve residents in procuring contractors were provided, but not many. Councils normally have a procurement team responsible for securing contracts for the supply of goods and services.**

There is a real opportunity to develop improved resident engagement while in the process of procuring services, particularly when residents are due to receive that service. Predominantly it sets the scene with potential suppliers as to the value of resident views and engagement in that organisation. Residents can be involved throughout the different stages of a procurement exercise:

- developing the brief for suppliers to submit tenders, getting the contract specification right can mean huge difference to the service eventually provided
- being part of the dialogue process and interview and selection stages
- being part of the monitoring and review of supplier performance
- ability to secure additional benefits such as local work opportunities and apprenticeships.

The regulatory system for social housing gives tenants the right to influence the formulation of their landlord's housing-related policies and strategic priorities and in the making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards.

There is no doubt as to the added value this activity can bring in enhancing engagement and enabling resident influence and experience to the supply chain, particularly where additional social and community benefits are sought. Residents can share their valuable insights and experiences as customers and work to co-design service and contracts that deliver value for money. Getting this right can be reflected in satisfaction levels and the smooth running of the contract.

## How can you improve?

Ensure procurement teams are trained in engaging residents in procurement.

Ensure the process for selecting residents is fair and transparent.

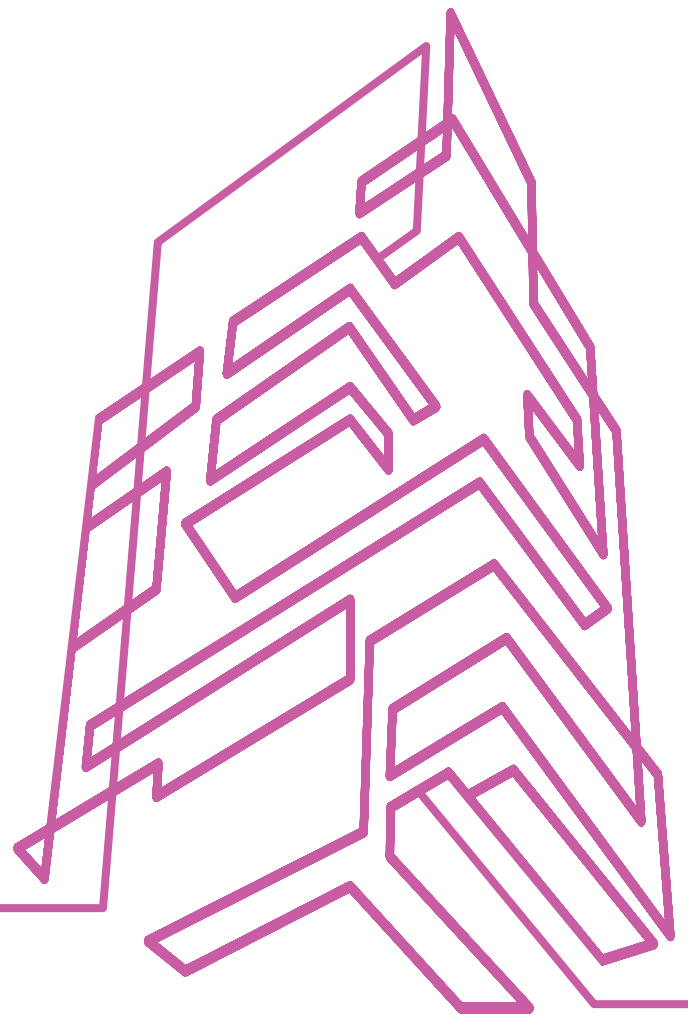
Ensure residents are trained in procurement including terminology and law.

## Learning from others

**South Cambridgeshire District Council** using insight added a social value clause to a repairs contract. They now fund a post that helps deal with rent arrears and residents with drug and alcohol dependency.

**Homes in Sedgemoor** residents are involved in putting together tender briefs, opening of tenders, the interview panel and monitoring the contractors. Contracts have a clause about social value. Contractors must put something back in the community eg they have paid for the tenants conference and run basic DIY workshops on things like how to change a fuse.

**Solihull Community Housing** carried out a survey of the cleaning service provided by contractors with residents living in low rise and high-rise properties. As a result they got 350 block champions who give their opinions on the service more regularly using a simple form. Comments and queries go to the contractors who have to respond. The contractor also holds DIY workshops, which focus on the things that are the tenants' responsibility.





# 14. High-rise engagement

**Since the fire at Grenfell last year, questions have been raised about whether social housing tenants are adequately involved in decisions that affect their homes, particularly when they live in high-rise accommodation. This was a national disaster that has thrust tenant involvement and the tenant voice, amongst other issues into sharp and political focus.**

The Hackitt review report published May 2018 and the Green Paper address a further exploration of safety, involvement and complaints.

## A safe and decent home for residents

Another key theme that runs across the green paper and the proposals is the intention to make building and fire safety information available and accessible to residents. Also involving residents on building safety processes and procedures and making it easy for residents to report concerns on building safety.

