

Tenant Involvement in Governance: Models and Practices Final Report



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with Halima Sacranie

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**David Mullins and Peter Shanks with
Halima Sacranie
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Executive Summary

- i. This project has provided the opportunity for a systematic review of the current state of the art on tenant involvement in the governance of social housing in Northern Ireland and an evidence review of the wider range of governance models in operation in GB and Europe.
- ii. These two reviews (Chapters 2 and 3) have provided the platform to consider a range of steps that could be taken to enhance levels of involvement that align with the key directions of change in NI. Relevant contextual changes include:
 - The Social Housing Reform Programme
 - Tenant Participation Strategy and TP Strategy Action Plan,
 - the growth of the housing association sector to provide nearly a third of all social housing in NI through a smaller number of larger HAs and
 - further changes in delivery of NIHE housing including:
 - the NIHE Transformation Programme
 - NIHE strategies for Community Empowerment and Social Enterprise
 - Building on 30 years of successful tenant engagement through the Housing Community Network and more recently through Scrutiny Panels.
- iii. A typology of approaches to tenant involvement in governance was developed from the evidence review. This identified the importance of underlying assumptions about the purpose of tenant involvement and the problems that it is intended to address, and the scale and organisational arrangements within which it is introduced. One clear conclusion is that the question of tenant involvement in governance is far wider than how many, if any, seats on the main governing bodies of social housing providers should be held by tenants.
- iv. A key contribution of the project has been to identify some specific governance models that operate successfully in different policy and organisational contexts across Europe and which appear to be relevant to current gaps in tenant involvement opportunities in the governance of social housing in Northern Ireland. An iterative and collaborative approach has been taken to the task of identifying and testing the models and their relevance in relation to the gaps in Northern Ireland.
- v. In the second stage of the project purposive case studies were undertaken in Northern Ireland to assess the context, gaps and barriers. A second set of case studies were undertaken with experts on Austria, the Netherlands, England and Wales to understand how specific models work in practice.
- vi. In the final stage of the project, workshops were held to establish a dialogue between experts on the models and tenants and other stakeholders in Northern Ireland social housing governance. The aim of these workshops was to provide a reality check on the relevance of the models and their potential for adaptation and adoption as part of future governance arrangements in Northern Ireland.
- vii. Case studies of current governance practice in NI were helpful in clarifying the strengths of current practice, the nature of current gaps and the likely barriers to adopting and adapting the international models.
- viii. Four **key strengths** were identified in the Northern Ireland cases:
 - The three case studies highlighted the wide range of approaches to involving tenants of social housing in Northern Ireland that already operate, many of which may be considered to be relevant to tenant involvement in governance.
 - These include central and regional tenant forums with direct links to decision making bodies within the landlord organisations, tenant scrutiny of landlord services, networking of local tenant

and community associations, menus of involvement enabling tenants to choose methods that suit them, and social enterprise models for local employment of tenants.

- Despite limited links between the NIHE and HA tenant groups and a degree of suspicion particularly of housing associations by NIHE tenants, there is a remarkable similarity in the approaches being developed.
- These similarities probably owe much to the expertise, coordination and support of both sectors by Supporting Communities and the emerging regulatory expectations for tenant involvement.

- ix. The Northern Ireland case studies also identified four significant **current gaps** in tenant involvement in governance.
- There are currently no tenants on the main boards of the landlords.
 - There are no local areas where tenants can control the management of their estates to the extent found in international models such as cooperatives and tenant management organisations.
 - There is no support from landlords for tenants groups to form prior to moving in to their properties or to influence the design and management of new housing from the outset.
 - Relationships of housing organisations with Northern Ireland's 11 new local authorities (known as super councils because they are larger and have more powers than the 26 local authorities they replaced) are developing. But there is currently limited provision for tenants to have a voice in these developing relationships.
- x. Four case studies of governance models found in four countries showed the potential for adaptation and adoption in NI in the context of Social Housing Reform and the creation of an Independent Tenant Organisation¹:
- The Austrian case study makes a particular contribution to the involvement of tenants in design and in forming community governance groups before they move into new estates, thereby building in involvement from the start.
 - The Dutch case study addresses the involvement of tenants in the wider governance of social housing at a local authority level by empowering residents to negotiate annual performance agreements and plans with their landlords and with the local authority.
 - The English case study of the 'Community Gateway' model provides a longstanding sustained example of the benefits of involving tenants in governance at the board level while also ensuring links to opportunities for involvement at local community level.
 - The Welsh case study provides a further example of involving tenants in the design and governance of new social and affordable housing projects by establishing housing cooperatives. It shows what can be achieved in a housing system which like Northern Ireland's had no local tenant managed housing co-operatives² until five years ago.
- xi. The workshops were carefully structured to include key findings from the earlier evidence review stages of the project to bring participants up to speed with project thinking. The central focus was to enable direct discussion of the relevance of the four international models with NI tenants and experts. In the case of Preston Gateway (the English model) there was a direct dialogue with two tenant members of the governing board and the chair of the tenant forum, and in the case of the Dutch model the dialogue was with a tenant member of the Amsterdam Tenants Federation.
- xii. The workshops established that all four proposed models could potentially fill some of the gaps in existing opportunities for Northern Ireland tenants to influence housing governance. While there

¹ An Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO) for Northern Ireland was established in 2017 following consultation by Government on proposals developed in the Tenant Participation Strategy as part of Social Housing Reform. A key aim of the ITO is to ensure consistency across the Northern Ireland social housing sector and to implement the Tenant Participation Strategy. This report is relevant to the latter aim.

² While Wales has had large scale Community Mutuals, similar to Community Gateways, since the early 2000s, this new programme has focused on smaller scale locally managed cooperatives, generally with under 100 homes.

was greatest support for adapting the Community Gateway model from England, some suggestions were made on how each model could be explored further in Northern Ireland by involving tenants and other stakeholders in an incremental process of exploration and change.

- xiii. The establishment of an Independent Tenant Organisation in Northern Ireland, as an outcome of the Social Housing Reform Programme and Tenant Participation Strategy, will provide an ideal opportunity to explore these models further. This could start with fact-finding activities to establish support and interest from relevant stakeholders in Northern Ireland for elements of the four models, and in particular the Community Gateway Model which secured the greatest support at the workshops, to be adopted in Northern Ireland.

Policy Recommendations

Our recommendations for policy are addressed to four main groups of policy actors as indicated against each recommendation:

A: the NIHE

B: the Department for Communities

C: the independent boards of housing associations

D: the Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO)

1. To consider the value of involving tenants in governance and where this is appropriate:
 - to put in place arrangements to enable and encourage suitably skilled tenants to join boards and sub-committees.
 - to ensure that relevant training, induction and support is provided to tenant board and committee members.

Recommended to: B (for NIHE Board) and C (for HA Boards)
2. To use the opportunity provided by the planned programme of stock transfers to embed future tenant involvement (as evidenced by Preston Community Gateway).

Recommended to: A and B to introduce as part of the competitive procurement process; C as part of post-stock transfer governance
3. To explore opportunities for social housing tenants to be involved in discussing local area plans and agreements with social landlords on issues that pertain to their interests as part of Community Planning processes. *Recommended to: A, B and C*
4. To follow up the four international models as part of the ITO's work on the Tenant Participation Strategy Action Plan. *Recommended to: D*
5. To provide training and peer learning opportunities for tenants to explore the international models first hand. *Recommended to: D*
6. To initiate a dialogue with Department for Communities and social landlords on practical steps to take forward the aspects of the models that have tenant interest and support. *Recommended to: D*
7. To support pilot initiatives emerging from this dialogue by capacity building and information sharing with tenants and to promote this with the Department for Communities and social landlords.

Recommended to: D
8. To support practical initiatives to take forward the tenant involvement aspects of the Social Housing Reform programme. *Recommended to: B*
9. To consider ways in which significant barriers such as the common selection scheme can be overcome to allow positive pilot programmes for tenant involvement to happen.

Recommended to: B
10. To embed tenant involvement opportunities into future procurement arrangements for social and affordable housing (learning from the Welsh and Austrian models). *Recommended to: B*

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Project Brief

- 1.1.1. This project was commissioned by the Housing Executive to inform ongoing work on organisational and sector governance. The Terms of Reference were set out in NIHE's Tender documents of July 2015.
- 1.1.2. The overall aim of the research was to explore the relevance of international models and practices of tenant involvement in governance to evolving governance of social housing in Northern Ireland.
- 1.1.3. In the first part of the project we reviewed the state of the art on tenant involvement in governance in Northern Ireland (NI) through scoping interviews with stakeholders in Northern Ireland and a review of current policies. In this scoping phase we also undertook an evidence review of tenant involvement in housing governance in Great Britain (GB) and Europe and identified a typology of models which were later explored with expert input.
- 1.1.4. In the second part of the project we undertook case studies in NI to understand more about the appropriateness of different models to the housing sector in NI. Three case studies were selected after consultation with experts including Supporting Communities NI and other members of the Project Advisory Group. The case studies comprised Newry & Down Scrutiny Panel and West Belfast and Shankill Scrutiny Panel in the NIHE sub-sector and Choice HA in the housing association sector.
- 1.1.5. In this second phase we devised a template and co-produced detailed outlines of four selected models of practice from GB and Europe with experts from the countries and models involved.
- 1.1.6. In the final part of the project we consulted with NI stakeholders including tenants and residents through a series of three consultation events held in October 2016.

1.2 Methodology

- 1.2.1. We set out a draft methodology in our proposal document of July 2015. The key stages of work agreed are outlined in this Section.
- 1.2.2. At the Project Initiation Meeting, we established overall project priorities and activities and confirmed the requirements in relation to project monitoring and reporting and agreed:
 - The overall work programme, key milestones, reporting dates, and critical path as well as key deliverables and reporting dates; (set out in Project Plan section 4)
 - The key stakeholder lists and methods of consultation
 - Finalised project management and reporting arrangements
- 1.2.3. The Project Team comprised Professor David Mullins (PI) and Dr Halima Sacranie of the Housing and Communities Research Group, University of Birmingham and Mr Peter Shanks (sub-contractor).
- 1.2.4. The Project Initiation Meeting took place on 23rd October 2015. This was attended by Joe Frey, David Mullins and Peter Shanks.

1.3 Project Plan and Delivery

Stage One – Scoping Study

- 1.3.1 **Literature Review.** This stage involved conducting a literature review of tenant involvement in governance in Great Britain and Europe. Selection of sources was assisted by earlier work by Housing and Communities Group on tenant involvement in stock transfer in GB since 1988 and on tenant involvement in housing in Europe. Further relevant literature for the review was identified from databases covering academic references and practice and professional journals. Relevant literature was reviewed by the Research Team and used to develop a typology for use in the Northern Ireland work.
- 1.3.2 This stage was completed by Halima Sacranie with guidance and input from David Mullins and Peter Shanks between November 2015 and March 2016. Additions have been made to the bibliography as the project has developed. Fifty sources were identified from a wide ranging purposive literature search with 15 key sources consulted closely to develop the typology included in Chapter 4. The resulting bibliography (section 8.0) is organised by country.
- 1.3.3 **NI Stakeholder interviews.** This stage involved conducting in-depth interviews with 24 stakeholders who have a strategic interest in tenant and resident involvement in housing governance in NI. A list of key stakeholders interviewed is shown in Appendix A 1.2.
- 1.3.4 These interviews, which were completed by Peter Shanks between November 2015 and April 2016, provided a deeper understanding of the NI policy context and the relevance of the international models identified in the international literature review. They also highlighted some key issues with the operationalization of policy such as the operation of the Common Selection Scheme. Interviewees were asked to advise on selection of case studies for Stage 2 of the project in NI. A topic guide was developed and agreed with NIHE in advance of all meetings (see Appendix A 1.1). This was used flexibly to focus on the specific domain knowledge of each interviewee.
- 1.3.5 A short scoping report on these first stages of the project was produced for discussion at the first advisory group meeting which was held in March 2016.

Stage Two – Case Studies

- 1.3.6 **Northern Ireland Case Studies.** Three case studies of tenant involvement in governance in Northern Ireland were selected after completing the state of the art review (chapter 2), which included consultation with Supporting Communities, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) and experts on the Project Advisory Group.
- 1.3.7 In these case studies staff and tenants were interviewed at different levels to elicit views on current governance arrangements and future options for enhanced tenant involvement in governance. These case studies comprised a mix of organisations, including NIHE and housing associations.
- 1.3.8 Following preliminary discussions it was agreed with the Project Advisory Group that two case studies would be undertaken within NIHE and that one other would take place within one of the larger housing associations.
- 1.3.9 After discussion with the Project Manager at NIHE it was decided against a case study of an estate transferred by NIHE to a housing association.

- 1.3.10 The NI case studies were undertaken by David Mullins and Peter Shanks in summer 2016 with a follow up visit to the HA case study in February 2017.
- 1.3.11 **Four case study models of tenant involvement in governance in GB and Europe** were selected from the long list included in the typology in Chapter 4 and drawing on the 50 sources identified in the literature search. The selection aimed to represent a variety of models from different countries that seemed capable of addressing the gaps identified in the foregoing NI case studies. We worked closely with country-based experts familiar with each case to draft case study descriptions to consult with NI tenants on the option appraisal and stakeholder consultation stage. This work was coordinated by David Mullins and undertaken between June and September 2016 in preparation for the workshops in October 2016.

Stage Three – Option Appraisal and Stakeholder Consultation

- 1.3.12 In the third and final part of the project we consulted with NI tenants and residents and other stakeholders on options for future tenant and resident involvement in housing governance in Northern Ireland. This was achieved through a series of three consultation events held in October 2016 in Ballymena, Belfast and Craigavon. Invitations to these events and programme planning and delivery were facilitated by Supporting Communities and NIHE. We had envisaged that around 50 tenants and residents would attend these events, but in practice around 120 people attended the three events.
- 1.3.13 The aim was to use these events to test reactions to options developed from the Stage 1 and 2 work for the future involvement of tenants and residents in housing governance in Northern Ireland. Each workshop had a common programme, beginning with a chance to hear and comment on the research findings on the state of the art of tenant involvement in governance in Northern Ireland based on policy review, stakeholder interviews and three case studies.
- 1.3.14 A short presentation then summarised the international research process which comprised a literature review, typology and selection of models of tenant involvement in governance that appeared to fill gaps in the current options available in Northern Ireland.
- 1.3.15 The main part of each event then comprised a direct presentation of two (workshops 1 and 3) or three (workshop 2) of the four models by country experts followed by a reality check with tenants and other stakeholders.
- 1.3.16 Appendix 2 includes a sample workshop programme, and the guidance notes which were provided to all attendees together with the detailed model descriptions set out in Chapter 6 of this report.
- 1.3.17 The results of these consultation events were summarised in three individual workshop reports (included here in Appendix A.2.3) and written up in an overall summary report which was published on the project website and promoted via a blog by David Mullins in the Supporting Communities e-zine.
- 1.3.18 This stage was completed by David Mullins and Peter Shanks in October-November 2016 with excellent support from Supporting Communities and expert input on the four international models.

Reporting

1.3.19 As outlined above, each stage of the project generated separate short reports which were all placed on the project website. The website was used throughout the project to provide participants with information on progress of research:

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/social-policy/departments/social-policy-social-work/research/projects/2015/tenant-engagement-in-governance.aspx>

This information was relayed to all Housing Community Network members by providing a link to the webpage in project updates included in the Supporting Communities e-newsletter. The staged outputs were:

- NI state of the art review (April 2016)
- GB and Europe Literature Review and Typology (April 2016)
- NI Case Studies reports 1 and 2 (June 2016 and July 2016)
- Four Models (September 2016)
- Workshop Reports (November 2016)

1.3.20 This Final Draft Report was submitted to the Project Advisory Group in February 2017.

2.0 State of the Art Review in Northern Ireland

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 A wide range of overarching legislative and public policy drivers and departmental strategies exist in Northern Ireland which influence how social housing landlords engage with their tenants. This chapter, however, focuses on the Department for Social Development's (DSD) Facing the Future: The Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017, Tenant Participation Strategy 2015-2020 and Proposals for a new regulatory framework for social housing providers in Northern Ireland as well as the Housing Executive's Community Involvement Strategy 2014-2017, Community Cohesion Strategy 2015-2020, Community Safety Strategy 2014-2017 and Social Housing Enterprise Strategy 2015.
- 2.1.2 This report is also informed by interviews conducted with senior DSD³ officials, senior Housing Executive (NIHE) and housing association (HA) officials, representatives of the Housing Community Network, and senior staff members of Supporting Communities, Housing Rights, Rural Community Network and Disability Action. In total 18 interviews were conducted with 24 stakeholders between December 2015 and April 2016 (see Appendix A.1). Appendix 1.7 includes 10 discussion points from the analysis in this chapter which were used in shaping later stages of the project.

