

## Practical approaches to involving tenants

**We're pleased to present our Eight Involvement Essentials for effective involvement within social housing. This document brings together some flexible, practical approaches to help you maximise tenant involvement.**

Now is a good time to reflect on approaches to involvement. 'The Right Stuff – hearing the tenants' voice' report has recently been published and tenants' expectations are changing whilst social housing providers are striving to provide more diverse services with fewer resources. Tenants, the people who know your services best, are in the best position to inform future direction and how precious resources should be prioritised.



# 1

## DELIVERING OUTCOMES - THE DIFFERENCE MADE

**What's the purpose of doing it? Effective involvement should create opportunities for tenants to influence decisions and the design and delivery of services. Involvement has the potential to initiate positive benefits for the organisation as well as for the community or individual customers. These include:**

- **Improved services**
- **Developing communities**
- **Landlord openness and accountability**
- **Increasing skills and knowledge of individuals**
- **Value for money e.g. reduction in costs/increased efficiency**

**Involvement isn't just done for the sake of it, but is designed to make a real difference**

Involvement can be perceived as being resource intensive so it's imperative that it shows that there are clear links to the core business objectives. You need to do what's right for the tenants and the organisation. Involvement methods need to be monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure that they offer value for money and, deliver the outcomes which you had planned! Finding effective ways of capturing outcomes can be a challenge for landlords, but if we want to encourage more involvement with tenants, it's essential that these changes are promoted and shared.

### Things to think about:

|   | Needs action | Made a start | Making progress | Doing well | Doing really well |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| We have identified outcomes that we hope to achieve as a result of involvement activities i.e. what's going to change/what difference will the activities make. |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Is there a process for evaluating and measuring the difference made? Is it clear that involvement has been effective?   |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Time is taken to monitor unintended outcomes.   |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We shout about the impact/changes involvement has achieved.   |              |              |                 |            |                   |

# 2

## 'A CULTURE OF INVOLVEMENT' - EMBEDDED THROUGHOUT THE ORGANISATION

Everyone who works for your organisation, including your contractors, should be concerned about delivering excellent services through involving tenants. The improved communication and decision making can help reduce costs and allow for the effective allocation of resources. Involvement will succeed and develop through being embedded within the organisation.

**Involvement is embedded across all levels and teams within your organisation**

This culture of involvement must come from the top with senior managers/local authority members embracing the concept and ensuring that all consultation is meaningful and acted upon – even if the answer isn't the one expected or wanted by the senior team! Involvement should not be tokenistic!

Embedding means that all staff are enabled and encouraged to have the flexibility and permission to consider the needs and priorities of tenants. Teams should be supported and encouraged to communicate with and involve tenants. This can be supported through job descriptions and the appraisal process. Tenant/resident involvement should not be an 'add on' but should be at the very heart of everything the landlord does!

| Things to think about:  | Needs action | Made a start | Making progress | Doing well | Doing really well |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| There is a genuine culture of involvement in our organisation. Is it embraced and encouraged from the top – is there real commitment? |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| "Introduction to Involvement" is one of our core training subjects for staff.   |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Involvement is included in all job descriptions.  |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| All teams within the organisation are committed to meaningful consultation with their tenants/residents.                              |              |              |                 |            |                   |

# 3

## TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY - LISTEN AND ACT

Trust and an appreciation of each other’s perspectives is an important element of the involvement process. Openness and transparency make it easier for customers to understand what decisions are being made and the influence they have had. Involvement with tenants will work if there is a relationship with the landlord built on trust and a culture of positivity.

**Involvement enables a trusting relationship to be built between you and your tenants**

As a landlord, you need to be consistent in your approach and must let tenants know that you are listening to them and hearing what they say!

Consider using social media, video etc for AGMs; events such as ‘Meeting the management Team’ or involving senior managers in estate walkabouts etc. These can be used to begin the process of being more open and transparent with tenants/residents. Is there information available that you currently could or should be sharing with tenants/residents?