## Feedback from review

**Residents and staff at a recent Tpas event on Safe and Decent Homes told us what needs to change?**

Partnerships between fire service, landlords and residents should be established.

Involving residents in safety aspects of their homes.

Standards must be reviewed and must include residents in the process.

## Self-reflection

**There are potential implications for local authorities:**

Do you make information on building and fire safety procedures available in accessible ways to residents?

Do you have or plan to develop consultation processes on building safety with residents?

Do you have easy and responsive reporting mechanisms for residents on building safety?

Are you prepared for a possible review of the decent homes standard with residents?

## How can you improve?

Consider and act on recommendations following the Hackitt review.

Identify all resident blocks so that cladding and external panels can be checked.

Publish all fire risk assessments and evacuations procedures for all high rises.

Adopt a strong engagement and involvement approach for all residents.

Keep under regular review in partnership with residents.

## Learning from others

**Hull's Multi-Storey Living Group** members of which all live in the city's 28 high rise blocks or 453 low rise flats, has had a profound effect on improving both services and the quality of life for residents.

**Oxford City Council** commenced a tower block refurbishment project in the past few years where residents are involved in procurement of contractors and architects and also involved in the evaluation of contractors through the procurement and interview stage. There is also a dedicated resident liaison post for refurbishment and housing development that sits within the Tenant Involvement team. Tenants regularly review the decant service and quality of new homes.

**Housing Leeds** has a high-rise tenant engagement group (116 tower blocks) that have worked together to create a high-rise strategy and meet regularly to review safety and service performance

**Dacorum Borough Council** developed a local lettings policy for Gade Tower and is a good example of where low satisfaction has resulted in an action plan for improvements; this is shared with staff and stakeholders

After a local survey identified issues around:

- **Dacorum Borough Council** housing service
- anti-social behaviour
- the community and environment
- allocations policy
- maintenance and repairs
- parking.

Engagement activities were carried out and a new local resident association worked with Dacorum to evaluate and develop the plan for improvement in all areas.

## Further reading

Building a Safer Future Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety  
May 2018 – Dame Judith Hackitt

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/707785/Building\\_a\\_Safer\\_Future\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/707785/Building_a_Safer_Future_-_web.pdf)

# 15. Complaints

## **The tenant involvement and empowerment regulatory standards state that registered providers shall:**

1. provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
2. have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

Councils usually operate a two stage process with an option then to refer a complaint to a designated person, usually an MP or, if established, a tenants panel. The designated tenant panel is a type of body with a specific function in the complaint process. As in an example from Hull City Council, a tenant panel acts as a 'designated person' who can consider an individual complaint after it has completed a landlord's internal complaints procedure.

Under the Localism Act 2011 tenants of housing associations, local authorities and ALMO's can ask for their complaints to be considered by a 'designated person' when their landlord's internal complaints procedure is finished. One of these 'designated persons' is a group of tenants acting as a designated tenant panel.

## **Effective resolution of complaints**

The Green Paper looks at the complaints system and the perception that the system is overly complex, offering an inconsistent lack of options to escalate complaints and quickly access redress. The intention behind this is to propose a number of measures that make the system easier and more accessible, with a stronger role

for local mediation procedures. It also questions the effectiveness of the designated persons or democratic filter which forces social housing tenants to approach a politician or Tenants Panel or wait eight weeks before they can access the Housing Ombudsman. The paper also raises the possible need for councils and housing providers to support independent advocacy and mediation services as a positive direction for customers.

## **Feedback from review**

**Feedback from residents and staff at a recent Tpas event on Complaints - what needs to change?**

Mediation should be used more and residents trained to offer this service.

Recruit resident champions to mentor and support others to make complaints.

More information needs to be provided on how to make a complaint.

## Self-reflection

Does your council review complaints procedures and communications to residents as well as complaints resolution and resolution times?

Is there a signposting and support for independent advocacy and mediation services and how is this information made available to residents?

How does the designated person's role work and how are residents making use of it?

## How can you improve?

**The green paper is examining the approach to complaints across the sector with a view to reducing the complexity and time taken to see a resolution to a complaint.**

Ensure that your complaint service is fit for purpose and:

- a. is accessible
- b. staff are trained and empowered to resolve complaints quickly
- c. you monitor and strive to increase satisfaction levels
- d. you examine themes and trends and take action within a service identified
- e. you involve tenants in co designing the complaints service
- f. you offer and signpost independent mediation and advocacy.

## Learning from others

**Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS)** won an award at the UK Complaint Handling Awards 2017 for the innovative and proactive approach it had taken to manage complaints.