2.2 Policy and Strategic Context for Tenants in Governance

- 2.2.1 The DSD has responsibility for the policy and strategic development of tenant participation in Northern Ireland, and the NIHE has a statutory duty to consult with tenants on matters that affect tenancies. As part of the DSD's regulatory process HAs are also required to consult tenants on issues that affect tenancies, have a complaints procedure in place, and survey tenants annually. It was suggested that the current statutory duty to consult with tenants is very different from the policy shift towards tenant engagement. Some stakeholders advocated that a legal right for tenant engagement should be introduced.
- 2.2.2 'Getting the structures right' is one of the themes outlined in the DSD's housing strategy. Divided into two parts, the first considers **structural reform** proposals for the role and scope of the NIHE's landlord (e.g. housing management) and regional (e.g. assessment of housing need and housing conditions and social housing allocations) functions and departmental housing functions (e.g. regeneration). The second considers **policy reform** which to date has led to a tenant participation strategy and reform proposals for the regulation of social housing. It is set to develop further proposals around social rent policy and local government engagement. Collectively these structural and policy reforms constitute 'The Social Housing Reform Programme' (SHRP). Such reforms have been deemed necessary to take account of the challenges of public finances, to ensure tenants continue to have access to quality homes, and to take account of changing political and civic structures that have developed.
- 2.2.3 The Northern Ireland Assembly and scrutiny committees have in many respects overshadowed the role of the Northern Ireland Housing Council; a body through which the views of local government are expressed on housing issues. DSD is awaiting a decision regarding the future of the NIHE before taking forward the 'engagement with local government' stream of the SHRP.

³ At the time of the review the responsible department was the Department for Social Development (DSD). Following an administrative change in 2016 the responsible department is now the Department for Communities (DfC). In this report we use the name current at the time of the research.

- 2.2.4 The DSD published its Tenant Participation Strategy 2015-2020 and Tenant Participation Action Plan at the end of January 2016. This strategic document explores how social landlords and tenants can work together to improve housing services. It challenges all social housing landlords to be consistent and to increase the extent and effectiveness of tenant participation services in Northern Ireland. The strategy adopts most of the proposals suggested in the original consultation document. In general, social housing landlords are expected to foster greater levels of participation by developing and delivering a strategy for tenant participation; by having due regard for the DSD's tenant participation strategy; and by ensuring tenants and other service users are made aware of the mechanisms for tenant involvement and that tenants and service users are encouraged to become involved. The Department has committed, at the appropriate time, to develop proposals for tenant empowerment in Northern Ireland similar to those in other jurisdictions. This will be subject to engagement with stakeholders and further research will be required to enable the development of delivery options⁴. Consideration may be given to a legislative requirement to support empowerment to be taken forward as part of the Action Plan.
- 2.2.5 The DSD's 'Proposals for a new regulatory framework for social housing providers in Northern Ireland', published in March 2015, outlined a new set of simplified regulatory standards. The proposals outlined a new **consumer standard** which sets out three key outcomes for social housing landlords. The first outcome expects social landlords to manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it **easy to participate** in and influence their landlord's decisions **at a level they feel comfortable with**. The second requires social landlords to provide premium homes with good services and quality choices **appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants**. The third compels social housing providers to concentrate effort to **support vibrant communities in ways that encourages tenant opportunities and promotes well-being**.
- 2.2.6 Some stakeholders mentioned that landlords and landlord representatives were heavily involved in the regulatory review process and queried why so much emphasis was placed on landlords and less effort made to engage the views of the tenants and service users. It was suggested that landlords tend to be over-represented in regulatory review discussions. It was also suggested that DSD needs to be prepared to ask difficult and challenging questions of housing providers and that they need to demonstrate that the value of tenant participation is just as important as financial compliance. It was stated that non-compliance with the consumer standard could lead to a failed inspection which in turn could have ramifications for HAs when trying to secure private finance.
- 2.2.7 Some of the broader legislative (e.g. Section 75) and public policy drivers (e.g. TBUC; Racial Equality Strategy; Community Safety Strategy; Community Asset Transfer Policy Framework) also inform NIHE strategies that promote community involvement, community cohesion, community safety and community enterprise.
- 2.2.8 The NIHE's Community Involvement Strategy 2014-2017 provides a framework for the NIHE to work with tenants, residents and community associations to improve local services. Interestingly, the strategy Foreword states that: *"The broad customer base comprises anyone with a stake in neighbourhoods, including Housing Executive and private tenants, owner occupiers and leaseholders"*. HA tenants are not included, although stakeholders mentioned that some HA tenants have now started to engage with NIHE tenant involvement panels and partnerships. The strategy was under revision at the time of our review. It is therefore important that while entitled *Tenant Involvement in Governance*, this project also considers the

⁴ It is hoped that the research reported in the current study, by the University of Birmingham, has contributed towards this objective, by exploring four specific delivery models from the international arena.

wider question of resident involvement (to include leaseholders, home owners and private tenants with a stake in the neighbourhoods affected by NIHE and HA policies).

- 2.2.9 Community division and ethno-religious segregation in social housing estates prevents the best use of stock and land. According to the Life and Times Survey 80% of people aspire to live in mixed religion communities despite the high levels of religious segregation in social housing estates. The *Community Cohesion Strategy 2015-2020* published in February 2016 is set to be delivered across 5 key themes. These include: segregation/integration; race relations; communities in transition; interface areas; and flags, emblems and sectional symbols. Delivery of this strategy requires partnership working between different statutory agencies and communities to bring about change. In 2016 NIHE removed a 'peace-wall' in North Belfast following years of relationship building and talks between community leaders on both sides of the religious divide which was described as "an important moment in the NIHE's history". Moreover, NIHE has made community involvement a compulsory requirement for new shared housing developments. Some HAs employ Community Development workers as part of the TBUC agenda which dovetails the work of community cohesion and community development (see paragraph 4.26).
- 2.2.10 The Department of Justice's *Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017* promotes safer communities and preventative measures to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour (ASB). This same approach informs the NIHE's *Community Safety Strategy 2014-2017* and its successful implementation is predicated on a range of partnerships with key agencies and communities in order to prevent ASB. NIHE is also an integral partner in the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs). Along with other statutory agencies, elected representatives and voluntary sector organisations, the NIHE works with communities to address local concerns and to promote safer, peaceful communities.
- 2.2.11 In March 2015 the NIHE published a *Social Housing Enterprise Strategy 2015-2018* to complement its support for community involvement, community safety and community cohesion. The strategy for the Landlord Services division aims to support and sustain its social housing communities by financing and supporting the local social economy and through the creation of community-owned social enterprises. According to the strategy, social investment in disadvantaged communities will help to transform the lives of individuals and families through inward investment, job creation, and through improving tenants' life chances (see paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 for more on social enterprise activity). A Community Asset Transfer Strategy was also being developed by the NIHE at the time of our review.

2.3 Existing Organisations and Structures that Facilitate Tenant Involvement

- 2.3.1 NIHE staff reported that the NIHE has always prided itself on being responsive to the needs of its communities. In the early 1980s, when the NIHE was at its zenith, its primary focus was on building more houses; the real driver for tenant engagement came about as a result of building places where people didn't want to live (the new towns built after the 1968 Matthew Plan). Many people felt safer living in single identity communities. This was a major stimulus for the NIHE's move to community involvement, according to a senior NIHE official.
- 2.3.2 NIHE's community engagement was initially tentative because of the connotations of some communities being politically active and the perception that community activists could have been paramilitary activists. The development of tenant participation was a joint initiative between NITAP (now Supporting Communities) and the NIHE in the early 1980s. At this time engagement tended to be targeted at those new town areas that were experiencing difficulties (Ballymena, Antrim and Craigavon etc.). However, at this early stage there was an issue of

community capacity and it was only through the support of NITAP that NIHE was able to engage with the 40-50 community groups that existed at that time.

- 2.3.3 In the early 1990s the NIHE rethought its strategic approach to tenant engagement which was described by an NIHE official as *“getting a bit cosy”*. Engagement was used as a conduit to gauge opinion but also to gain an insight over what went on in certain areas. In the early 1990s tenant engagement was described as a mechanism for the NIHE to get across what it thought was best for the community: *“never in a million years would we have thought in the late 80s or early 90s of asking tenants for their opinion and this approach lasted right up until the first phase of devolution”*.
- 2.3.4 In the 2000s the NIHE still had over 100,000 homes and was at its pinnacle in terms of community engagement, working with 624 community groups. NITAP didn't cover all of them although they (Supporting Communities) now cover the vast majority. A new accountability for the NIHE as a public body and landlord came with the first phase of devolution. Peace funding for local communities during this period also meant that the capacity of community groups needed to improve in order to access funds.
- 2.3.5 Recently, the NIHE has started to engage in a more systematic way with tenants, taking regular advice on housing policy and practice as the organisation found itself dealing with groups that had the capacity to take on more of a role in governance. At the same time, people were starting to get involved in social enterprise activities and were empowering their estates and communities. One stakeholder stated that the publication of the DSD's Tenant Participation Strategy has made the NIHE realise that it needs to make better use of the Housing Community Network (HCN). Any policies considered by the NIHE (especially on the landlord side of the business) are consulted on with the HCN before being ratified by the board: *“from the wording of our arrears letters to the wording of our Housing Benefit communications right through to the major policy issues like the SHRP”*.
- 2.3.6 Today the NIHE has an agreement with Supporting Communities to promote and deliver community engagement through the formal HCN structure. This network effectively acts as a sounding board for NIHE policy development and for improving service delivery. It is well established and comprises 400 member groups. Residents can engage with the NIHE at Area, Regional and Central levels. The network comes under the aegis of Supporting Communities which has oversight and responsibility for its operational functions.
- 2.3.7 Supporting Communities (under various guises) has worked for almost 37 years helping to empower communities across Northern Ireland. It is an independent body which for many years worked exclusively with the NIHE to promote best practice in tenant participation and to provide information, training and advice to new and existing community groups across the religious divide. More recently Supporting Communities has expanded its remit to cover HAs and now employs a Housing Association Development Officer. The organisation is funded by the NIHE with HAs procuring services on an ad hoc basis. Supporting Communities works with approximately 400 community groups across Northern Ireland who are members of the Housing Community Network as well as representative tenant involvement panels in each of the Housing Executive Areas of housing management. It provides community development expertise, training, information and funding advice. <http://supportingcommunities.org/central-housing-forum/> (accessed February 8th 2017).
- 2.3.8 The DSD's Tenant Participation Strategy had a stated aim to establish an Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO) by June 2016. Stakeholders were generally very complimentary of the work done by Supporting Communities and the majority felt that Supporting Communities was the

logical and best placed organisation to undertake the role of the Independent Tenant Organisation. Some concerns were raised, however, about a potential conflict of interest, with funders/landlords taking positions on the board of Supporting Communities. Whilst it was considered appropriate that housing providers pay for services, queries were raised as to whether or not this should translate into board positions. However, the majority of interviewees felt that landlords should not be excluded from sitting on the board of any new ITO as ultimately the role of the organisation is to improve standards and processes which can be better achieved through the direct involvement of landlords.

- 2.3.9 One HA official felt frustrated by the lack of capacity in relation to training and support for tenant participation and had attempted to engage with TPAS. *“I would like to have seen us further along the line – I am worried that there is not a lot that we can tap into in terms of training for staff and tenants in regard to tenant participation. Supporting Communities have provided some of it but I don't think it is broad enough at this point in time. And my concern is that every HA has to comply with the DSD TP strategy – is everyone going to be targeting the same one resource which is also used by NIHE? Is there capacity within that one organisation?”* It was suggested that there was a gap in provision in relation to tenant participation training and development and that competition, competitive pricing and quality assurance were important issues from the HA perspective. Another query was raised about the future funding structure of the ITO as its remit is extended to provide more balanced coverage of the social housing sector. The majority of Supporting Communities funding has in recent years come from NIHE after the withdrawal of funding by DSD. A small but increasing share of funding comes from consultancy work for HAs. HA officials stated that in principle they would not be averse to paying an annual subscription fee towards a new ITO if it meant achieving outcomes that would bring benefits to their tenants and organisations.
- 2.3.10 Housing Rights, the leading specialist provider of independent housing advice in Northern Ireland, has developed its work on tenant participation in recent years. This work evolved after the organisation started to become more conscious of the value of involving users to shape services and inform policy. Relevant work has included commissioning research on hard to reach groups, organising joint tenant participation conferences with Supporting Communities and establishing a Private Tenants Forum. Supporting Communities is a member of Housing Rights and has the right to nominate a board member. They have been represented on the board of Housing Rights for 20+ years; the arrangement is not reciprocated. There haven't been any discussions about the two organisations becoming closer but it is recognised that there is a complementary strategic fit. Supporting Communities' services are more about the practical involvement of tenants and users in service delivery. The work of Housing Rights, on the other hand, is more about trying to promote the voice of service users in policy work across all tenures. Supporting Communities also assisted Housing Rights to develop its Private Tenants Forum. It was stated that there may be opportunities for Supporting Communities and Housing Rights to work together in a more structured way in the future.
- 2.3.11 At the time of the review there were 22 registered HAs in Northern Ireland. Seventeen operated across the region and five were community-based. Four had group structure arrangements. Unlike the NIHE's funded HCN there is no central tenant network structure for HA tenants. Tenant involvement is not consistent across the HA sector which was noted by the DSD's research and analysis briefing to the Social Development Committee on the reform of social housing (2014). This reflects the fact that HAs are independent organisations which vary in size, scale, geography and client group. As a result they have developed organisational rather than sectoral approaches to tenant participation although the DSD's Tenant Participation Strategy 2015-2020 and the new consumer regulatory standard may result in greater conformity as HAs adopt successful tenant governance models and practices already used in the sector. It was also

noted that some HAs have already started to engage with the NIHE Housing Community Network and Interagency Partnerships. It was suggested that for some HAs in the sector, tenant involvement was being driven by the DSD whereas others had strong histories of involving tenants within their own organisations, sometimes reflecting the importance of community engagement in their early histories.

- 2.3.12 One common suggestion was that HAs could tap into the existing NIHE HCN infrastructure. It was also suggested that the larger scale of some HAs militated against tenant engagement in their governance. Meanwhile some smaller HAs found it difficult to resource tenant involvement and wider community investment initiatives. Another suggested alternative was for HAs to develop their own community involvement infrastructure in a collective way across the sector or in particular geographical localities. *“Some are so small, some are so geographically dispersed, how would you facilitate all of that capacity building?”* Spatial scale and accountability is a theme that we return to in our international evidence review (Chapter 3) where we review examples of large organisations attempting to bridge involvement at corporate and local neighbourhood scales and tri-partite accountability arrangements between municipalities, housing providers and residents and city or district levels.
- 2.3.13 HA staff agreed that it was increasingly challenging to establish tenants’ forums in general needs housing estates. Some have taken the decision to engage with existing residents’ associations rather than attempt to create new ones. Others remain committed to establishing local structures, with one HA official stating: *“we are not a geographically based organisation but people are inherently interested in geography; what is more useful is local democratic structures than regional democratic structures. There needs to be a focus on tenants associations in local areas.”* One HA was advised by Supporting Communities that constituting new community groups might not be the best approach. Another HA conducted a mapping exercise to ascertain the scope and nature of tenant involvement across all of its stock/estates. Where tenant representatives or tenant groups did not exist the HA has sought to engage with existing groups to bring benefits to the community.

2.4 Existing Tenant Involvement Infrastructure in Northern Ireland

- 2.4.1 The Review of Public Administration has had a number of impacts for the NIHE’s community involvement infrastructure. As the eleven new super councils have assumed responsibility for community planning, the NIHE has had to amend its own internal structures (see 2.4.2-2.4.16) and its community involvement infrastructure has had to be restructured to be coterminous with the new super councils (see 2.4.17-2.4.32).

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- 2.4.2 The NIHE has undergone reorganisation to take account of structural change to councils and to meet some of the expectations outlined in the SHRP. An internal NIHE programme labelled *‘Journey to Excellence’* has been introduced to implement a consistent approach to business, customer and people excellence. This is supported by four strategies: Business Excellence; Customer Service; People; and Technology. The first main change of this reorganisation occurred in April 2014 when there was internal separation of the regional housing services body and the landlord body with both now having separate business plans. Management directorates were revised to facilitate this separation and a new directorate of Business Transformation was developed to oversee business change. Secondly, there has been a rationalisation of the management structures within the local office network which now comprises thirteen Areas and three Regions.