Let them know what you’ve done with their input. E.g. “You said, we did” or “you said, we can’t because....” Communication is vital in building a sense of mutual trust and openness. It also enables better involvement in the future as it reassures tenants that their contribution is valued and respected. Timely responses provide credibility and demonstrate an appetite for open conversation.

| Things to think about:  | Needs action | Made a start | Making progress | Doing well | Doing really well |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| There is an Openness and Transparency policy/statement.   |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| There is a trusting and honest relationship with tenants with an open conversation. The organisation is open to acting on information/feedback they may not want to hear. |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Tenants feel valued and know the difference that their contribution makes. i.e. the organisation routinely feeds back to them in a transparent way.                       |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Effective Scrutiny of the performance and decisions made is encouraged.   |              |              |                 |            |                   |

# 4

## INVOLVEMENT IN BIG DECISIONS

Involvement which is limited to consultation on small-scale operational matters or services is tokenistic. Whilst it is important to provide choice and ask for feedback, there are also much deeper conversations to have.

**Tenant involvement is not limited to operational matters only**

Tenants who are involved at a strategic level can help to review decisions and streamline services, focusing on what's important. E.g. Rent Policy. Your business plan objectives should reflect the priorities highlighted through involvement.

Informal involvement is needed to reach as many tenants as possible. Therefore, don't limit the involvement in big decision just to tenants who may get involved via more traditional methods. Use every-day contact as a way of consulting with as many different tenants as possible e.g. estate walkabouts, face-to-face contact with front-line staff.

| Things to think about:   | Needs action | Made a start | Making progress | Doing well | Doing really well |
|--|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| The organisation's strategic direction is informed by meaningful involvement and insight from tenants and communities. |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Information and insight is gathered through everyday contact with tenants to influence our business plan.              |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Appropriate opportunities for tenants and residents to comment on draft strategic proposals are used.                  |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We have started to involve tenants in wider issues e.g. Procurement, selection of contractors.                         |              |              |                 |            |                   |

# 5

## CURRENT AND RELEVANT

**Involvement should look at local as well as wider issues, e.g. climate change and the need for more sustainable homes or, health and safety concerns. Tenants will want to discuss issues that are relevant and current in their lives, homes and communities.**

**Involvement should reflect today's big issues and what currently matters to tenants**

The world is moving fast. Local and national events can impact on all our lives. These events also set the scene for the environment in which your organisation operates. Tenants have local knowledge relating to their homes and communities which can provide invaluable information for the landlord. Utilising this knowledge can help landlords make informed decisions based on this input which can provide Value for Money.

Consider whether you can work with other agencies in these communities. Their knowledge, experience and contacts can help support you in communicating and dealing with these communities.

Tenants and residents may also have ideas about what can be done to minimise the impacts of current issues, E.g. charging points for electric cars; projects to increase the re-cycling of plastic; development of eco homes.

| <b>Things to think about:</b>   | Needs action | Made a start | Making progress | Doing well | Doing really well |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| We talk to our tenants about today's big issues and ask them to share their ideas with us.  |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We know what issues are important to them because we ask them.  |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We are aware of local issues that may affect tenants. E.g. recent increases in local crime rates; potential closure of the local school. We offer support to tenants to get involved in these local issues. |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We know who the tenants in our communities are.   |              |              |                 |            |                   |



# MONEY, TIME, COMMITMENT FOR INVOLVEMENT

We're keen for landlords to consider involvement as a real opportunity – 'an investment not a cost'! Discussions with tenants can provide real value for money by informing decisions and ensuring that money and resources are being spent where they are needed most. Involvement makes business sense!!

**There should be enough money to get involved meaningfully whilst also considering the best use of resources**

Landlords should consider wider initiatives to raise confidence, develop skills and build capacity that can bring longer-term results for the community. Investing in the people, resources and assets within these communities can lead to greater collaboration, community ownership and project sustainability for residents. These in turn, can benefit the landlord!