**Asra Housing Association** use complaints in service design with the initial aim to 'humanise the complaints process with a whole organisation training programme focusing on:

- a positive first response as first time fixing is critical, they took a commercial approach to complaints whereby many customers expect a quick solution and a quick response time
- improving the customer experience by only dealing with 1 person, the aim was that anyone can deal with a complaint and fix it quickly
- development of scripts so that everyone can deal with queries and questions-building knowledge system- helps call handlers deliver customer diagnostics
- customers were involved in road testing the diagnostics, journey mapping
- staff empowered to deal with and resolve complaints there and then
- satisfaction now 96 per cent from 64 per cent.

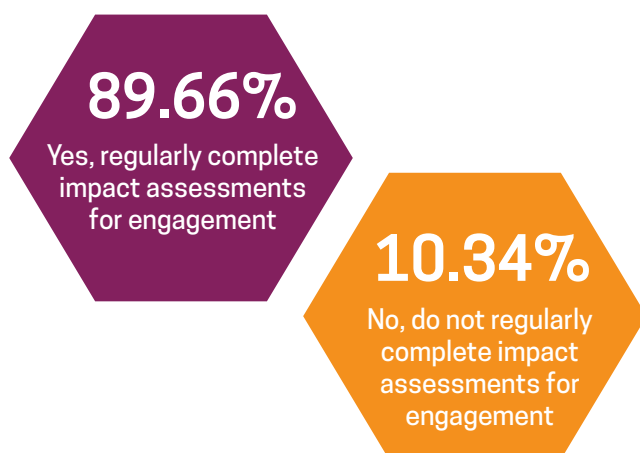
# 16. Measuring, targeting and impact of engagement

**This is a major challenge reported by some local authorities particularly around an effective way to capture outcomes and report on these. Many types of local authorities felt this is key to challenging the perception of resident engagement as a service as more needs to be done nationally to share and promote the positive outcomes and impacts of engagement.**

The ability to measure and raise awareness of impact would provide objective information to inform future decisions on funding and priorities. Most of the challenge lies in the absence of relevant strategic objectives (see chapter 13) without these in place it is hard to put measurements in place to monitor and assess impact.

Combined with the perception of many that resident engagement is resource intensive it is imperative that engagement links to core business strategy and has clearly defined objectives.

**Fig 3. Survey question: Do you regularly complete impact assessments for tenant and community engagement and involvement?**



**Common outcomes measured by organisations that do plan, monitor and review what they do are often through established KPIs that measure:**

service improvements and changes to both quality and effectiveness

satisfaction

reduction in costs/efficiency savings

increased social value/impact

This does not need to be as challenging as you think, use tailored surveys, before and after costs and measures, staff feedback, look at changes in complaints. Just ask, capture and report.

## Feedback from review

**Staff and tenants who participated in this review were very clear about what impact needs to look like.**

Involvement needs to make a difference.

Need to value expertise of tenants.

Need to get everyone in the room to have buy in.

Need to take away the tick box mentality.

Need more self-belief.

Need to be better at demonstrating outcomes from tenant engagement for the sector

Need to let tenants know where their voice sits.

Need to change the perception that tenant engagement is a 'fluffy' service.

We under value ourselves as a profession and don't market our achievements and ourselves.

## How can you improve?

Ensure your approach is planned, measured, monitored and has clear aims, objectives and outcomes at the start.

Ensure monitoring methods are agreed with stakeholders, including residents, in advance of projects and interventions.

Ensure activities are tracked and outcomes are evaluated transparently with stakeholders.

Ensure you achieve performance improvement through effective engagement and challenge.

Ensure you capture other improvements and benefits such as environmental and social.

Ensure your activity results in positive change for the landlord, residents, communities and stakeholders, if it does not stop it – if it does shout about it.

Ensure your approach is routinely reviewed assessing and identifying the value of engagement, interventions and outcomes.

Ensure you adopt a learning and continuous improvement culture improving the effectiveness of engagement, which links to increases value for money and greater impact on services and projects.

## Learning from others

An example from **Virgin Trains** is the use of net promoter scores and beginning to end journey mapping, alongside an approach that sees all teams involved, clear communication of vision and empowered staff. Virgin aim to create amazing through understanding basic needs and wants, understanding enhanced needs and wants and personalisation. They understand that they need to walk in their customer's shoes and they do this by end to end journey mapping, interviewed customers as each point of their journey they found eight stages, stages most important were planning and preparation – led to improvements on website and boarding and settling in – new meet and great service/priority boarding.

**Hull City Council** measure through the use of Outcome STARs – they ask people how they feel before and after an activity. Relevant questions are taken from the STAR survey and they also carry out a door knocking exercise. They also:

- do peer reviews where they compare their performance against the services of other landlords
- take tenants on city bus tours – take people from better blocks and show them the not so good blocks and vice versa so they can benchmark.

**Nottingham City Homes (NCH)** a self-assessment form is used by the Customer Excellence Panel to measure whether or not NCH is delivering the service tenants and leaseholders expect. This is assessed through a combination of performance measures, customer satisfaction data and service managers' self-assessment against the promised statements. The new Achieving Customer Excellence (ACE) Inspectors can also be commissioned by the panel to gather further information and evidence to inform the panel's overall assessment of whether we are achieving four star services. The panel completes assessments of how the organisation is performing against the four star promises by end of each financial year starting from March 2014. The wider resident body is kept informed of progress through tenants annual reports, NCH 'News' magazine.