- 2.4.3 As part of this rationalisation the NIHE revised its tenant involvement infrastructure from 32 Districts and 5 Areas to 13 Area Scrutiny Panels and 3 Regions. These new structures have been in place for almost three years.
- 2.4.4 Stakeholders raised concerns about the replacement of the 32 District HCNs with 13 Area Scrutiny Panels (although some District HCNs continue to meet: see west Belfast/Shankill case study). The replacement panels cover a wider geographical area and have gaps in terms of local representation. Stakeholders suggested that the role of the District HCNs was to examine local housing and community issues whereas Area Scrutiny Panels have a different remit and focus on scrutinising service delivery. Concerns were raised that links to grassroots community groups and capacitated individuals were being lost, resulting in fewer opportunities for tenants to raise issues related to their local community. There was also a concern that the removal of the District HCNs may put at risk some of the positive work done on community cohesion if community groups dissipate.
- 2.4.5 NIHE officials stated that NIHE Area Managers still meet with the groups but were considering whether the switch to 13 Area Scrutiny Panels was geographically too large. Some Area Scrutiny Panels have found it difficult to cover issues in meetings where they have conjoined to include communities with very different sets of issues (e.g. Mid-Ulster). Concerns were also expressed about the loss of peer learning within groups, and loss of visibility and local presence. However, in other areas (e.g. west Belfast/Shankill) the formation of Area Scrutiny Panels was said to have benefitted communities in terms of building community relations. Also, community development has strengthened as a result of the shared learning, knowledge and expertise across the community divide.
- 2.4.6 Some District HCN representatives (under the old structure) would have had connections with other local community groups. It was stated that when District HCN representatives met to discuss issues under the old structure they were often able to successfully coordinate responses and find solutions to issues. However some felt that the removal of the District tier now prevents this. The District HCN was also a mechanism for channelling information up and cascading information down through the tenant involvement structures. This mechanism has been weakened at the District level. However, some District HCNs have continued to meet as they have seen the benefits that can be achieved through local activism and engagement. This raises important questions of how much of the impetus for resident involvement in governance should come from the bottom up rather than the top down and how important it is to allow for difference rather than attempting to establish a neat and consistent yet unresponsive structure.
- 2.4.7 Area Scrutiny Panels now include residents who are leaseholders and owner-occupiers. Whilst stakeholders weren't averse to resident engagement, it was felt by some that the resident representation and the scrutiny remit combined to dilute the local focus of the previous District HCN structure. As a result some NIHE tenants have tried to use the Area Scrutiny Panels as a forum to raise local issues. Some had issues with owner-occupier members of the Area Scrutiny Panels scrutinising NIHE services whereas others didn't perceive it to be an issue and welcomed it. One point of consideration is the fact that leaseholders are clearly affected by some of the broader decisions of free-holders and it was suggested there needs to be accountability for these decisions.
- 2.4.8 The thirteen Area Scrutiny Panels feed into three Regions (Belfast, North and South). It emerged that two of these regions (North and South) have not held regular meetings but had provided some opportunities for tenants and residents to be involved through Interagency Partnerships. It was also stated that the Belfast Region was successful due to the relatively contained geography and the strength of the NIHE administrative structure; the other two Regions cover a

vast geographical expanse in comparison. Although the North and South Regions did not meet, stakeholders supported the need for flexibility (which would enable them to meet if they felt the need to do so).

- 2.4.9 The HCN's Central Forum sits at the apex of the NIHE's community involvement infrastructure and meets once a month. One representative nominated from each of the thirteen Areas plus one from each of the four 'hard-to-reach' fora (see 4.12) make up the Central Forum. The Central Forum is consulted on all NIHE policy and major procedural changes; some members also sit on NIHE procurement panels. It meets with the NIHE board biannually. Recently the Central Forum has developed a lobbying role and produced a manifesto for social housing. It will meet with the Northern Ireland Housing Council, political party housing spokespersons, the Social Development Committee and the Housing Minister to lobby for changes to housing policy. This recent evolution from tenant involvement to political lobbying was initiated through discussions with the NIHE Board. One stakeholder felt that formal recruitment practices are needed for the Central Forum and that members should be appraised.
- 2.4.10 In our interviews we were advised that *'The NIHE previously had a tenant on its board in the early 1980s when the NIO Minister appointed nominees. No tenants are currently members of the NIHE board due to current legislation which means tenants' interests are deemed to be represented through political representatives.'* Notwithstanding this, stakeholders thought some Central Forum members would be *"more than capable"* to serve as board members; some also felt that there would be *"huge appetite"* among Central Forum members to join the board. Prior to this project it remained unclear, however, whether or not tenants would prefer the opportunity to take up independent board positions or whether they would prefer to challenge in a representative capacity from outwith the board. The workshops reported in Chapter 6 and Appendix A.2.3 show that there is now clear support for suitably skilled tenants to join their main boards. However, this would require a change to the NIHE Board appointment process which is a matter for the Department for Communities and ultimately for the Minister.
- 2.4.11 A Community Conference organised by the Central Forum also takes place each year to celebrate community success and to share good practice among community groups. It is the second biggest event of the NIHE calendar and is attended by approximately 250 delegates including tenants, residents, community stakeholders and housing professionals. The 2016 theme was 'Inspiring Leadership' and the conference involved hard-to-reach groups.
- 2.4.12 The NIHE proactively engages with hard-to-reach groups through NIHE funded fora. These include a Disability Forum; Youth Forum; Rural Residents Forum and a Black Minority Ethnic Forum. NIHE also engages with Travellers Groups and it facilitates a Consultative Forum which evaluates the impact of organisational policies from an equality perspective. There was recognition that conventional governance structures don't work for everybody and that social housing providers need to be more proactive in seeking innovative ways to encourage involvement from groups that have traditionally been less likely to get involved in decision-making. This requires commitment and resources to deliver.
- 2.4.13 Interagency Partnerships comprising community representatives, other landlords, statutory agencies, and voluntary and community sector organisations also form part of the NIHE community involvement infrastructure. Each NIHE Area develops bespoke Interagency Partnerships to reflect community development requirements. Annual business plans for the Areas also reflect the desired outcomes for residents and Interagency Partnerships. Interagency Partnerships have been successful in regenerating derelict and run down areas and have been instrumental in promoting community cohesion and community safety initiatives.

- 2.4.14 NIHE Task Teams (of tenants and residents) are sometimes used to examine matters for consultation and change. These are ad hoc task and finish group-type structures which have a limited life and usually focus on one particular theme. NIHE Task Teams may include specialist input where required. The NIHE convenes these working groups from its database of interested tenants (which includes tenants who do not form part of the HCN but who are willing to be involved in ad hoc consultation). It was stated that not everyone wants to be part of a community group but some tenants are happy to engage on single issues. At the time of our review a marketing strategy was being developed by the NIHE to promote tenant involvement; some thought that the current database of interested tenants was not being used to its full potential.
- 2.4.15 In total the NIHE (Landlord Services) invests over £4m per year in community involvement activity. NIHE also provides over 300 community centre lettings within its estates at nil charge, the equivalent of over £1million in rental income per year. These buildings offer a base for communities to meet and participate in training and development; the community lettings also enable the provision of a range of services including affordable childcare and after school homework clubs. This encourages community involvement at the local level. These lettings are also important as having an address is often a precondition for community groups to attract external grant funding.
- 2.4.16 A strategic review of resident involvement was conducted by the NIHE from January 2013 to June 2013 prior to the publication of *its Community Involvement Strategy 2014-2017*. A SWOT analysis identified a series of weaknesses including: uncertainty of the NIHE's own role and the role of other service providers in delivering community expectations; participation structures not being coterminous with NIHE administrative structures; community funding spend not being proportionately spread across all areas; NIHE staff being unclear as to whether they should only be looking after the interests of their own tenants or also that of other residents such as private tenants, HA tenants and owner occupiers; NIHE having limited tenant representation throughout the HCN; NIHE tenants having limited representation on the NIHE Board, tenants paying for community participation from their rents even though others may benefit; and lack of equitable representation for all geographical areas in the HCN. At the end of the current research project it was confirmed that a refreshed NIHE Community Involvement Strategy will commit the NIHE to continued involvement of tenants in governance by:
- Twice yearly meetings between the Central Housing Forum and NIHE Board
 - Bi-annual meetings between the Central Housing Forum and NIHE CEO and Directors
 - Annual review of these arrangements across the life of the strategy.

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- 2.4.17 Housing association staff considered all tenant contact to be a good opportunity for promoting engagement. It was suggested by some that smaller HAs located within communities have greater levels of interaction. It was also suggested that more personable relationships between tenants and staff creates greater pressure for HAs to be fully accountable and transparent in how they do business. In smaller community based HAs it was suggested that tenants have easier access to senior management. However, this becomes difficult to sustain once organisations reach a certain size. Board members of smaller HAs tend to come from the local community; it was suggested that this enhances accountability as tenant dissatisfaction can easily find its way to board members living in the local community.
- 2.4.18 Some HAs have established panels to engage with tenants on certain issues (e.g. gardening panels; repairs panels etc.). These panels are often akin to the NIHE customer scrutiny panels. HAs also regularly facilitate pre-tenancy classes in new build developments. All tenants come

together and meet the local housing officer and key agencies and it is seen as the first stepping-stone to creating a new community. Established community groups that already have a presence in the area are also invited. HA respondents made reference to the importance of pre-tenancy sign-ups as a means of tenant engagement. Pre-tenancy sign-up meetings help new residents to integrate into the community as quickly as possible: *“we do not want to have separate communities so local community/residents groups, local service providers, police, the council, ourselves, local credit unions and others come to our pre-tenancy events”*.

- 2.4.19 At pre-tenancy meetings different stakeholder groups make presentations on the services they offer to new tenants and on what support is available to them. HA staff also use pre-tenancy meetings to discuss community involvement with their tenants and encourage them to get involved: *“you will normally find they are enthusiastic at sign-up stage. But sometimes our challenge comes from engaging those other agencies in trying to get the facilities in place that the community needs. I am hoping that with the new Department of Communities they will maybe have a more holistic approach to looking at that”*.
- 2.4.20 Stakeholders reported that tenant engagement on a scheme basis (e.g. sheltered, shared future schemes, or a particular patch on a single issue) tends to work well. Some HAs have engaged with Supporting Communities to help create a menu of options for tenants to enable them to have active input into key organisational decisions that affect them. One interviewee suggested that there is a cultural tendency in the sector to equate tenant participation with the need to create a tenants forum when it is actually about providing options so that HAs can engage with tenants on their terms. *“If we are asking someone to assist us then we have to ask them to assist us in the way that is most appropriate for them.”*
- 2.4.21 One HA was exploring new approaches to tenant involvement including estate ‘walk-about’s’. Areas that score low in tenant satisfaction surveys are identified and targeted by a Customer Service Group. Community Cohesion Officers engage with tenants and inform them that directors, managers, and/or officers will be visiting the area to hear their views. This was matched with a budget that enabled some of the issues to be addressed following an action plan. *“There is an element of balance with this but you can’t ignore where there is discontent because we want to have satisfied tenants but also we have to justify equity in provision of services. There is a balance to be achieved”*.
- 2.4.22 Many HAs operate in areas where there is mixed tenure and where there are other HA and NIHE properties. Therefore quite often social capital is well developed, with HAs able to feed into various existing constituted community and residents groups. Some respondents stated that they were actively seeking residents groups as a vehicle to engage with local communities. However one HA official stated: *“where we have to be careful is that sometimes the residents group does not necessarily represent the views of tenants. We cannot say we don’t need a tenant because we are already speaking to a community group that is representing a wider area. There are specific issues that you need to drill down and engage with your tenants on. The concept we have is that we don’t talk about tenants or residents; we talk about communities. Although for the most part the issues affect everyone in the community”*.
- 2.4.23 One key challenge in relation to large new build developments according to one HA official is the need to develop social capital and bridge relationships and activities with surrounding areas. *“I think there are issues with the way social housing is built in Northern Ireland. We do the consultation around housing need and we say there are so many people on the waiting list but there is no consultation or linking back into the public services in a local area and how stretched those services are. Community planning should resolve this – but no one from the councils have approached us in relation to this”*.

- 2.4.24 For example: one particular scheme was allocated to people with high levels of need from across west Belfast but with no previous links to the local area (e.g. households in receipt of intimidation points; households with difficult personal circumstances; children with special needs). Investment in social capital can be critical for new build schemes in order to provide community support, particularly for estates that don't benefit from the levels of social capital that has been developed over generations in other established NIHE or HA estates. It was stated that low levels of social capital and poor skills attainment compound the difficulties in trying to encourage tenant involvement in governance.
- 2.4.25 Much of the discussion on tenant involvement centres around housing policies and service provision. Although consultation is required as part of the development programme, less attention is given to tenant involvement in the design and development stages of new schemes. Interviewees highlighted that for the most part tenants have no active involvement in the design of the new homes or infrastructure in their local communities. This was different, however, for one of the smaller community based housing associations: *"the developers were under no illusions after the first meeting that they could not just propose a development and move on site. The community wanted to be involved and that was a complete cultural sea change for the design team. I think they have greatly benefited from it. They have definitely ended up with a better scheme – an award-winning scheme - because of it. That is the benefit of doing things in concert with your residents, local community and other stakeholders"*. Another HA respondent talked about conducting surveys 12 months after tenants move into new developments. The feedback is then used to help inform future design. It was also stated that most of the negative publicity against housing associations pertains to new build development.
- 2.4.26 Shared Future schemes are promoted as such before the development begins. One HA has recently developed a specific charter for its shared future developments. An academic worked with the local community and political representatives to develop a charter focused on positive ethos and living together. Tenants are asked to sign up to the charter when they move into the scheme; if they refuse then the scheme cannot be designated as a shared future neighbourhood. This is one area where the NIHE and HAs work closely. *"In delivering the Together: Building a United Community (TBUC) strategy we have worked with NIHE social cohesion unit for a number of years now. Before that we had worked on other shared future schemes. It is a difficult concept to explain to the public because they think we are doing social engineering by implementing quotas. It is peace-building work and it is good relations work. Paramilitaries deal in territory; integrated education doesn't really unsettle territory. Cross community peace programmes don't unsettle territory. What we are doing in shared future housing is creating shared territory and challenging the assumptions that exist around territory"*.
- 2.4.27 Half of HAs had tenant board members. Queries were raised about the contributions made by tenants to boards and there was a sense that in many cases it amounted to tokenism. *"It is not just about getting them around the table, but it is about what they are engaging in when they get round the table"*. It was also noted how much current tenant board members mirror housing professionals. *"Why is that? Are they the type of people who are drawn to become involved or are they the people facilitated to become involved by the current structures? How is this adding to discussions or decision-making? Also what value is gained from tenants sitting around board tables talking about operational issues? Do tenants come on and think they are only expected to contribute in the area? Do they think their mandate and authority is strictly confined to tenant issues?"* These are issues that concern diversity, recruitment, clarity of roles and responsibility, and capacity building. The DSD Tenant Participation Strategy gives an undertaking to develop guidance in respect of tenant directorships but did not make any stipulation in relation to HAs requiring tenant board membership.