Evidence has shown that there is a link between Tenant Involvement and satisfaction rates. Hull City Council referred to a substantial increase [in tenant satisfaction] from 50% in 2003 to 80% in 2014. *(An Investment not a cost – the benefits of tenant involvement. March 2015 Department for Communities and Local Government)*

| <b>Things to think about:</b>  | Needs action | Made a start | Making progress | Doing well | Doing really well |
|--|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| Involvement activities are adequately resourced in terms of people, time and money.  |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Involvement within our organisation is seen as Value for Money. i.e. an investment not a cost?   |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We tap into our community resources and assets. These may be physical such as buildings, or skills e.g. enthusiasm and knowledge of residents. |              |              |                 |            |                   |

# 7

## PROMOTION!

**Effective marketing and publicity about involvement opportunities is almost as important as the activities themselves. It doesn't matter how well you've thought through arrangements for an involvement activity, if people don't know about it, it won't succeed!**

**The word on how to get involved is spread widely across your customers and communities**

You should think about a multi-method approach to spread the word as widely as possible. A lot can be done online through social media and web-based promotion, but you need to consider who won't be able to see this! Do you need to think about maintaining some of the more traditional approaches to promotion such as flyers and posters? Could events be advertised face to face through front-line staff? Can you use existing groups and networks to get involved with your tenants?

Accessibility is wider than ramps for wheelchair users and loop systems for deaf people! Consider the timings of events and whether the venues used are seen as 'neutral' i.e. using a local school may discourage some people from attending events.

Also reflect on what people need to know for them to be encouraged to attend. Tell them what's involved, what support is available e.g. it will be an informal, drop-in event etc. The more you can tell them, the better.

| <b>Things to think about:</b>   | Needs action | Made a start | Making progress | Doing well | Doing really well |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| Our customers know what we're working on and how to get involved.   |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We are adopting a multi-method approach to publicity.   |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| Two types of feedback are needed!<br>1) What events took place and how amazing they were! (Convince people they missed out by not being there!)<br>2) What's changed as a result of the event: "You said we did"; Increase in community spirit etc. |              |              |                 |            |                   |

# 8

## GETTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

Tenants will have different preferences and abilities to take part and not everyone will want to get involved all the time. Do you know your community profile so that you can be as inclusive as possible? A wider menu of involvement choices will ensure a more balanced and diverse representation of community views and help provide value for money.

**Your involvement methods consider the needs and preferences of all groups**

Social activities such as fun days or 'coffee and chat' events can have a wider reach than more formal events. Digital involvement may be best for those with little time to commit or for some younger people but may alienate the older generation or miss opportunities for face to face contact to tackle isolation. Accept that some people may want to 'dip in and out' of involvement and may not be able to commit long term.

There is no 'silver bullet' for communication so the more methods used the greater the chance of getting more people involved.

Consider the profile of your communities and tenants. Any potential barriers for different groups should be identified and addressed e.g. using the written word can exclude a surprising number of tenants and residents. Other potential barriers could include language e.g. the need for plain language, cultural and religious sensitivities or accessibility.

| <b>Things to think about:</b>   | Needs action | Made a start | Making progress | Doing well | Doing really well |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------------|
| We know our tenants' involvement preferences and how we can be more inclusive.                            |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We have considered how our involvement opportunities/ activities may be perceived by the wider community. |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We have stopped to consider which groups are not present and why and what might limit their involvement.  |              |              |                 |            |                   |
| We take time to review our activities and what worked well; what we would do differently next time.       |              |              |                 |            |                   |



# HOW CAN TPAS CYMRU HELP?

TPAS Cymru has expert knowledge of the issues that affect tenants in the Welsh housing sector. For 30+ years, we have positively changed tenant participation techniques and best practice through training, support, projects, consultancy and policy development.



**Talk to us about how we can provide in-house support to you: from training to consultancy services**



**Have a chat with us about issues or ideas arising from this document**



**Ask us about how we can tailor our support to suit your organisation**

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