**A1 Housing** carry out an annual impact assessment report, which includes the social impact. A1 housing are clear on their purpose for involvement:

1. improves accountability
2. improves social capital
3. improves services.

In partnership with resident they assess impact and value for money with a set of indicators to show high level, medium level and low impact. See annex 5 for KIP comparison table.

### Further reading

5 Ways to Ensure Effective Engagement  
<https://www.tpas.org.uk/ebooks>

# 17. Celebrating and closing the loop

**Feedback from tenants and landlords suggest that not enough is done to promote and celebrate achievements and promote positive news and outcomes as result of tenant and community activities. More of this activity directly supports the Benefit to Society campaign also now referred to as ‘See the Person’ and addresses the real issue of stigma faced by many tenants. More needs to be done.**



Many tenants and staff did report that they communicate changes made as a result of involvement in a ‘You said We did’ type publication and many still hold local awards to celebrate and reward achievements and successes achieved by residents.

A review carried out by the national tenant organisations (NTOs) in 2016 found that while investing in tenant involvement can produce financial, service, social and community benefits it is not often recognised or articulated.

## Feedback from review

**Feedback from residents and staff at a recent Tpas event on Stigma and Thriving Communities – what needs to change?**

Residents have to take the lead in challenging stigma – more promotion of positive stories.

Challenge assumptions that ASB is a consequence or cause of living in social housing.

## How can you improve?

Ensure that your council promotes the positive achievements in existing communities.

Ensure that you sign up and pledge support to the campaign benefit to society.

Ensure that your staff and organisation challenges negative assumptions.

Ensure you focus on the right culture in your organisation see chapter 12.



## Learning from others

Tpas have partnered with Home Group to roll out a Human Library approach to break down stigma and challenge stereotypes. St Ledger Homes, Doncaster have produced a making a difference video and hold tenants awards with afternoon tea for which there are five categories.

## Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities

The Green Paper addresses the issue of stigma that social housing tenants expressed they felt in the consultation road shows of 2017.

Embedding good customer service in housing management is a primary concern that was also fed back into this review through consultation with tenants.

## Further reading

Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing  
[http://benefittosociety.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Findings-from-Overcoming-Stigma-Think-Tank\\_Report\\_with-quotes.pdf](http://benefittosociety.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Findings-from-Overcoming-Stigma-Think-Tank_Report_with-quotes.pdf)

[www.humanlibrary.max-mediagroup.co.uk](http://www.humanlibrary.max-mediagroup.co.uk)

Tenants Leading Change an Investment Not a Cost

<https://nationaltenants.org/tenants-leading-change/>

Tpas Green Paper Findings

<https://www.tpas.org.uk/knowledge-hub/download/591>

Benefit to Society: See the Person films

<http://benefittosociety.co.uk/see-the-person/>



# 18. In the community

**The review found that this is an area of excellence for local authorities in their place shaping role, there is a real focus and body of evidence that demonstrates a commitment to improving quality of life and addressing health, financial and environment concerns. Often through effective and strong partnerships within the locality and as a result of the right strategies in place, activity is easier to measure and report on impact.**

**Fig 4. Survey question 16: Do you have any of the following strategies in place?**



## How can you improve?

Target experience and encourage and use the knowledge in the community, community leaders, existing organisations and anchors.

Ensure you know who lives in your communities see chapter 12.

Consider a community mapping exercise to identify key issues facing communities and neighbourhoods in partnership with residents.

Consider a targeted community strategy through neighbourhood agreements or charters that set out how you will commit to tackling key issues and concerns.

## Learning from others

**Nottingham City Homes** has changed their approach to tenant engagement in the last few years and have a renewed focus on community development. Seven projects a year are chosen by residents eg 'fit in the community' was a project funded by Sport England but shaped by tenants, with the purpose of getting tenants physically fit. They also support community groups with training on how to apply for funding. NCHs are looking to set up a charity to help groups apply for funding to address issues identified in the community.

### **Northwards – changing lives in north**

**Manchester** For the past year the independent living officer has been working with the community, helping to ease pressure on the NHS. The officer engages with residents who are frequent re-attendees in hospital or A&E departments, and those identified as vulnerable, isolated or lonely. To date the project has helped 155 people improve their way of life.

**Stockport Homes** create self-sustaining projects eg community cafes and a domestic violence network, they tap into what external funders are looking for and secure grants to support projects. Many projects provide work skills for tenants.

**Homes in Sedgemoor** developed a programme of activities for year 10 school children as part of an enrichment week. They took part in litter picking, fence painting and other activities, which resulted in greater confidence, new skills, pride in neighbourhood and anti-social behaviour decreased.