- 2.4.28 There was some confusion over the role of tenant directorships. *“Some think the point for tenant/community voices on boards is to represent the views of tenants/communities. It is not. They are directors of the company and they have got to act in the interests of the organisation at the board meeting. They are there because they should be an expert in a particular field and to give a view on how something is going to affect our service users”*. One HA official questioned if current governance practices were conducive to facilitating tenant board membership: *“we are struggling with the code of governance and how we can make it work because under the code all board members including tenants serve for 3-year periods. We pondered: is three years too much of a commitment for a tenant? If so, could they come on annually and maybe rotate if they felt it was too much for them?”*
- 2.4.29 Some stakeholders considered local knowledge/tenant experience to be just as valuable and important as the range of other skills around the board table. *“We have got ourselves into the mindset that tenants don’t have the capacity to participate – of course they do”*. One respondent reported that tenants can find sitting on boards *“really daunting”* and referred to the different skills required for tenant representative and company director roles. Some thought tenants were better placed on sub-committees of the board (particularly the housing committee) as opposed to the main board. ‘Professionalised’ tenants was another theme that emerged during discussions on tenant directorships. Some interviewees strongly believed that ‘professionalised’ tenants should be used to capacitate other board members: *“who would want to challenge their position? But if they weren’t on the board they could be used to help capacitate others to develop skills”*.
- 2.4.30 One approach mentioned for engaging hard-to-reach groups was family support hubs which have been established as part of the new super councils’ family support strategies. Support services are in attendance at these group meetings and it was suggested that they offer networking opportunities for HAs to meet with groups that can assist them to make contact with hard-to-reach tenants/service users. One HA official stated that the organisation’s money advisers often make referrals to these hubs.
- 2.4.31 Some HAs are particularly adept at engaging with supported housing tenants. A number of HAs felt this is where they have had most success in terms of improvements to tenants’ lives, securing access to external funding sources, and delivering benefits to the organisation. Some HAs have different focus groups within their tenant involvement infrastructure for engaging with tenants with learning disabilities, mental health issues and older people. One respondent stated that the difficulties in engaging with hard-to-reach groups did not suggest a lack of engagement or willingness on the tenants’ part but rather engagement with hard-to-reach groups depends on having a structured approach in place for engagement and having a staff member with the right skills to engage with these groups. *“It is about getting out there, taking the time, engaging and listening to them, trying to meet what their expectations are and if they believe that you are meeting their expectations, they will be willing to engage. So it is about trying to find out what their interests are and coming back to that”*.
- 2.4.32 It was also suggested that advocacy groups can be effective for engaging with hard-to-reach groups. Some HA officials mentioned that they worked with Traveller, BME and Rural support groups and that more can be achieved through partnership approaches than by working alone. However, it was suggested that not all hard-to-reach groups want to engage: *“it was made quite clear that they don’t want us becoming involved in anything outside of the landlord role (e.g. integration into the community, local schools etc.). They want us to fix repairs and we try to facilitate Traveller support groups to support them”*.

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- 2.4.33 Succession planning and engaging with younger people were two common themes that emerged during discussions with NIHE and HA officials. Tenant forums are traditionally composed of people aged 40+. Officials from both the NIHE and HAs reported on how they have embraced technology to extend their reach to tenants including use of social media, interactive websites and text messaging although some housing providers were more advanced at using these approaches than others. Translation services are also widely available.
- 2.4.34 Some stakeholders favoured the establishment of Housing Provider Forums that could be used to encompass NIHE and HA landlords and possibly private landlords, perhaps on a sub-regional basis. The reform of local government could provide opportunities for developing cross-tenure housing consultation mechanisms at that spatial scale. A number of such forums exist already. They were also suggested as a possible means of providing wider public accountability. In one example, a representative from each of the local housing providers meets regularly with local politicians and community representatives: *“we are very committed to it and attend every meeting and would always have a manager present. But I have heard comments from my staff saying some HAs don’t attend or send staff who can’t take decisions or make commitments. If you are running an effective business you need to be out there and hearing what the issues are. It is vitally important and that builds relationships with elected representatives”*.
- 2.4.35 Others made reference to the importance of building trust with partners through multi-agency partnerships/landlord forums: *“we sit on multi-agency forums and the criticism that is levelled is often around the levels of participation by other HAs. The NIHE is always there. We are always there. Others are always there. But many aren’t. That is part of the problem. One of the other issues is that HAs go to those forums when they have a problem. It doesn’t necessarily work like that when you attend and say we have a problem can you help us solve it and then not attend again. You have to invest to build trust. Sometimes you could attend these meetings for weeks and there might not be any issues that affect your housing association but it is important to be there to build trust”*.
- 2.4.36 The question often arose during discussions about the possibility of HAs connecting and linking into the NIHE community infrastructure where HAs experience difficulties in creating their own for general needs housing. The feedback on this was mixed. Some HA officials believed there to be merit in this whereas others felt it was better to have their own approach. One respondent stated: *“we would be willing to tie in with the NIHE network. A lot of the time we have large developments but also a lot of the time we have small in-fill developments with maybe only a half dozen houses. We also have ESPs [existing satisfactory purchases: existing dwellings purchased on the open market in areas of high need where the opportunity to develop is very limited.] scattered throughout NIHE estates or private developments and you may only have two or three people amongst all the others. We moved from calling our approach ‘tenant participation’ to ‘community involvement’*. A number of HAs have been working with Supporting Communities to develop their tenant/community involvement infrastructure.

2.5 From Tenant Involvement to Tenant Empowerment

- 2.5.1 Although some stakeholders agreed in theory and in principle with tenant empowerment, a number of reservations were noted. Firstly, there are often tensions between the needs and preferences of those who are tenants and those who aspire to be tenants leading to agency concerns around self-interest. Second, the type of tenant who becomes involved can often mirror housing professionals (see 4.29) to the detriment of the less articulate, less skilled service user. This further reinforces the exclusion of others, particularly if tenants are drawn from one

particular cohort. Whilst stakeholders thought that there was merit in considering tenant empowerment as part of a longer-term agenda, the majority felt the time is not right.

- 2.5.2 Concerns about the relationship between some community groups and paramilitarism were raised: *“there is a risk with empowerment because you could have healthy revenue streams which the paramilitary organisations could exploit. I can’t see tenant empowerment happening in the lifetime of the DSD’s current strategy. We need to embed tenant participation, establish the ITO, and build capacity before we would even think about it”*. It was stated that some community groups are affiliated with political groups/parties: *“in my experience of working with these groups I can’t see a lot of ulterior motives – they are doing it because they believe it is the right thing to do and it benefits the community. I have been involved in consultation processes with community groups along with other statutory organisations. And that is as democratic a process as you are going to get”*.
- 2.5.3 Devolving power to tenants to manage their own homes has never been tried before in Northern Ireland. Although some groups may have the capacity to do this, it was felt that social enterprise offered the best opportunity for tenant empowerment. As one interviewee put it: *“I would still have the fear that we haven’t – where our assets are located - come far enough to a point where I would be confident that those assets would be used to support the local community in a way that would not be corrupted. If we had the likelihood of miscarriages of allocations or nepotism in relation to allocations it would hold this country back decades and I think that is from a business point a bridge too far”*.
- 2.5.4 The NIHE has worked in conjunction with the HCN and local communities to promote social economy projects and job creation through the development of social enterprises. An NIHE Community Grants Scheme is also in operation across Northern Ireland which provides funding (up to a maximum of £5,000) to assist with the promotion of volunteering, inter-agency working, and social enterprise activity. Community Service Agreements are also used by the NIHE to promote community enterprise activity and job creation. Some services are delivered by community groups on behalf of the NIHE for agreed fees as part of these agreements. This currently covers four services and includes inspections of void properties, inspection and cleaning of low rise flats, post scheme satisfaction surveys and leaving out/returning Euro-bins from flats.
- 2.5.5 There is profound, deep-rooted social and economic deprivation in many social housing estates across Northern Ireland, with unemployment levels approaching 80% and one in two households receiving Disability Living Allowance. Although social enterprises can develop in any area they are likely to have more impact in social housing communities where greater levels of social and economic disadvantage exist. **While these measures might be seen as beyond the remit of tenant involvement in governance, in terms of impact they may be some of the most effective ways of transferring power to residents and are therefore considered to be of importance for this study.**
- 2.5.6 Both NIHE and HA officials believed social enterprise activity to be a more laudable feature of tenant empowerment than handing over control of housing stock. Some respondents stated that HAs should be directing more attention towards community social enterprise activity: *“In essence we already are social enterprises. It depends on how you do it and what route you go down. We could maybe assist our own community organisations to become involved in community enterprise projects. It may not be that HAs are the overriding social enterprise governing body but certainly we could be involved in assisting organisations to establish themselves”*.

- 2.5.7 Numerous HAs are also involved in employability initiatives. One HA works in conjunction with a city council to provide paid work placements. Another partnership initiative with Sainsbury's store assists single parents back into work. Enhancing financial literacy was also regarded as tenant empowerment: *"we are involved in oil buying clubs and we have funding from Comic Relief for a three-year Financial Inclusion Officer post. In the first period he had got £187,000 of back-dated benefits so every new tenant gets a full benefits review to ensure their benefit entitlement is maximized. Sometimes we can be insular and think of TP as being about influencing decisions just about the policies that impact on them e.g. setting rent, service charges, ASB. That is all good but some of the better stuff is about how communities live, what goes on in our tenants' communities, building community spirit, and trying to get funding for those communities that we wouldn't be able to do on our own. This is a massive part of our work in trying to build sustainable communities"*.
- 2.5.8 Other tenant empowerment initiatives include apprenticeships and local employment opportunities through social clauses within procurement arrangements. One HA provides construction training and skills development to long-term unemployed women in partnership with Women's Tec: *"seventy per cent of our general needs tenancies are female headed single parent households. And particularly with our new builds we have young mums. They need significant support to enter or re-enter the workplace. Women's Tec is a perfect partner for us in that sense. Completion of one course improves self-esteem and confidence and empowers people to do other courses. The benefits to our HA are multiple and diverse"*.
- 2.5.9 It was suggested that one of the reasons NIHE tenants are resistant to the idea of stock transfer is because tenant involvement infrastructure is not as well developed in the HA sector and there is a fear that they could lose the influence that they currently have as NIHE tenants. However, one stakeholder noted a shift in tenant attitudes towards stock transfer after a joint NIHE-Supporting Communities exercise clarified the similarity of rights between NIHE and HA tenants and in the landlord services provided. There appears to be a preconceived idea and belief prevalent in the minds of NIHE tenants that HAs don't provide the same standard of service as the NIHE. This concern is perhaps amplified by historic differences in rents between the two sectors: *"stock transfer should not be a Hobson's choice. In other words if you want your repairs done you have to sign up to a particular landlord. That shouldn't be the vehicle. HAs should be confident in saying 'this is what we do, here is the service we provide, this is our track record - do you want to become a tenant?'"*.

2.6 Overcoming Barriers to Involvement and Succession Planning

- 2.6.1 There was a concern expressed that many tenants have been in position for too long: *"I don't think we are good at succession planning for our own staff let alone our tenants. It is one of those things often talked about but has anyone ever seen it having been done very well? If you can't get people to engage to begin with then how do you succession plan?"*
- 2.6.2 Most tenants tend to become involved because of a single issue (e.g. repairs) they have experienced and would like to see resolved and most tend to disengage once this issue has been resolved. Some, however, remain involved because they see the value of it but many never get involved at all. Some stakeholders suggested an exercise was needed to establish the reasons why tenants don't engage and if alternative methods might help. It was noted that the NIHE has approximately 6,000 new tenancies per year of which around 1,500 are new tenants/households. *"Do we do enough to try and capture those people in terms of tenant involvement? Probably not."* The evidence review in Chapter 3 highlights examples of ways in which resident involvement in governance can be fostered at the time of moving into properties, particularly in new build schemes.

- 2.6.3 Stakeholders agreed on the need for greater use of technology to promote tenant engagement (e.g. having interactive sections within websites; blogs; webinars; feedback sessions). It was suggested that technology could be a way to gain perspectives from those who don't normally engage. Whilst some HAs use technology effectively others did not have access to the same level of resources or expertise. *"We have a significant systems upgrade on-going at the moment. We are moving towards mobile working and our housing officers having iPads. Our priority in terms of technology is getting our housing officers and maintenance officers out and about"*.
- 2.6.4 Another HA official talked about how they were encouraging tenants to inform the agenda for forum meetings: *"we send out an agenda to tenants two weeks after the previous meeting as a blank agenda in an envelope for them to put things on. You need to create a situation whereby people have the scope and ability to put things on the agenda"*.
- 2.6.5 Various barriers to tenant involvement were recognised. It was reported that some tenants remain fearful of tenant involvement, as they believe it could impact negatively on the service they receive. Some are also fearful of how they would be perceived by the wider community. A lack of confidence can prevent people from getting involved as can financial constraints (tenants need to be reimbursed for expenses incurred). Therefore, stakeholders stated that it is important not to assume that tenants don't want to get involved due to apathy. It was also suggested that landlords need to understand the benefits of informal tenant engagement rather than exclusively promoting involvement through formal structures, and that progression to formal structures could occur once confidence has been developed (see section 2.7.6). It was also suggested that the sixth week tenancy visits could be used more fruitfully to encourage tenant engagement and to target young people.
- 2.6.6 Supported housing tenants present different challenges in terms of tenant engagement. Engagement of supported housing residents is expected not only as part of the DSD's new Housing Strategy but also as part of RQIA assessments. Triangle HA provides an exemplar for engagement. It has established 'Choice Checkers' to train individuals with learning disabilities. The project is designed to enable service users to express what they feel is important and to help them evaluate the support they receive. Capacity building for this client group has taken many years. Tenants have made valuable contributions through board sub-committees, they have engaged in discussions about the Bamford Review, undertaken accredited training, organised their own conferences, and produced all the easy to read documentation for the organisation. Promoting tenant involvement for supported tenants in a way that is not tokenistic but provides meaningful engagement is a key challenge for this client group across the sector. A key difficulty cited for this client group concerned board membership because of the legal duties involved. Stakeholders stated that there needs to be a realisation of the support systems and costs associated with engaging with this client group.
- 2.6.7 Those aged between 25 and 40 were underrepresented in tenant involvement structures. It was stated that the perspectives of 16-25 year olds were being heard but not those aged 25-40s. *"We need to focus on that age range. Are they aware of the current structures being offered?"* It was suggested that the register of interested tenants could be used to identify people in this age range. In terms of succession planning and attracting new tenants more generally, queries were raised about the mechanisms needed to ensure representatives are quality proofed and take into account the views of those who need housing. Some favoured more formal recruitment and appraisal practices to address poor attendance and poor performance. There have also been discussions about the Youth Forum constituting a shadow Housing Forum to assist with succession planning; and at the time of our review two young people were expected

to join the Central Housing Forum <http://supportingcommunities.org/central-housing-forum/?rq=young%20people>. (Accessed Feb 8th 2017). Other challenges to tenant involvement were identified including child minding and geography (i.e. travelling distance).

- 2.6.8 One HA was focused on improving its service offering in order to offer more to tenants through having an enhanced scale (e.g. tenancy sustainment, community investment, shared ownership, IT investment etc.). *“In my 30 years’ experience working in housing, people tend to get involved if they are unhappy with something. Or if we are doing major works on a scheme – that is when you will get people together. We have to sell to them the benefits of becoming involved and that they can influence decisions. We need to change the narrative and sell the benefits”.*

2.7 Training and Development

- 2.7.1 Training, development and capacity building has been delivered by Supporting Communities to NIHE tenants for many years to assist community representatives to engage effectively with their social landlord. The training offer has recently been extended to HAs. HAs are also working with Supporting Communities to deliver a number of training courses and projects on digital engagement.

- 2.7.2 NIHE has been promoting digital inclusion throughout its communities. There is a correlation between those who are socially excluded and those who are digitally excluded in the tenant population. Digital inclusion, training and development and social economy projects can offer opportunities for tenants to improve their standard of living and to address levels of worklessness and unemployment within social housing. Free digital inclusion training has been offered by Supporting Communities <http://supportingcommunities.org/search?q=digital%20inclusion> (accessed Feb 8th 2017). Meanwhile digital inclusion plays a key role in the NIHE Community Involvement Strategy to promote community development and to address issues of social isolation.

- 2.7.3 Quite often, tenant participation is viewed as a housing management issue. Some stakeholders therefore advocated tenant participation training to include board and staff. Some thought that unless all members are trained (not just housing management staff), then organisational tenant participation strategies (as required by the DSD TP strategy) could be undermined. It was stated that to date only one social landlord has had tenant participation training delivered to both board and staff. *“We hope to train all departments now. We are saying to all the other departments you have a role....There is also a role for property services, development and finance. We have also had discussions with DSD in relation to the consumer standard and what we will use as an evidence base. There is further information that we need to start gathering and that is why we are working with the other departments”.*

- 2.7.4 External to housing associations, community capacity building, team-working, meeting effectively, managing funds, project management, dealing with media, and lobbying are all popular training programmes for community groups. A flexible approach to training was considered essential, as was the delivery format, i.e. delivering training in the communities as opposed to tenants having to travel. Accredited training was considered important as was bespoke training which caters for the needs of individual community groups. Supporting Communities has developed a two-day training programme for Area Scrutiny Panels on how to scrutinise services. Concerns were also raised about attendance at training and about the importance of getting the right people involved from the beginning.

- 2.7.5 According to Disability Action, mental health and learning disabilities are harder to deal with. They advocated for resources to be put aside for training which moved from focusing on

disability awareness training to disability equality training and delivered by someone who has a disability.