**Swindon Borough Council** has street representatives and junior representatives that are an integral part of resident engagement. Other community-based activities include a free café with a range of other organisations. M&S give food left over from the previous day and children's activities during school holidays are in place. Swindon invites older people to events at the café directly tackling isolation and loneliness. Swindon also held a competition with young people to design road speed signs for an estate.

**St Leger Homes** (Doncaster) ensure that young people have a role in influencing services and have a say in what they would like to see from services. St Ledger created an online portal that helps with CV writing and job searches. In their work with schools they deliver lessons on money management and tenancy sustainment.

**Dacorum Borough Council** has a Community Engagement Plan that is aligned to landlords strategic objectives (business plan) helping them to monitor and measure change and report on social, environmental and economic planned outcomes.

**Hull City Council** operate a common tasking framework which is a multi-agency partnership, which all partners have signed up to and have deployed resources to engage with community sector partners and support community based solutions.

**Wolverhampton Homes** operate a learning, employment and achievement programme (LEAP) offering skills development and work experience open to tenants and leaseholders that live in their properties. Helping over 100 tenants into permanent employment, 105 apprenticeships and 205 tenants get work experience.

### **Oxford City Council**

With a grant from health watch, the council undertook a 'Quality of Life' survey in 2014 of their seven priority regeneration areas. 1,117 residents across the seven areas completed the survey and their feedback along with feedback from focus groups, workshops, resident groups and local businesses led to the formation of community plans for each of the seven priority areas, which in turn feeds into the Regeneration Framework for Oxford 2026. Residents are able to attend open forums for updates on progress.

### **Further reading:**

Community Planning Toolkit  
<https://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement0815.pdf>

# 19. Learning from each other – effective networks and information sharing

**Many participants are involved in peer-to-peer benchmarking through HouseMark or other area based groups. Many participants felt that enabling better access to benchmarking information for residents is an area that needs to improve. There was a strong request for more support towards knowledge sharing and networking.**

## How can you improve?

Consider the development of a web based knowledge hub to place case studies of good practice in resident engagement, validated by tenants - there is a need for these to become common place and shared widely that include contact details of good practice organisations and stock sizes so others can look at organisations that are a similar size to our own. The LGA was noted for good practice sources; particularly for community initiatives and Tpas have a knowledge hub available for members.

Ensure you support residents and staff to participate in or even set up network groups, over the past few years these have become unsupported by local authorities and other landlords due to the pressure on resources and funding, there is a huge need for these to become common place and local authorities are in an ideal position to lead on how these are developed.

# 20. Conclusion

**We hope that you have found this report useful and a resource for you to improve your approach in involving tenants. We found the feedback very useful in the development of this report and while some local authorities are exemplars, many still have a journey ahead of them.**

Now is the time for you to reflect on how good your organisation is at:

- embedding a positive resident centred culture
- ensuring you have firm foundations and a strategic commitment for engagement
- ensuring residents and staff are trained and well resourced
- ensuring you know who lives in your homes
- ensuring a range of activities to involve residents
- providing an effective complaints service
- ensuring a wider place shaping and leadership role in improving communities
- ensuring effective ways to measure and report on outcomes of work you do in engaging and involving.

**Do use the reflection box questions to evaluate where you are in your approach.**

**Do read and contact those organisations we have cited as case studies.**

**Do contact Tpas if you need any more support.**

**The journey needs to start now.**

We thought we would leave you with some of the views of staff and tenants about what else needs to happen to improve.

## Survey feedback

### Improving culture

Capacity across different departments to do meaningful engagement with residents.

Organisational culture changes, I am all for the idea that it's in everyone's role to engage and involve customers and needs to be demonstrated from the top down, although in reality this is very difficult and a challenging aspiration to manage and monitor.

Greater investment and clearer tenant engagement service standards would provide tenants assurance that landlords truly want to hear their voices and landlords have a clearer expectation of what is required from them.

## Improving outcomes

I think we still see collecting numbers a success when actually there needs to be more emphasis on capturing impact. I have previously attempted to pitch the idea of a county wide tenant group that included all affordable housing provider involved tenants to help respond to central government consultation on legislation. This was not taken up due to non-stock holding authorities feeling it was outside of their remit. I think this would help to split the high level strategic involvement which some (not all) tenants are interested in and help to keep in house involvement focused on the day-to-day service. It would also help to give weight to tenant's voices.

We have been developing a culture where we recognise every point of contact with tenants is a form of engagement so continuing to develop this throughout the service.

Better co-operation between partners, working together to support great outcomes for customers and efficient use of resources.

Demonstrating to residents that we act on their feedback. Being able to accurately capture and track feedback to change of service. Having more flexibility to deliver a range of options for engagement in an efficient, timely way.

Being able to capture outcomes and impact more consistently across the service.

## A range of activities

More resources to buy in digital engagement tools.

Increased digitalisation.