- 2.7.6 One respondent mentioned the need to provide training that supports individual needs and stressed that not everyone will require all the training on offer. Training and mentoring for tenant directorships was also considered important. *“I think the key thing here is ensuring that the tenant voice is articulated during board discussions – the way we want to move forward with that is developing the tenant voice and creating a medium for tenants to feed into – potentially through a committee as opposed to having a tick box of having a tenant on the board. You can get a more meaningful tenant voice through supporting tenants as a group to create a voice rather than having an individual tenant who is on the board”*. Another respondent disagreed, making reference to the importance of training and capacity building: *“I think having a tenant at the board is really important because some of those decisions that are made around that table impact on our tenants and residents and I think it is important that they are there as part of this process but it is a real challenge in relation to training, capacity and skills building. This is essential – previously sheltered tenants sat on the board and it was a massive leap from dealing with issues in their own scheme to joining the board. It was about developing their confidence, capacity and skills. They shouldn’t sit on the board in order to tick boxes – and we must ensure the regulation approach to TP is not prescriptive in this regard”*.

2.8 Assessment and Evaluation

- 2.8.1 The Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS) assesses the attitudes of NIHE tenants in relation to service delivery and satisfaction. From this survey service delivery improvements are identified and addressed.
- 2.8.2 The NIHE (through Supporting Communities) has used mystery shopping since 2002 to assess service delivery. It examines how organisational policies and procedures translate into service delivery. Members of the HCN test areas of service delivery by masquerading as customers. This research and analysis provides the NIHE with data that can be used to effect change and improvements to service delivery.
- 2.8.3 Each NIHE Area conducts an annual business planning process which is informed by data gathered through the CTOS and mystery shopping (2.8.1 and 2.8.2) and from general tenant feedback. Business Plans are developed which contain key outcomes to be achieved and they include service delivery improvements; plans are used to report against targets and progress.
- 2.8.4 Internal and external evaluations are commissioned by the NIHE. These are used to inform future investment plans and decisions and offer judgments on value for money in relation to NIHE funded projects. Tenant involvement was described as *“one of the jewels in the NIHE’s crown”* by the Customer Service Excellence Assessor in 2013. A new think tank / Centre of Excellence was suggested. This could help to share good practice on tenant involvement and be used to source funding that could be disseminated for innovative tenant engagement and social enterprise projects.
- 2.8.5 Stakeholders also stated that tenants should have a more proactive role to play in the regulation of social housing and of their landlord. Some respondents were critical of the fact that the regulatory regime fails to engage with tenants or seek testimonies from partners/stakeholders: *“if everything we are doing is to benefit tenants or future tenants they must be involved in all parts of the regulation process”*. Another respondent agreed: *“we facilitated discussions with the DSD and one of our supported living groups for the TP strategy consultation and they came back and thanked us and said it was really meaningful. If you have*

the structures in place there should be no issues with the department speaking to tenants during the inspection process”.

- 2.8.6 Difficulty in measuring the impact of tenant participation was another key issue raised by interviewees. For some this was achieved by analysing the numbers of repairs and complaints, levels of tenant satisfaction and business KPIs. However, many felt that there needed to be a more strategic, outcome-based approach to measuring the impact of tenant involvement. For example, some HAs have started to use measurement tools that measure the impact on well-being. But a number of respondents cautioned against this: *“it is great that something is being measured and that we are measuring the positive impact of work on our tenants, but monetising that is dangerous. Particularly the values that are attached to it”*. Another HA official referred to another way of measuring impact: *“our office is located in an interface area – this was the second worst Super Output Area to live in 2010 in terms of deprivation levels. So when the new figures are published that will be a very tangible outcome of where we have moved this area in terms of our redevelopment work to where it is today. But we are relying on NINIS and NISRA to provide those statistics”*. None of the respondents reported having any methodologies in place for assessing value for money.

3.0 Evidence Review and Typology: GB and Europe

3.1 Background: Aims and Methods

3.1.1 The aim of the literature review was to explore the relevance of international models and practices of tenant involvement in housing governance in Great Britain (GB) and Europe to identify key themes around tenant involvement and inform a typology of relevant approaches.

3.1.2 In order to explore the question “What do we know about tenant involvement in governance?” the methodology for this review incorporated the following stages:

- i. Researching recent (since 2000) academic and practice literature on housing governance and resident participation with search parameters of Europe, GB, Scotland, England, Wales, and search terms: resident/tenant involvement, participation, empowerment, AND social/public/non-profit housing AND corporate governance, boards, committees.
- ii. Adding a purposive search based on expert recommendations from researchers and European expert advisers.
- iii. Shortlisting from an initial search population of around 50 to maximise the range and provenance of evidence, focusing on practical implementation experience rather than simply governance design and structures (15 key sources selected).
- iv. Reviewing evidence against the key themes and questions to inform the main dimensions of the typology.

3.2 Corporate Governance

3.2.1 There are conflicting views of the role of tenants in Corporate Governance, which involves tenants in the formal decision making processes of a housing organisation.

3.2.2 A prevalent theme within corporate governance literature is the role of tenants on governing boards which includes a number of aspects such as the extent of tenant representation, balancing representation and skills based recruitment, remuneration and benefit conflicts, skills, training and stakeholder antipathy. Stakeholder antipathy can relate to, among other factors, organisational culture which has been seen to be both a barrier and enabler to tenant involvement in governance. Other challenges emerge in the operation of governance involving resident board members, and also in the connections between board representation and wider tenant involvement structures. There are also economic costs and benefits of resident involvement in governance at Board level. In England and the Netherlands minority resident representation on Boards is common, while in Denmark residents make up a controlling membership of governing boards (Pawson, et al, 2012).

3.2.3 A popular framework cited in the discussion around tenant participation is the Arstein’s 1969 ladder of participation with increasing degrees of influence and decision-making control along the eight steps. Formal representation and self-management is located at the top of this hierarchical framework, where citizens are empowered with control rather than simply being involved as participators in a more tokenistic capacity.

3.2.4 This view ties in with the perspective of tenants as board members in a corporate governance structure as the ideal tenant involvement model. However, there are particular challenges around the role of tenant board members, where conflicts of interest or culture can emerge between tenant board members and other board members. These clashes are referred to in the

social housing literature as competing governance discourses or institutional logics that exist between tenant interests and local accountability, and the drive towards management efficiency (Mullins, 2006; Bradley, 2008)

- 3.2.5 Bradley (2008, p 894) argues that board membership may not be as empowering for tenants as would be expected, because of these competing interests:

“Board membership has enabled tenants to seize an opportunity to make improvements to their status and to their influence in decision making at an operational level in housing organisations. To a varying degree housing organisations have welcomed this perspective; however, it is clear that tenant aspirations are not easily assimilated into the current values of social housing organisations. While tenants may well have joined the competing interest groups...they are the least powerful and perhaps the easiest to exclude.”

- 3.2.6 There are alternative views to tenant board membership being the most effective form of tenant involvement in social housing. Recent research by Tenants Leading Change in England (Bliss et al, 2015) suggest local tenant involvement and management in service delivery and tenant scrutiny are currently seen as the most effective methods of involvement for delivering benefits, followed by involvement in governance and tenant panels.
- 3.2.7 In a comparative European case study on resident involvement in social housing, it was found in most cases that landlords typically attached more importance to organisation-wide tenant councils, panels or advisory boards or customer services committees than to main board resident membership. These tenant forums, found in Belgium, England and the Netherlands, are designed to provide a resident perspective to help inform corporate decision-making (Pawson et al, 2012).
- 3.2.8 What is seen to be unique to England compared to the other European case studies is that these resident forums or groups are more incorporated within the corporate governance structure, in the role of functional and regional governing body subcommittees (not exclusively made up of residents) with a service delivery objective. In the cases of Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands, despite resident representation on governing boards, the main focus of resident involvement is at the estate level.
- 3.2.9 It can be argued that scale, from estate level to organisational to regional, is a key component of tenant engagement in corporate governance and therefore key to any typology of models of tenant engagement.
- 3.2.10 Of course, in addition to tenant involvement in governance of housing associations and public housing, we should also consider the experience of governance in housing co-operatives, where residents are involved in formal decision-making and governance in line with International Co-operative (ICA) principles. Countries such as Denmark and Austria have a large co-operatively governed social housing sector, although even in those countries there have been moves towards more professionalised governing boards in large housing providers.
- 3.2.11 In England and Scotland, stock transfer has provided the opportunity to involve tenants in governing boards, often on a one third constituency level basis (Mullins and Pawson 2010). The Community Gateway models in England and Wales provide GB examples of large-scale social landlords with residents involved at the highest levels of corporate governance. Meanwhile the tenant management organisations (TMO) sector provides excellent examples of tenant majority boards working well at the estate level of governance.

3.3 Consumers or Citizens?

- 3.3.1 One of the key debates around the identity of tenants, and therefore tenant engagement in housing governance, is that of consumerist versus citizenship approaches.
- 3.3.2 Consumerist approaches regard the tenant as a consumer of a housing service and therefore their involvement with social housing should be service orientated. This can often (but not always) be a more commercial perspective prevalent in larger organisations.
- 3.3.3 The citizenship perspective alludes to a more participatory approach, as found in locally based, smaller housing organisations such as co-ops. It is relevant to Good Practice on community and citizen involvement in local governance of services. Arstein argues that “the idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you” (1966, p 216).
- 3.3.4 However, unpacking the idea of citizen participation with reference to the notion of an engaged tenant reveals contending views that underpin the debate around citizenship vs consumerist approaches, revealing some overlap about the characterisation of both.
- 3.3.5 Cairncross et al (1997) argue that the identities of tenants, as understood in changing policy, are based around the dual functions of self-agency and self-responsibility and that self-agency is encouraged through choice and active decision-making for the tenant as a consumer. The concept of 'Social responsibility' or 'Community responsibility' of tenants has also been linked to ideas around citizenship (King, 2003; Flint, 2003). This framing of citizenship as a communal function and consumerism as an individual perspective is a recurring theme in housing governance literature.
- 3.3.6 While considering the two distinct new strands of 'consumerist' and 'citizenship', that move away from the traditional style employed by social landlords in the UK, Pawson et al (2012) suggest that changes have been linked to a rise in individualism, with a parallel breakdown of collective, democratically accountable, social institutions. There is still nevertheless continued political attention on citizens' rights and responsibilities in the UK.
- 3.3.7 Flint (2004) contends that since at least the 1980 Housing Act (and Tenants Right Act 1980 in Scotland), the identities of social housing tenants have been reconfigured from passive recipients of welfare to empowered and responsible individuals. This paradigm shift towards 'responsibilisation' has seen a move away from a dependency culture among tenants with its over-reliance on welfarist forms of housing management. A driver behind this shift has been the growing managerialism in social housing governance with its focus on market influences and the increasing importance of financial reporting and performance measurement:
- “The Best Value regime provides a consumerist framework for the regulation of housing management, based on promoting the efficacy and reflexivity of housing services through increasing the transparency and accountability of housing providers to central government, tenants and private financiers. The government's advocacy of both stock transfer and increasing tenant participation reflects this consumerist approach in tandem with a communitarian emphasis on duty, responsibility and the importance of strengthened local communities to policy outcomes.” (Flint, 2004, p.895)*
- 3.3.8 Consumerist approaches to tenant engagement in governance can be seen as an alternative to board membership of tenants as described in Chapter 2. In their European case studies, Pawson et al (2012, p.35) found that in responding to social and legislative change social landlords have

created 'consumerist opportunities' that allow residents to take their involvement in bite-sized pieces. These organisations find that most tenants are not willing or able to become a committee or board member, and that residents prefer engagement not to be tied to long term time commitments.

- 3.3.9 While the literature shows some overlaps in consumerist and citizenship approaches in practice, it is clear nevertheless that these can be regarded as two distinct arcs in the conceptualisation of tenant engagement, which therefore inform different models of tenant involvement in social housing governance.

3.4 What's the Problem?

- 3.4.1 The purpose or rationale behind tenant involvement can be explored by problematising the topic in order to understand what the issue or challenge is that tenant involvement in governance seeks to address.
- 3.4.2 Decision-making for residents relates to the activities they are involved in and the purpose of their involvement such as: housing management, community services, repairs and maintenance, reinvestment, stock transfer, new stock investment, community investment, community regeneration, corporate strategy, corporate finance, HR and staff employment, allocations and lettings.
- 3.4.3 Bliss et al (2015) quote the National Tenant Organisation's 2012 publication *Tenant Panels: Options for Accountability*, which states that "Good landlords understand that listening to tenants is not just the right thing to do. It is also good for business" and argue that there is indeed a business rationale for involving tenants to improve the landlord's business. Recent case study research in England (2014) undertaken by the Tenants Leading Change group shows that tenant involvement can lead to significant business benefits, in addition to a range of social and community benefits (Bliss et al, 2015).
- 3.4.5 In addition to being good for business from an operational perspective, research also shows that having good resident involvement in governance can have an impact on organisational growth, by making an organisation more attractive to potential merger partners. This is particularly the case where landlords see resident involvement as *consumers* having a strategic fit with their own customer-focused business model. Therefore, beyond the motivation for resident involvement as the right thing to do, this is "augmented by an increasing understanding of its symbiosis with business efficiency and effectiveness in delivery." (Pawson et al, 2012, p.42)
- 3.4.6 Regulatory pressures are another strong driver for tenant involvement in governance, where they may play different roles in the regulation process. Tenants can act on behalf of the regulator (such as previously in the TSA) or on behalf of the organisation (e.g. as with tenant inspectors).
- 3.4.7 Involving 'hard-to-reach' or 'easy-to-ignore' groups could be regarded as another problem that tenant involvement strategies must address in order to include the views, and respond to the needs, of all tenants.
- 3.4.8 Good housing and neighbourhood design can also benefit from early and active engagement with residents starting before they move in to their properties (CABE 2016 forthcoming). Building a sense of community and a platform for future active participation can also be more possible in new build projects and the evidence review identified good examples of this in Wales

(CCH 2015), with the development of new mutual housing schemes, and in Vienna where 'community building' is a recognised part of large scale new housing programmes (Lang, 2016).

- 3.4.9 The rationale behind tenant engagement in social housing governance logically has implications for the type of model of involvement social landlords will employ – to solve the problem of, for example, increasing business efficiency or meeting regulatory expectations. The purpose for which tenant engagement in governance is undertaken in different contexts is therefore an important dimension of the typology developed from this review and presented in section 3.7.

3.5 Scale and Scope of Involvement

- 3.5.1 Rather than continuing with the theoretical discussion of tenant engagement in social housing governance in the previous three sections of this review, this section deals with more practical questions. It considers how the scale and scope of organisations affects mechanisms through which tenants are involved in governance. By linking the earlier discussion to examples of different organisational forms, we aim to ensure that our typology of tenant engagement models addresses the different contexts which connect the thematic approaches with frameworks of operation.
- 3.5.2 Different organisational models of tenant involvement can work to create governance partnerships where "power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders. They agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses." (Arnstein, 1969, p.221)
- 3.5.3 Tenant engagement takes place in different organisational forms including TMOs/estate management boards, Coops, Community Mutuals, Community Based Housing Associations, community-led housing organisations, housing associations and local authorities.
- 3.5.4 As an example, Pawson and Mullins (2010) describe the role of tenants in the governance structure of the first Community Gateway stock transfer completed in Preston in 2005. The Community Gateway Association is a housing association of 6,000 homes, owned by tenant and resident members who elect a key decision-making body, the Gateway Tenant Committee (GTC). The scope of their decision-making includes repairs and maintenance procurement, while other roles have included participating in developing a new community transport service, a youth inclusion strategy, and developing new community-led homes (Bliss et al, 2015).
- 3.5.5 Smaller community-based organisations can enjoy a high degree of local accountability and legitimacy through effective resident engagement in governance; however they can be viewed as being less in control and more dependent on local authority because of their small scale. (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000)
- 3.5.6 Scale is a key aspect of decision-making processes involved in tenant governance, particularly with devolved budgets and local decision-making. Since scale and scope relate to both the purpose and rationale behind tenant involvement in governance, as well as to the operational and structural issues of how this involvement takes place, they form another important dimension of our typology of models of tenant involvement in governance (section 3.7).