Building a number of channels to record tenant voice. Gaining larger tenant involvement. Analysing behavioural insight on activity. Increased feedback on service. Engaging with younger tenants.

Devolved decision making.

A better representation and better e-engagement.

Greater flexibility to engage a broader group of tenants.

Moving away from some of the traditional approaches and engaging a much broader range of tenants and residents about the issues relevant to them – we've seen some great new technologies out there – and want to start trialling these so we spend less time on involving a small number of residents, and more time acting on the views of many.

Have more opportunities for customers to be involved with task and finish or action groups with devolved budgets.

## Supporting residents

A more cohesive approach to recruiting residents, training involved residents and maintaining engagement over time.

Although I have a good working relationship with the Housing – Community Engagement Team, there are some TARAs that feel that this could be much better and be more consistent for all.

## Celebrating and closing the loop

We need to be more effective at showing the benefits and impact both internally and externally.

## Improvement in regulation

National engagement standards that are externally audited.

As with many housing professionals, I feel that further regulation around tenant involvement/engagement would be beneficial in that it would act as a driver for improvement. I feel that the current tenant involvement standards don't challenge organisations enough.

The LGA needs to challenge all chief executive officers about how they engage with tenants. Ask them to produce an annual statement.

The LGA should produce some sort of tool kit to measure the value of tenant engagement to an organisation.

Need to increase regulation and be clear that it needs resourcing. Would like Green paper to make Tenant Engagement mandatory.

## Learning from others

We could do even more to work closely with the voluntary and community sector, to learn from their engagement methodologies and work together to engage our harder to reach customers.

Moving towards digital means of engagement and increasing the number of reps/residents involved.



# 21. How we gathered feedback

**Tpas delivered four roundtables across England, hosted by local authorities and open to local authorities and ALMOs.**

## We met with:

**30 landlords of these**

- 16 were local authorities
- 14 were ALMOs

## We met with:

**43 staff**

**16 tenants**

Tpas adopted an appreciative enquiry approach to the roundtables to establish:

1. What is good practice?
2. Where is the good practice?
3. What are the challenges?
4. What needs to happen to improve?

The roundtable events were based upon an appreciative enquiry approach to ensure that voices were heard and feedback captured. The same questions were followed at each session. The events were a place for many to hear from others about their experiences, challenges and solutions that was welcomed by all who attended.

Tpas also ran a short survey, one for staff and councillors and one tailored to tenants. A copy of the surveys can be found at Annex 2.

## Participation in the survey:

**50 staff**

**79 tenants**

**46 organisations**

- 23 local authorities
- 23 ALMOs

## Total participation breakdown:

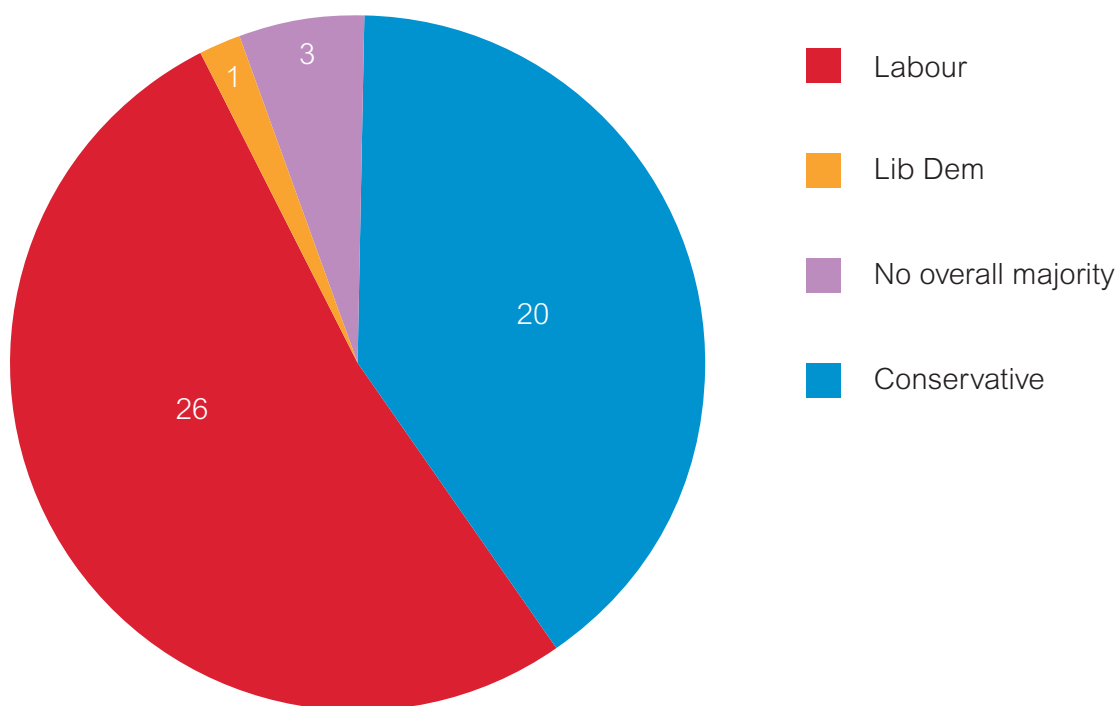
**35 local authorities**

**20 ALMOs**

**95 tenants**

**93 staff**

We found that local authority political leadership was fairly evenly represented (see Fig.1) in the feedback obtained; issues, challenges and good practice were reported from organisations with different political leadership. What is clear from feedback is that local politicians are very influential in determining how much a success or failure tenant engagement is.



**Fig.1 Political leadership**

# 22. What is tenant engagement?

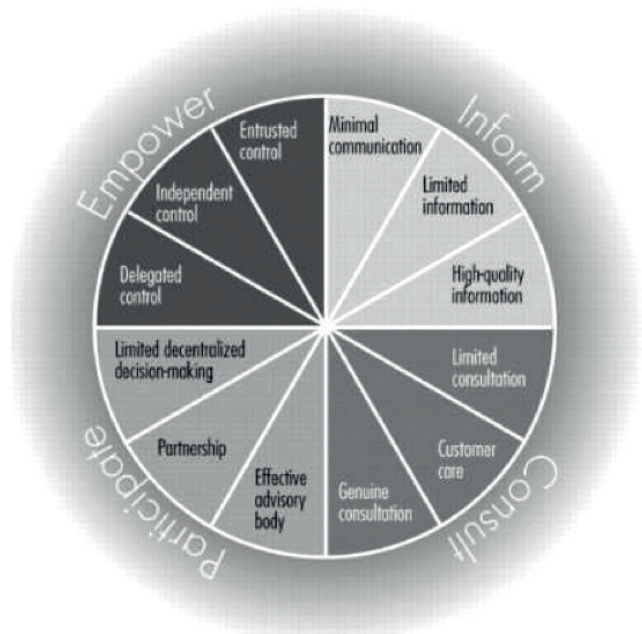
**It is worth pointing out that there are many theoretical models that have been presented over time which are useful to understand as they encapsulate alternative approaches and intended outcomes. But, a health warning needs to be applied when you read about examples of theories as in practice what tenant engagement is for you may not be what tenant engagement is for others.**

We have presented an overview of some of the most influential and wider known models here to illustrate different approaches however most theoretical frameworks have their supporters and critics.

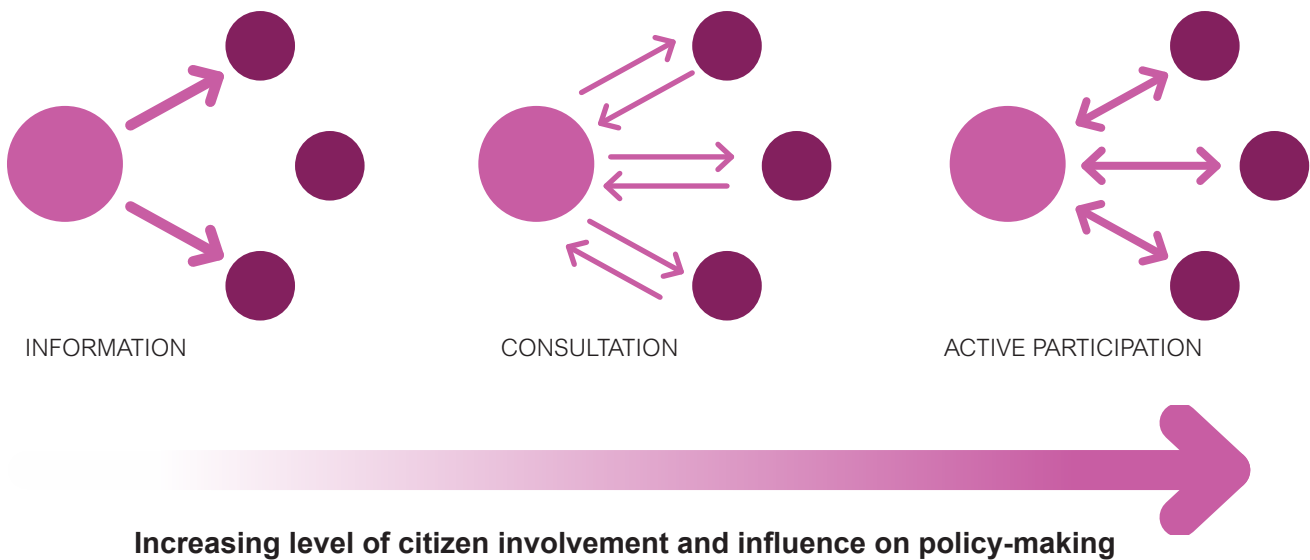
The International Association for Public Participation five step framework for participation 2007 is useful; albeit a hierarchical framework whereby there are five levels of participation. This is sometimes also referred to as the ladder of participation, each level increasing participation and involvement. This framework is based upon Sherry Arnstein's ladder of participation which set out eight steps or 'levels' of participation; the higher up the ladder the higher degrees of power for those participating.