3.6 Conflicting perspectives on Tenant Involvement models

3.6.1 From the discussion in paragraphs 3.1-3.5 above we can identify a number of conflicting perspectives that need to be addressed in designing tenant involvement models that are fit for purpose in Northern Ireland today:

- a. First there are conflicting perspectives on the **role of tenants in housing governance** and these have implications for the approaches to tenant involvement.
- b. A prevalent view of tenants being actively involved in housing governance is that it implies **tenant board members** on organisational boards. The role of tenants in corporate governance is linked to **hierarchy**, with the inherent presumption that it would be better to be at the top of the ladder (Arnstein). There is actually a **wider spectrum of approaches** by which tenants can be part of corporate governance and accountability structures.
- c. The **consumerism vs citizenship debate** considers whether tenants should be regarded as customers/consumers or active participants in the housing. Consumerist approaches would argue that tenant involvement should be service or **customer service orientated**. Citizenship is linked to **participatory approaches** and co-management.
- d. **Organisational scale** impacts on the type of tenant involvement models adopted, with a unique set of problems related to different sized organisations or areas of activity. **Large organisations** have particular issues about tenant representation across the management hierarchy from corporate level to front line and strata in between. The Community Gateway Model in Preston had tenants represented at Board level but also involved in local engagement projects. The NIHE has different levels of tenant representation across its hierarchy. A high level of local involvement and local accountability is possible in **smaller organisations** such as co-operatives and Tenant Management Organisations.
- e. Key to models of tenant involvement is understanding the **purpose** of involvement i.e. **what is the problem** that tenant involvement is trying to solve? The purpose of tenant involvement includes **design, good practice**, social and **community enterprise**, linking to a **broader regulatory structure** and **accountability** to residents (TSA, scrutiny panels etc).

3.7 Typology

3.7.1 Drawing on this literature review we have identified the following typology of resident involvement in governance from which case studies can be selected to clarify underlying principles and how these models work in practice.

Type	How does this model involve residents in Governance?	Case Studies
Estate level within local authority sector under right to manage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TMOs and EMBs • Tenant majority committees • Devolved budgets • Mainly operational • LA remains landlord 	<p>Leathermarket (1) WATMOS</p> <p>Leathermarket interesting case as involved in new build social housing and design in the locality (a high land value area adjacent to the Shard).</p>
Estate level support for new residents to take on responsibility for running local facilities for residents in new social/collaborative housing in Vienna	Consultant/facilitator is appointed by municipality/housing fund to work with residents prior to occupancy. Residents take on responsibility for some local facilities.	Vienna hauptbahnhof (2)
Small scale organisations: independent entities run by the residents and following ICA principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional co-ops • Independent self-governing • Operational and strategic • May be services by secondaries 	<p>Small Heath co-ops; Birmingham Redditch; CDS London; NW housing services Liverpool</p> <p>CCH promotion of new co-ops in Wales (3)</p> <p>NW housing services interesting because actively supporting expansion of new co-ops.</p> <p>CCH work in Wales selected because shows the scope for start from scratch approach with active support from HAs and knowledge transfer from CCH to HAs and residents.</p>
Community based housing associations: locally focused and governed HAs – especially in Scotland but some in England (including estate based stock transfers)	HA model with greater emphasis on resident involvement including in formal governance.	<p>Poplar HARCA (4) Castle Vale (now Pioneer) Birmingham Scottish CBHAs</p> <p>Suggest Poplar HARCA because a longstanding leader in community based stock transfer and CEO is actively interested in NI.</p>

Larger organisations: range of models here, some with majority tenant governance on boards	Denmark a longstanding example of tenant-led governance of housing associations of all sizes. Scotland: Glasgow transfer interesting because of comparable size to NIHE. But strong existing networks mean there are limits to additional learning that would be provided by inclusion.	
Community Mutuels, Community Gateway, Rochdale staff and tenant mutual model	Stock transfer models in England and Wales Resident majority boards.	Preston Community Gateway (5), Watford, Rochdale, Tai Calon CCH suggests Preston Gateway worth studying because of the emphasis on neighbourhood level engagement and projects alongside corporate governance involvement at Board level.
Traditional stock transfers: $\frac{1}{3}$ / $\frac{1}{3}$ / $\frac{1}{3}$ tenants in boards	Post-1997 English stock transfer model	Very widespread but tending to dilute tenant (and LA) involvement over time through smaller business boards and mergers.

Other forms of accountability and purposes for involvement

Type	How does this model involve residents in Governance?	Case Studies
Tenants' panels and committees at area and region level	May be 'consumerist' or about sharing power <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For certain (usually operational) matters • Differs from TMOs in LA sector as there is no HA right to manage 	NIHE itself. The role of the Forum was a key feature of two of the NI case studies. Larger English HAs
Resident Scrutiny: regulation and inspection roles	Roles promoted by regulation and inspection regimes in England particularly under Tenant Services Authority	Many English HAs Some NI HAs (e.g. Choice) already have these arrangements (explored in NI case studies).
Tenant led social businesses	Achieves engagement and tackles unemployment and stimulates local economy – can use procurement power of landlord – estate maintenance work, grounds maintenance etc.	Some English and Scottish HAs This was a feature of the NIHE case studies

Type	How does this model involve residents in Governance?	Case Studies
Tenant involvement in design of social housing estate regeneration	How local community involvement can improve design, especially of communal space and neighbourhood facilities	CABE has compiled a set of good practice briefings: includes Leathermarket case (Kipling Estate) covered above and Hull (David Lister School site).
Sector Governance	Area based consultation with tenants and residents; whole local authority and main municipal district (in Amsterdam and Rotterdam) – Netherlands new duty to consult (2015 Housing Act)	<p>Amsterdam Local Area Performance Agreements (6)</p> <p>City wide consultation framework.</p> <p>Amsterdam had earlier tripartite system (Municipality, HAs, tenants' federation) on which the new statutory arrangement builds; duty to consult 2015 Housing Act.</p> <p>Amsterdam Tenants Federation provide a perspective on how to works in practice.</p>

3.7.2 The typology identified six case studies that exemplify different models and scales of involvement and that desk research indicated could be relevant to explore in depth for relevance to Northern Ireland. These cases were discussed further with sector experts in Northern Ireland and in particular Supporting Communities staff working on the ground with tenants in Northern Ireland. Some important considerations at this stage were to avoid multiple models from a single jurisdiction. Three of the initial shortlist of models came from England and two of them from London which exhibits many important differences to Northern Ireland. In the end it was decided to explore four case studies in depth (cases 2, 3, 5 and 6 from table above), one each from each of four countries: two in GB and two in continental Europe (see Chapter 5).

3.7.3 During the next stage of the project three case studies were undertaken with tenants and landlords involved in current tenant involvement approaches in Northern Ireland (see Chapter 4). One of the purposes of these case studies was to enable the researchers to consider the enablers and barriers that may exist to the adaptation and adoption of these models in Northern Ireland and to prepare briefs to work with experts on each of the models (Chapter 5) in preparation for participative workshops with tenants. The result of this process was a set of four model descriptions co-written by the research team and these experts (see section 6). The experts were also invited to present and discuss the models at the autumn workshops (see Chapter 6).

4.0 Northern Ireland Case Studies

4.1 Case Study Overview

- 4.1.1 We conducted three case studies in Northern Ireland to complement the state of the art review by providing an organisational level picture of current practice, to assess similarities and differences between the HA and NIHE sectors, and to consider the context in which the international models emerging from the international evidence review would be tested.
- 4.1.2 In discussion with our advisory group it was agreed to undertake two case studies in different areas of the NIHE Housing Community Network and one in a large housing association. The final sample contacted with the assistance of Supporting Communities comprised:
- Newry and Down Scrutiny Panel and Housing Community Networks
 - West Belfast and Shankill Scrutiny Panel and Housing Community Networks
 - Choice Housing
- 4.1.3 The three case studies highlighted the wide range of approaches to involving tenants of social housing in Northern Ireland, many of which may be considered to be relevant to tenant involvement in governance. These include: central and regional tenant forums with direct links to decision making bodies within the landlord organisations; tenant scrutiny of landlord services; networking of local tenant and community associations; menus of involvement enabling tenants to choose methods that suit them; and social enterprise models for local employment of tenants. Despite limited links between tenants groups in the two sectors, and a degree of suspicion (particularly of housing associations by NIHE tenants), there is a remarkable similarity in the approaches being developed. This probably owes much to the expertise, coordination and support of both sectors by Supporting Communities and the emerging regulatory expectations for tenant involvement.
- 4.1.4 However, another common feature of the three cases is that there are currently no tenants on the main boards of the landlords; although housing associations have several tenant members of service committees. There are no local areas where tenants can control the management of their estates to the extent found in international models such as cooperatives and tenant management organisations. Furthermore, there is no infrastructure to enable tenants' groups to form prior to moving in to their properties or to influence the design and management of new housing schemes. Relationships between housing organisations and Northern Ireland's 11 new local authorities (known as super councils because they are larger and have more powers than the 26 local authorities they replaced) are developing. But there is currently no provision for tenants to have a voice in these developing relationships which are likely to be important for governance of future strategic coordination and planning for housing and communities in Northern Ireland. Both NIHE and HA staff supported the idea of exploring opportunities for social housing tenants to be involved in discussion of local area plans and agreements on issues that pertain to their interests as part of the new community planning arrangements. We were advised in a comment on our final report by NIHE that *'this is coming out via the community Involvement Strategy consultation process'*; leading to greater confidence in our Recommendation 3 (page 7 and 94).
- 4.1.5 After presenting the case studies we return to consider some important learning points about barriers to tenant involvement in governance in NI that were important considerations for the next stage of the project (see section 4.5)

4.2 Newry & South Down Scrutiny Panel

4.2.1 Introduction

4.2.1.1 This case study comprised a two day visit to Newry and South Down facilitated by Supporting Communities and the Housing Executive. The case study was organised around the two former HCNs that had been brought together to form the new Scrutiny Panel. Separate visits were conducted to meet members of the two panels and staff of the two NIHE offices. Growing integration was apparent as some tenants from Newry were visiting Downpatrick on the day of the visit as part of a scrutiny review in change of tenancies. Both HCNs were set to continue alongside the single scrutiny panel as tenants had recognised the importance of local networking to support for tenants and community associations in the two parts of the District.

4.2.1.2 In addition to the Scrutiny panels and HCNs, the visit explored wider community involvement and the key role played in this part of Northern Ireland by Rural Community Network and local community associations whose base is wider than tenants of NIHE. The case study also highlighted the potential of the super councils and links to community strategies and multi-agency working that was already well established. Relations with housing associations and tenant involvement in new social housing were also discussed. Finally, there were insights into the transformation process and corporate governance in NIHE and the role of community enterprise in tenant empowerment.

4.2.2 South Down

4.2.2.1 Downpatrick is a small town (population 10,000) in the former mainly rural Down district. The NIHE office is based in a modern multi-service hub in a former hospital converted three years ago on the outskirts of the town. It serves a mainly rural area including the small coastal towns of Newcastle and Dundrum and the inland town of Castlewellan. NIHE services are co-terminus with the new 'super-council' for Newry, Mourne and Down; colocation with several other public services for Downpatrick has assisted enormously in joined up working.

4.2.2.2 **The Downpatrick Scrutiny Panel** was established in 2015 and works in tandem with the Newry Scrutiny Panel. After training in November 2015, the group considered undertaking a first scrutiny of customer contact (and repeat contacts). It then discovered that other scrutiny panels had chosen a similar topic and it was decided to do something different. The first full scrutiny review will be on 'COT [Change of Tenancy] policies' which cover the period between a tenant notifying NIHE that they wish to terminate the tenancy and occupancy by the next tenant. The aim is to identify the best process for tenants in terms of minimising void time and cost, cost and quality balance on repairs, recovering costs from outgoing tenants who have damaged the property, and responding to tenants' preferences (e.g. on specification of repairs and decoration works and timing (before or after occupancy)). This review will take the form of a 'controlled experiment' since Newry is moving ahead with 'transformation' (the NIHE's 'systems thinking' service review) while Down will not implement this until later. The two approaches to 'COTs' can therefore be compared with tenants scrutinising service in the other part of the area.

4.2.2.3 *Participant views of the Scrutiny Panel*

The three tenants interviewed generally seemed interested in the scrutiny approach and felt that it would be a worthwhile use of their time. There had been some nervousness about whether they had the expertise to take this on and about delays in training. However, after the November 2015 two day training course, reinforced by a refresher at the January 2016 panel meeting, members had been confident to take on the first scrutiny which was in progress on the day of my visit with two panel members from Newry over to check out the Down COT process

and undertake a visit to a terminating tenant's property. The NIHE officer interviewed was also happy that scrutiny would add value to the service by enabling tenants to see things for themselves, introduce new ideas and make recommendations which, if picked up, would provide the reward of achieving change. Supporting Communities services and minutes the panel and provides access to training and support, and there is also significant input from the NIHE office. While the latter is not factored in to work plans at present, it has been possible to support the process alongside the 'day job'. There have been some minor difficulties, for example in locating and agreeing to visits of outgoing tenants to coincide with the dates of the Newry panel visit, but these issues have been overcome.

4.2.2.4 ***Recruitment to Scrutiny Panel***

All three members interviewed had been involved in the Housing Community Network prior to joining the Scrutiny Panel and were asked to take on the new role after structures changed 2013-15. One panel member was a leaseholder, having bought under the House Sales Scheme; he had not been sure whether he was eligible to join the scrutiny panel but a representative was needed from his area (Newcastle) and he agreed to try to recruit a tenant to the role. However, no tenant was found, he was happy to continue with the role, and his participation as a leaseholder was agreed. This could be relevant to other panels and is consistent with discussion at the Central Forum in April about the value of including leaseholders in governance initiatives.

4.2.2.5 ***Impact of Re-organisation of HCN***

The Scrutiny Panels were set up following the 2013-15 re-organisation of tenant involvement in NIHE, which replaced 23 HCNs with 11 scrutiny panels. The HCNs had mainly had an information sharing role to enable local groups to exchange experiences and NIHE to pass on information about service changes while representatives from the Central Forum passed information up and down.

4.2.2.6 In the case of South Down this involved replacing two main groups (Newry and Downpatrick) with one scrutiny panel with a much more specific service accountability function. Residents were initially unhappy about the change and lobbied for the HCNs to be reinstated and to remain at the more local scale. The Scrutiny Panels were established to cover the single new super council area. With the support of the NIHE Manager the HCNs were replaced with Local Forums which are now meeting again. Some local groups had been lost and it is planned to try to build support for new groups in those areas. Supporting Communities can assist with this and there are small set-up budgets.

4.2.2.7 Thus it seems that, in this area at least, residents were able to negotiate and shape the change to retain the things that they most valued about the old structure while taking part in the new scrutiny arrangements.

Scope and Purpose of Involvement

4.2.2.8 Interviewees were generally content with the scope of existing involvement in governance. There was a general feeling that residents' views were taken seriously, NIHE staff were held to account and things had changed as a result of their involvement. The main way in which South Down already appeared to have broadened the scope of involvement was in the rural community based, cross-tenure and multi-agency approach and engaging with the super-council.

4.2.2.9 There was not a great deal of interest in tenants playing a direct role in the Board of NIHE, but neither was there disagreement that this could be a good thing. Provided training and support

were available, it was felt that there was no reason why tenants could not sit on the board and it was felt that a growing group of trained tenant scrutineers, and representation on Central Forum could provide a route into board recruitment.

- 4.2.2.10 There was generally less interest in locally-devolved management of services, and there were some specific concerns about allocations and whether tenants have an appetite for running rather than commenting on services. The absence of co-op models and the continued heritage of 'the reasons NIHE was established' were noted.
- 4.2.2.11 Social enterprise could be a part of effective tenant involvement in governance, but the initial impact of marketing the NIHE social enterprise grants in the area had been limited.

Locally Based Involvement

- 4.2.2.12 South Down is a largely rural area and NIHE properties tend to be in small clusters close to other tenures including NIHE stock sold through the House Sales Scheme and newer HA properties. A key theme from all of the interviews was the emergence of community based responses, rather than a tenure specific response to involvement in this context. All of the tenants interviewed were active at the community level as well as participating in the Scrutiny Panel and Tenant Forum for South Down.
- 4.2.2.13 The NIHE initiated Rural Residents' Forum was an important influence in South Down. One Panel member was also part of the RCN and regularly attended its meetings in Cookstown. Another worked for the Down RCN and undertook community development work with residents' groups in the District.
- 4.2.2.14 Another scrutiny panel member chaired a local community association working on mixed tenure estates in Newcastle with around 200 NIHE and former NIHE properties. This is adjacent to a newer HA estate with around 150 rented homes. The aim of the community association is to respond to ASB (including a recent arson incident), make best use of green space for neighbourhood activities such as football and sport and to provide social support and activities for older residents across tenures.
- 4.2.2.15 A scrutiny panel member was involved in 'Good Morning Down' a telephone base befriending service for older and disabled people living alone in the area. Although initiated with help from NIHE this group met wider community needs.