Both informing and consulting are well used methods, and often seen in involvement strategies however caution needs to be applied if tenants are not involved in developing the content of information and feedback is not used as a result of consultation.

One other example framework is the 'wheel of participation' developed by Scott Davidson in 1998 for South Lanarkshire Council in response to the lack of community involvement in the planning system. The wheel promoted the use of dialogue beyond the limitations of traditional meetings and replacing these with focus groups, networking and workshops. The wheel promotes the level of involvement without suggesting the aim of climbing the ladder.



<b>Empower</b>	Involvement of the public into the whole decision-making process; final decision is made by the public
<b>Collaborate</b>	Involvement of the public into the whole decision-making process with the option to identify their preferred solution
<b>Involve</b>	Involvement of the public throughout the whole process; opinions of the public are taken into account
<b>Consult</b>	Information to the public and obtaining feedback from them
<b>Inform</b>	Provision of information of the public



It is important for organisations to assess how they adopt a framework, as if not done well it can damage trust and reputation. Diane Warburton (2007) suggests that there are occasions when public engagement should not be undertaken.

For example:

- if a decision has already effectively been made, and there is no room for change
- as a tick-box exercise, because it is required, and there is no intention of taking any notice of what comes out of the engagement process
- as a delaying tactic, because it is too difficult to make a decision immediately, but the engagement is not considered an important part of the decision-making process that will eventually take place.

If engagement is not done at all or done badly it can also damage trust and reputation so this also needs to be taken into consideration.

This framework below was developed by (Organisation for economic Co-operation and development (OECD) in 2001 to help define the relationship between citizens and government. It shows an increasing level of involvement and influence.

To conclude, there are differing 'levels' of engagement ranging from one way information, to a higher degree of influence and empowerment afforded to tenants and communities, each has a place however there is increasing demand for tenants and communities to be afforded more power in how their services are delivered. It is useful to understand some of the theory however theory must be considered in combination with good practice models showing what can work and learning from the experience of others to develop your own approach, as one size does not fit all.

This reports uses the term tenant and resident, interchangeably. While the scope is very much focussed on tenants rather than leaseholders some of the improvement sections are applicable to both tenures.

# 23. Current regulatory requirements

Regulatory Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard	
Required outcomes	Specific expectations
<p><b>1. Customer service, choice and complaints</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide choice, information and communication that is appropriate.</li> <li>• Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information about services.</li> <li>• Offer a wide range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Involvement and empowerment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formulation of housing-related policies and strategic priorities</li> <li>• the scrutiny of landlord performance and making of recommendations.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Support tenants to develop and implement opportunities for involvement and empowerment by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting the formation and activities of tenant panels or equivalent</li> <li>• the provision of performance information</li> <li>• consultation with tenants of local offers for services</li> <li>• performance monitoring.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat all tenants with fairness and respect, demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants.</li> </ul>	<p>Demonstrate how they respond to tenants' needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants.</p>

The current regulatory standards relating to tenant involvement are set out in the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, as part of the consumer standards, which is applicable to all local authorities. Regulation and the emphasis on co-regulation is there to protect and empower residents and to secure public and private investment. Many have argued that the self-regulation focus and non-proactive enforcement of the consumer standards alongside other challenges facing councils has resulted in tenant involvement becoming less of a priority. Regulatory intervention only occurring when there has been ‘serious detriment’ meaning structural ‘serious actual harm or serious potential harm to tenants ‘and then only as issues emerge’. Often this intervention comes too late.

The Green Paper, published in August 2018 is designed around five principles:

- a safe and decent home for residents
- improving and speeding up how complaints are resolved
- empowering residents and ensuring that their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account
- tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- building the social homes we need and ensuring that those homes are a springboard to home ownership.

For the purposes of this review the first four principles are reported on within our findings below. The Green Paper is an opportunity to discuss things further, and hopefully the start of a more ambitious plan delivering change. We also see it as an opportunity to review and improve tenant engagement practices and this joint piece of work between the LGA and Tpas is designed to help with that.

The Green Paper is clear that the consumer regulations will be strengthened as such the Ministry of Housing, communities and Local Government (MHCLG) are currently consulting on the regulatory framework.

The intention to carry out a review of the regulatory framework for social housing is to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, reflects changes in the sector and drives a focus on delivering a good service for residents. The review has three key objectives:

1. to rebalance the relationship between social housing landlords and residents, setting out the level of service residents should expect and clarifying how they can hold their landlord to account when they are not delivering
2. to ensure private registered providers of social housing are well governed and financially viable – reflecting the changing business models and levels of risk in the sector
3. to make sure the Regulator of Social Housing (‘the Regulator’) has effective powers to deliver the first two objectives and that there are clear lines of accountability between the Regulator and Parliament.





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