Joined Up Approaches

- 4.2.2.16 A related finding is that in South Down there was already a well-established multi-agency approach to local problem solving across the community which included tenants and residents, the new super-council, HAs and other public services. The location of NIHE in the new Council offices complex helped to build links and integrate services. The District Electoral Areas (DEAs) provided a point of contact with the council for local communities. There were a number of multi-agency groups in all of the main towns and larger villages; these groups had taken a local problem solving approach and, although starting from a Northern Ireland-wide ASB response programme (between NIHE and PSNI) some years ago, had been able to take on a wide range of local issues.
- 4.2.2.17 HAs and HA tenants were invited and in some cases attended and contributed – an example was in Newcastle where an NIHE estate and adjacent HA estate had experienced ASB issues and the HA had agreed to increase the height of a boundary fence to resolve the problem.

The Future

- 4.2.2.18 There was a strong interest in preserving the information sharing role of the HCNs/Local Forums. There was a willingness to work with the scrutiny panel model and to undertake a future evaluation on impact and effectiveness.
- 4.2.2.19 The role of Supporting Communities was valued and seen as the most obvious basis for the ITO role. Some competition was seen to exist in this area, with SDRCN and SC performing similar roles supporting new groups in the area.
- 4.2.2.20 There was support for working more closely with HAs and HA tenants and this was consistent with the community-based, cross-tenure and multi-agency approach.
- 4.2.2.21 There was opposition to stock transfer to HAs but recognition of the importance of the HA role in new build estates and the potential there for effective community building, although the Common Selection Scheme was seen as something of a barrier to this.
- 4.2.2.22 There was recognition of the need to refresh and support new groups and representatives. The shortest length of involvement of interviewees was six years.

4.2.3 Newry

- 4.2.3.1 Newry is a major urban area with a population of 30,000 in south of NI with substantial neighbourhood renewal activity over 10 years (9 local areas with a total of around 10,000 people). The rural hinterland has a further 60,000 people in the former Newry and Mourne district. The NIHE office in Boat Street near the town centre is purpose-built on two floors with customer contact and interview facilities on the ground floor. The office has been part of the NIHE transformation programme and is moving to a local patch management system with 'customers setting the nominal value'.
- 4.2.3.2 Information was provided about the way in which the HCN works by two chairs and the community liaison officer (CLO). There were around 25-30 community groups across the region affiliated to the HCN and a further five or so unaffiliated. Agendas were set jointly by Supporting Communities and the CLO with reference to previous minutes, and outside speakers were often invited to share learning on key issues and partner organisations. Chairs tried to focus discussion at a strategic level and asked for individual estate and tenant issues to be put in writing for the CLO to follow up. There had been strong (and successful) tenant resistance to proposals to replace the HCNs with the Scrutiny Panels, indicating the value placed on the information-sharing and learning role of the HCN. There was also an argument that being involved in the HCN increased legitimacy in putting individual issues and complaints to NIHE.
- 4.2.3.3 NIHE staff felt that HCNs provided a robust accountability function and were often not an easy ride. One example was given in both an officer interview and a tenant interview of the case where a community association rep and HCN member brought a deputation of disgruntled tenants to the office to discuss problems with poor consultation on a major repairs contract. The organisation was seen to have listened, recognised the problem and taken the action needed to make the programme work better. It was felt that the ability to have such a dialogue symbolised the changes that the NIHE had gone through in listening to tenants.

Value of Tenant Scrutiny

4.2.3.4 The three tenants involved in the COT scrutiny process showed great enthusiasm and commitment. They felt genuinely involved and listened to and were determined to get to the bottom of certain issues such as actual recharges of vacating tenants for damage repairs. They were working as a team across the two parts of the district and being supported by officers in SC and NIHE. It was anticipated that other tenants from the HCN and Scrutiny panel would contribute to future reviews.

Impact of Neighbourhood Renewal

4.2.3.5 Tenant reps interviewed had been involved in the significant DSD-funded neighbourhood renewal programme in nine areas of Newry, one as Chair and another in one of the local community projects. This programme had provided a meaningful example of the impact that tenant involvement can have on urban design and programmes and had produced an experienced cadre of volunteers for the HCN. Interestingly, it is understood that there had been less synergy in Armagh where community leaders involved in the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme had not seen the HCN as relevant (differences in age, community background and immediacy of influence were seen as important contrasts).

Super-Councils and Community Planning

4.2.3.6 Newry, Mourne and Down (NMD) was seen as a frontrunner super-council. Led by a former NIHE officer, it had two strategic themes that include housing (one on community planning and new social housing, the other on ASB and community safety). There are seven District Electoral Areas (DEAs) in NMD at which inter-organisational service partnerships will focus. This builds on highly developed inter-agency models for ASB and other issues that NIHE and HAs were already involved in at more local levels. In discussion it was agreed that this was a structure with which tenants and communities needed to engage. A proposal for a tenant forum within the community planning and social housing theme could enable NIHE, HA and private tenants to engage with community planning (in a similar way to Dutch model).

Relations with housing associations

4.2.3.7 There was evidence of suspicion of housing associations, which lack a strong local presence and were perceived to be less responsive to their tenants (particularly by the tenant and community interviewees). However, community associations and interagency partnerships usually included HAs and in the case of Linenhall they (Helm, South Ulster and Ulidia) were said to be regular attenders. Interviewees agreed with the principle of HAs having a similar set of tenant involvement standards to NIHE and the potential role of SC and HCN members in transferring learning to the HA sector. In addition, there was support for cross-tenure community based approaches to include HA tenants who usually face similar local issues to NIHE tenants, leaseholders and PRS-tenants in NIHE-built estates.

New Social Housing

4.2.3.8 We discussed the potential provided by the new HA estates to 'design in' tenant involvement and develop more co-operative approaches. Interviewees felt that this potential had not been realised and HAs were less good at welcome, tenant induction and supporting local associations. It was felt that NIHE should be allowed to develop new housing estates. Other barriers to new build co-ops were discussed – notably the constraints of the Common Selection Scheme, which made it hard to select groups with local commitment and knowledge, since people from other areas with sufficient points can move to the area and the timing of allocations makes it impossible to build communities before people move in. Tenant reps were interested in having more involvement in allocations – not so much in selection as in matching new tenants to suitable properties and thereby avoiding subsequent clashes. NIHE interviewees maintained the

importance of the CSS but felt that local knowledge of housing officers, often informed by tenant reps was fed to the allocation office to avoid mistakes.

Transformation

4.2.3.9 Links between Transformation and tenant involvement were becoming apparent. The patch based system will make the local housing manager the key single point of contact for local community associations, which will still be backed up by Community Liaison, HCN and Scrutiny Panel, with support from SC. This could strengthen local accountability and responsiveness and enlarge the role and impact of community associations. There were potential conflicts between the control role of the housing manager and community involvement, but this is already there and HCN themselves are often highly supportive of control measures (ASB, arrears and damage recharges). At the time of the research the Transformation process was being rolled out in Newry office but was due to be implemented in Downpatrick at a later date.

Devolved Management

4.2.3.10 There is no tradition of co-ops or tenant management boards in NIHE and discussion indicated that neither tenants nor NIHE staff saw much merit in moving towards devolved estate management by tenant boards. Key barriers to devolved management included capacity and training required, motivation and responsibility entailed, and continued underlying concerns about sectarian organisations gaining influence and power.

4.2.3.11 However, as noted above, community associations would like a little more involvement in allocations within their neighbourhoods (as opposed to priorities for rehousing). They have already enjoyed considerable influence on major works, planned maintenance programmes (on which HCNs are routinely consulted) and in some cases neighbourhood renewal (in the nine 'worst' areas designated by the DSD programme). Tenants are now involved in procurement of major contracts (the Newry and Down rep in the Central Forum was away taking part in such a procurement panel on the day of our visit). Comparing the situation to 20 years ago, long standing NIHE officers perceived there to have been a considerable journey towards empowerment and were confident that further steps were possible.

NIHE Corporate Governance

4.2.3.12 It was no longer anticipated that the governance of the landlord function of NIHE would be split into four or five separately governed organisations. This means that the main tenant involvement in corporate governance question is whether there should be some tenants on the NIHE Board. The general view of tenants and staff alike was that there should be; the experience and skills gained by taking part in scrutiny, procurement and the Central Forum has shown tenants' capacity and the contribution that they can make. Provided there is clarity about the skills that will be required and adequate support and training, mentoring etc., there were few concerns about the risks of opening access to the board to tenants and it was thought to be right in principle that the users of the service should have a say in key decisions.

Tenant Empowerment and Community Enterprise

4.2.3.13 It was generally agreed that empowerment would be advanced by bringing more jobs and employment training opportunities to NIHE tenants and that this is a legitimate part of the agenda for tenant involvement in governance. However, the first round of social enterprise grants had not had a big take-up in the District and it was recognised that more support may be needed for tenants to consider setting up SMEs for grass cutting, window cleaning and the like. NIHE contracts had begun to incorporate social clauses requiring local employment and training impacts, apprentices and so forth. In addition, an exciting social enterprise had come out of a health and social care support hub working with people with learning difficulties. The project originated in Warrenpoint and developed into a wider project with three social enterprises in

Warrenpoint, Kilkeel and Newry. Multiple benefits were outlined for NIHE tenants including volunteering and training opportunities, and availability of recycled furniture to furnish flats. This project highlighted some of the potential to engage with tenants in different ways and thereby to empower them. Social Enterprise is one of four strands of NIHE community engagement strategies alongside community cohesion, community safety, and resident involvement.

4.2.4 Conclusions

- 4.2.4.1 Visiting Newry and Downpatrick and meeting tenants and NIHE staff on the ground brought to life the NIHE tenant involvement activities and their practical operation in a predominantly rural area with several major towns. Tensions underlying the shift from HCNs to Scrutiny Panels had been largely resolved by listening to tenants and retaining the HCNs alongside the new panels. While scrutiny had been slow to get off the ground, a full review involving both parts of the district was in full swing and tenants were enthusiastic about the scrutiny role and its potential for empowerment. However, they are clear that this must not be at the expense of the wider information sharing, raising issues and holding management to account that was the core function of the HCNs.
- 4.2.4.2 Tenants and NIHE staff were clear that the NIHE model of tenant involvement had many strengths, but felt that it should continue to evolve to provide higher levels of empowerment. Board membership, further devolution of management decisions and social enterprise opportunities could all be part of this journey.
- 4.2.4.3 There were clear concerns among tenants about HAs and a strong emphasis on the need for similar levels of accountability and involvement in governance to be achieved across social housing. It was believed that SC, the HCNs and existing tenant and community associations should have a big role to play in sharing learning and spreading good practice. It will be important to consider the role that HAs have in building new social housing and to experiment with ways of incorporating involvement from the start; this should involve NIHE and existing tenants as key partners because of the importance of the Common Selection Scheme and the area impacts of new clusters of social housing tenants often close to NIHE estates.
- 4.2.4.4 One surprise was the extent of joined up working that already existed, including engagement with the new super council and links with the HAs and their tenants. We were impressed by the broad community remit of the community associations (often involving HA tenants and leaseholders) rather than a narrow focus on NIHE tenants. A strategic focus on new social housing and community safety within the Newry/Down/Mourne community plans and area based working in the seven DEAs could provide a platform for social housing tenants to link with the super council community strategy. This supports our proposal for tenant involvement in governance to provide opportunities for involvement in decisions that affect neighbourhoods rather than organisations. This might be achieved by linking tenants and residents into NIHE, HAs and super-council co-ordination at both district and DEA levels.

4.3 West Belfast & Shankill Scrutiny Panel

4.3.1 Introduction

- 4.3.1.1 This case study comprised nine meetings and interviews undertaken over a three month period to explore current tenant involvement practice involving Housing Executive tenants in West Belfast and Shankill. The case study was facilitated by Supporting Communities and the Housing Executive.
- 4.3.1.2 At the core of the case study is the story of the establishment of a single Scrutiny Panel for West Belfast and Shankill; recruitment, background and succession of Scrutiny Panel members; tenant scrutiny practice examples, and observation of the West Belfast Scrutiny Panel . The case study also explores links to transformation and corporate governance in NIHE. Finally, it considers the Housing Community Network and wider community involvement; cross-community working and the Black Mountain Shared Space project; the role of super councils; and the role of community enterprise in tenant empowerment.
- 4.3.1.3 West Belfast extends from the Falls-Shankill ‘peace-line’ at Cupar Way and the Springfield Road to Poleglass/Twinbrook and Lagmore in the west; the area also extends from the Westlink/M1 in the South to New Barnsley and Moyard on the Black Mountain. Demand for social housing remains stubbornly high, with almost three-quarters (73%) of applicants in housing stress. Of the applicants in housing stress almost half (48%) are general family households and almost two-fifths (39%) are single households. The Shankill area spans from Brown Square in the city centre to Glencairn in the west and extends to the Ballygomartin and Springmartin Roads at the western edge of the District. The demand for social housing in the Shankill remains consistent but lower than in West Belfast. Forty-four per cent (44%) of total applicants requesting housing were in housing stress of which half (51%) were single households and almost one-quarter (23%) were older households (NIHE District Housing Plan and Local Housing Strategy, 2014-15).
- 4.3.1.4 At March 2014 the total NIHE stock for the 40 common landlord areas in West Belfast and Shankill stood at 8,416 units. A similar number had been sold under the House Sales Scheme (8,137) and there were seventy voids. NIHE stock for the Shankill, which covers 15 of the common landlord areas, totalled 3,378 homes compared with 5,038 homes for West Belfast which covers the other 25 common landlord areas. In Shankill, NIHE had sold thirty-seven per cent (1,955) of its homes compared to fifty-five per cent for West Belfast (6,182 homes). Voids rates stood at 1.2% (41 homes) and 0.6% (29 homes) for Shankill and West Belfast respectively. Following the addition of Dairy Farm to West Belfast as part of the Review of Public Administration, West Belfast now has 10,200 homes. Thus the total Housing Executive stock in West Belfast was greater than the number of dwellings owned by the largest HA in Northern Ireland at the time of the research.
- 4.3.1.5 The NIHE Shankill office is based at the Shankill Wellbeing and Treatment Centre on the Shankill Road, Belfast. The Centre brings together various care and information services which had previously been delivered from different buildings and locations throughout the Shankill. It provides a range of community health, nursing and social services, allied health professionals and GP practices. Other facilities include treatment rooms, consultancy suites, conference rooms, and social areas for staff. The Centre and NIHE office is modern, bright and can be accessed either from the front entrance or the rear where there are ample car parking spaces. The Housing Executive’s West Belfast office is based in the city centre at Great Victoria Street. This building is used exclusively for NIHE business and at the time of the research also housed: south, east, and north Belfast offices; Belfast regional office; Belfast public and private housing benefit units; Belfast accounts unit; and the Belfast area land and property office.

4.3.2 Establishment of the West Belfast & Shankill Area Scrutiny Panel

- 4.3.2.1 A draft Community Involvement strategy published by the NIHE in November 2013 proposed the creation of tenant scrutiny panels in each of its landlord areas. It stated: "Each of the NIHE areas will develop Tenant Scrutiny Panels so that NIHE tenants will have a voice in ensuring that the local areas and outlets are delivering the services customers require and to the level of quality that customers expect."
- 4.3.2.2 Discussions about tenant scrutiny in Belfast started a number of years ago when Supporting Communities staff met with the NIHE's Belfast Regional Housing Manager. NIHE asked Supporting Communities for its advice on tenant scrutiny. Prior to this Supporting Communities had worked with NIHE on a pilot tenant-led inspection and on mystery shopping and other tenant initiatives. Tenant scrutiny was considered more rigorous than the range of other initiatives that had been undertaken up until that point; the discussions between Supporting Communities and the NIHE's Regional Manager focused on what tenant scrutiny might mean for tenants in Belfast. Prior to tenant scrutiny work being initiated, tenant services tended to be RAG (Red, Amber, Green) monitored against certain objectives but this approach didn't challenge assumptions or ask if the set objectives were correct and/or appropriate. It was felt that tenant scrutiny offered an opportunity to adapt this approach (and involve tenants directly in these service assessments).
- 4.3.2.3 However, tenant involvement was still seen as much wider than scrutiny. Although the Scrutiny Panel had been formed for West Belfast and Shankill to scrutinise key service areas, both Housing Community Networks continued to meet separately "because their agendas are very different". West Belfast is one of the few NIHE administrative areas that retains its original HCN structures, although our other case study in Newry and South Down had also retained two HCNs as a result of tenant demand. The agenda in West Belfast has tended to focus on schemes, consultation and performance, whereas in the Shankill the focus has generally been on response maintenance and change of tenancy issues. When the two districts became one 'area' (West Belfast) the tenants decided to keep the two HCNs to address their distinct issues. The rationale put forward for Belfast retaining its HCN structure was that while other districts face common issues that can be addressed through the Area Panels, in Belfast the issues can be quite unique to different areas and thus the HCN structures have remained. "If you are representing Glencairn, with the best will in the world, half the meeting will be dedicated to consultation on schemes in West Belfast. That is not going to be of relevance or of interest to the others". Therefore the West Belfast and Shankill HCNs continue to meet separately each month and collectively each quarter.
- 4.3.2.4 The Scrutiny Panel has agreed and collaborated on common issues, and shared learning has also occurred since the joint working of the HCNs: "It is all about learning, common sense and communication. Some plagiarism goes on but in a positive way".
- 4.3.2.5 The ambitious cross-community nature of the new West Belfast and Shankill Area required careful planning to stimulate involvement from all parts of the Area. A seminar with numerous workshops was convened by the NIHE in February 2014 at Crumlin Road Gaol and attended by approximately forty community representatives from the West Belfast and Shankill Housing Community Networks and from the constituent community groups in both Districts. Conference facilities were hired at the Gaol as it was considered to be a neutral venue. Tides Training facilitated workshops and discussions at the event in the Gaol and a report on the discussions was produced by housing staff and presented afterwards to the two respective HCNs. Workshops covered six service areas including: obtaining a home; paying for your home; repairs to your home; improving your home; sustaining your home and sustaining your neighbourhood.

- 4.3.2.6 In June 2014 representatives from the two HCNs came together again at a residential event to review the discussions and reports that emerged from the seminar and workshops and to examine the potential for an Area Scrutiny Panel. It also included a dinner and opportunities for networking which helped participants to interact. A specific member of NIHE staff had worked with both HCN groups and it was stated that the groups' trust and familiarity with this staff member, coupled with the common desire to scrutinise key services, resulted in congenial and collaborative working. There were a number of agreed outcomes as a result of this exercise including:
- aspects of housing management to be subjected to tenant scrutiny;
 - tenant expectations and aspirations around service delivery;
 - a priority list of management services to be scrutinised;
 - key questions to be asked pertaining to each of the services; and
 - how the area scrutiny panel was to be supported and facilitated.
- 4.3.2.7 The residential concluded with agreement that an Area Scrutiny Panel be established to undertake an initial scrutiny exercise of a key service area by the end of the 2014 calendar year. Area Scrutiny Panel members were then nominated at subsequent HCN meetings. Eight members were nominated by the two Housing Community Networks; four from each network. In August 2014 Panel members participated in some basic tenant scrutiny awareness training, delivered by Supporting Communities and it was agreed that the first service area for scrutiny would be response maintenance and change of tenancy repairs (the 'repairs to your home' service area noted above). This was accepted by the NIHE as the Panel's first priority. An NIHE staff member also carried out research on tenant scrutiny in the English context which complemented the Panel member training.
- 4.3.2.8 Since then, Scrutiny Panel meetings have taken place bimonthly and in March 2015 the Panel met with NIHE senior staff and board members. Some members thought this was a worthwhile exercise but others were less convinced: "on the twice I have met with NIHE board they have been more interested in hearing presentations from other bodies than hearing about drilled down work of the tenant scrutiny panel. Also, there are times that I feel that the central panel is paid lip service by the board. I don't understand how relevant it is meeting the board. Would there be more relevance in having two members attend NIHE board meetings? One from urban and rural settings and their role would be to report back to their networks?"
- 4.3.2.9 Supporting Communities facilitates the discussions and minutes Scrutiny Panel meetings. In 2015 the Scrutiny Panel was shortlisted for a 'Working Together' award at the Chartered Institute of Housing Northern Ireland's annual awards ceremony.

4.3.3 Background of Tenant Scrutiny Panel Members and Community Representatives

- 4.3.3.1 Members include community representatives, some of whom are ex-tenants who had purchased their home through the House Sales Scheme; it was unclear at the time of the research how many Panel members were current NIHE tenants. Panel members stated that the NIHE empowers residents associations to speak on behalf of its tenants. All five Panel members interviewed were community representatives working in posts funded by a raft of revenue streams one of which was part-funded by the NIHE.
- 4.3.3.2 Members felt that when community representatives deliver messages, tenants are more willing to accept the responses. Whilst this was considered to be effective by the interviewees, some respondents in the State of the Art review paper raised the query about professionalised tenant/community representatives. No (NIHE-tenant) Panel member interviewed was without a community-funded post. Some members were relatively new to community work whereas

others had been community activists for almost four decades. Two of those interviewed worked for a women's group in the community; these posts were funded by the Department for Communities (formerly DSD). Others worked for community partnerships or community associations, one was a co-ordinator for a federation of residents' associations and another two were public representatives.

- 4.3.3.3 Bringing the two HCNs together was considered to be a major success, as some group members had not mixed with or visited neighbouring estates across the community divide. At the beginning, bus tours enabled Panel members to gain a visual perspective of the communities and estates just a short distance away. For one Panel member it was her first time in Ballymurphy in over 30 years.
- 4.3.3.4 One of the organisations involved with the HCN in West Belfast at the time of the research was the Upper Springfield Resource Centre, which was receiving tripartite funding from Belfast City Council, NIHE and the Department for Communities. The centre provided an administrative function for residents' groups and an NIHE-funded newsletter was widely distributed to residents across West Belfast every quarter. The Resource Centre had a citizens' advice (CAB) satellite office and a NIHE satellite office, and a local councillor attended one day a week to deal with community issues.
- 4.3.3.5 One innovation and success for the Upper Springfield Resource Centre had been in facilitating and managing an NIHE swap and exchange scheme. This had the advantage of making links with new housing association schemes in the area and had assisted in setting up HA resident associations. The community representative had been able to liaise and negotiate on behalf of tenants when offered new homes in order to help create sustainable communities: "we are able to negotiate and we noticed first time tenants didn't want to move into this new estate – they would have stayed a year and a day then put in a transfer request. We knew who wanted to live here and we worked with allocations officers to move people about. Members of two residents associations and a few others in community development work moved into this new estate and this meant they had their own residents' group right from the start".
- 4.3.3.6 The linkage between the HCNs and the Scrutiny Panel was considered to be very important and the community expertise and background of Panel members meant they were all well placed to scrutinise NIHE service areas. Two of the Scrutiny Panel members also sat on the Housing Central Forum.

4.3.4 Succession Planning

- 4.3.4.1 Panel members considered succession planning an issue for every group. Some intimated that they would like to see younger tenants get involved with their local HCNs and for the NIHE to engage with younger people to better understand their housing aspirations. It was also stated that the difficulties of succession planning were not unique to West Belfast and Shankill. One respondent summed it up as: "on the one hand having the same faces has it pluses as you build up trust. On the other hand the downside is that those involved might not challenge". Others mentioned how longstanding community representatives are considered the stalwarts of community development and there is an expectation that these members will lobby on important community issues.
- 4.3.4.2 One interviewee suggested the reason tenant associations were renamed 'residents associations' was to reflect the enthusiasm and involvement of ex-tenants who had purchased their home. Family commitments were considered to be key constraints on involvement and succession planning. "I could fill an auditorium tomorrow if NIHE was coming to do a [new build

development] scheme. When I ask people to set a working group you can see the dust rising as they leave the door.” However, there was evidence of succession planning in terms of community representatives. In at least three cases, Panel members talked about younger colleagues in paid employment who were learning from their more experienced community activist mentors. “Every community group should have succession planning. There are younger people coming through this office now who came here as young volunteers and have since moved into PT employment. My message to them is clear; your goal is to get my job. We are trying to skill them up to critique and challenge”.

4.3.5 Tenant Scrutiny: Observation of West Belfast Panel

- 4.3.5.1 As part of the research, we observed a Scrutiny Panel meeting, which took place on 19 May at the NIHE office in the Shankill Wellbeing and Treatment Centre. Panel members received an update on response maintenance following the service review. The NIHE area manager also provided staffing updates and in particular highlighted the high level of vacancies in the maintenance division and the external recruitment drive to reconcile this. The Panel was also informed that NIHE maintenance officers had begun to operate agile working and were connected to IT network which should result in enhanced visibility of maintenance officers on estates. Some of the discussion focused on specifications (e.g. a new bathroom spec) and it was suggested that new approaches in respect of planned and response maintenance might follow the recent appointment of a new Director of Asset Management. Maintenance contracts were up for renewal in September 2016 and the NIHE was imminently due to announce the new Northern Ireland-wide contractors.
- 4.3.5.2 The Panel heard how the new contractors would focus more on social clauses, working with communities, promoting social and community enterprise activity, and taking greater account of tenant issues such as furniture storage. The contract tendering process had been reversed to focus on 60% quality/40% price, compared with the previous arrangement of 60% price/40% quality.
- 4.3.5.3 Further discussions took place around the move to an appointments-based system between the DLO and tenants in an attempt to reduce costs associated with ‘no access’ and the potential for community representatives to order repairs on behalf of tenants. The importance of technology had been a consistent theme in the stakeholder interviews for aiding tenant engagement with hard to reach groups. The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the importance of user-friendly services and advocated for the phone number to be shortened and for greater use of text messaging. NIHE’s CSU was also devising a piece of technology to include all possible repair items in a home so that orders could be processed on site and sent directly to the contractor. The Panel also made a point about how they might go about scrutinising social clauses and mentioned that they had not been involved in shaping them in the first instance.
- 4.3.5.4 The Scrutiny Panel then discussed ‘change of tenancies’, how to reduce re-let periods, tenancy sustainment and the tenants’ charter. Finally it received a presentation followed by a short discussion on the NIHE commissioned ‘Tenant Involvement in Governance’ research and obtained a copy of a Peabody report on tenant scrutiny towards the end of the meeting. All members actively and enthusiastically took part in the discussions and clearly had significant community expertise.

4.3.6 Tenant Scrutiny of Response Maintenance and Change of Tenancies

- 4.3.6.1 Scrutiny Panels afford members the opportunity to delve into certain areas in more depth than could be achieved at HCN meetings. Some Panel members acknowledged that they were

unaware of how 'sophisticated' NIHE systems and operations were prior to the scrutiny of the 'repairing your home' service area. The newly formed Area Scrutiny Panel had embarked on a number of study visits in October 2014. These included visits to the Belfast Customer Services Unit (CSU) in Great Victoria Street and to the Shankill Office front counter to see how operational staff delivered the repairs service.

- 4.3.6.2 Some Panel members had expressed concerns about the NIHE's response maintenance contract and in particular the relocation of the DLO from Argyll Street (Shankill) to Stockman's Way (South-west Belfast). The DLO subsequently hosted a meeting with the Panel to explain working practices and allay concerns. Perceptions of a lesser or diminished service in the Shankill were addressed directly by the contractors during this meeting, which also gave the Panel a better insight into how the repairs process worked once orders had been raised by NIHE maintenance officers.
- 4.3.6.3 The first Area Scrutiny Panel meeting for West Belfast and Shankill took place on 17th November 2014 facilitated by Supporting Communities and attended by six community representatives and six NIHE staff including district staff and the CSU manager. In total 17 recommendations were agreed by the Scrutiny Panel for further investigation (see Appendix A.1). At the time of writing 14 had been completed and three were in progress. A second Area Scrutiny Panel meeting was held in January 2015 to scrutinise the Change of Tenancy (COT) procedures, at which 12 recommendations were agreed (see Appendix A.2). Eleven had been completed and one remained in progress at the time of this research. It was also agreed that the HCNs would receive regular reports from the Panel and that representatives who attended the workshops at Crumlin Road Gaol and in Fermanagh would receive feedback on the review. All recommendations in relation to response maintenance and COT repairs were also fed back and tested by the NIHE redesign team. An action plan was devised and some recommendations resulted in changes to policy and procedures, some were fed into the NIHE 'journey to excellence' programme and others led to questions being included in the NIHE Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey. It was agreed at the June 2015 meeting that 'obtaining a home' would be the next Scrutiny Panel priority.

4.3.7 NIHE Transformation

- 4.3.7.1 The NIHE transformation process had been occurring at the same time as the Panel's initial service review. Quite a bit of interaction had taken place between the Scrutiny Panel and the transformation team around the use of technology by NIHE maintenance officers. Panel members were able to see the process evolve, and discuss and challenge it. The engagement with the transformation team focused on delivering better standards. One interviewee stated that: "there was a particular value to the work we were doing at the time we were doing it. If we had been doing this exercise 15 months earlier we might not have seen the same changes". The two work programmes were not divorced, as one NIHE senior housing officer in the Shankill led the transformation conversations and also participated in the tenant scrutiny conversations. Because the NIHE's 'journey to excellence' transformation programme and the work on tenant scrutiny work ran concurrently, it will be interesting to see if the next service review achieves the same positive results. Concerns were expressed in relation to the NIHE's internal separation of landlord and regional functions. One Panel member felt that this separation might make the tenant scrutiny role of the landlord activities more difficult if they aren't kept abreast of regional issues/developments.

4.3.8 NIHE Corporate Governance

4.3.8.1 Panel members thought there was merit in board membership being extended to include tenants. However a number of reservations were made in relation to this including: how the selection/nomination process would work; the need to achieve a balance of perspectives (e.g. urban/rural; catholic/protestant) and the process for cascading information down the tenant involvement infrastructure. “It is a hard one because if there are big major decisions to be made, tenant board members could be compromised by some of those bigger issues – for example the bedroom tax”. A caveat was also placed on councillors acting as the tenant voice during board discussions. “They are part time councillors; the vast majority have full time jobs – many are employed by their own political parties”.

4.3.9 Housing Community Network and wider Community Involvement Infrastructure

4.3.9.1 HCNs have always focused primarily on monitoring NIHE services and performance. However, in some instances HA officials have attended HCN meetings in relation to allocation queries and other matters. In the Shankill HCN, for example, there has been frequent involvement and representation by one community-based HA and less frequent input by two other prominent HAs. The West Belfast HCN is geared exclusively towards NIHE activity. Panel members were receptive to the idea of HA tenants becoming involved in the NIHE’s tenant involvement infrastructure in the absence of having their own.

4.3.9.2 Discussions had taken place at the Shankill HCN about the multiplicity of social landlords operating within the area and there were concerns about ASB etc. Policing and Communities Together (PACT) was one existing structure at the time of this research that brought social housing landlords together in the Shankill. It was suggested by interviewees that HA tenants should not be precluded from engaging with NIHE structures on issues that concerned community safety, community cohesion or community social enterprise initiatives.

4.3.9.3 One respondent thought that the Shankill Housing Convention might be the best and most appropriate mechanism for convening a community forum for tenants and residents spanning all tenures on the Shankill. The Shankill HCN was established from the Greater Shankill Partnership and Shankill Housing Convention and it was suggested that the DSD TP strategy provided an opportunity to explore this further. In relation to West Belfast, the situation was considered more complex “because it is a patchwork already and will now sit alongside Twinbrook and Poleglass”. It was suggested that the area management approach in West Belfast would be more difficult to achieve not least until a full complement of staff and/or structure was in place to manage it.

4.3.9.4 Generally, Panel members were critical of housing associations and provided numerous anecdotes of concerns that they encountered through their community work. Representatives stated how they had concerns relayed to them about lack of communication, service charges, call out charges for missed appointments, and high rents. The most common complaint centred on HAs’ supposed enthusiasm to engage with communities when undertaking new developments only for it to wane once the developments were completed. “The same relationships don’t exist with HAs as they do with the NIHE. They don't seem to see the value of working with the community the same way the NIHE does. That social conscience is missing”. Another Panel member stated: “in the 70s there was a gap between NIHE and tenants and they worked hard to close that gap through partnership working. HAs are now at the stage that the NIHE and tenants were at in the 1970s”.

4.3.10 Shared Space - Working across the Community Divide and the Black Mountain Shared Space Project

- 4.3.10.1 In the round of stakeholder interviews, a number of respondents commented that the Shankill had benefitted from the joint working in terms of being able to learn from West Belfast's more advanced community development structures and expertise. However, those who worked most closely with the Panel discounted this argument. One stated that: "both sides have learned from each other and no one side has taught the other a lesson".
- 4.3.10.2 Other respondents mentioned how the Shankill HCN perceived the joint working initiative between the HCNs as a threat as it felt overwhelmed by West Belfast's stock size and community background and there was a fear amongst some that they would lose out on potential schemes. 'Poor cousins' and 'arranged marriage' were some of the terms used to describe the coming together of the two HCNs. This may explain why at the observed Scrutiny Panel meeting some members requested a breakdown of the schemes being delivered in each of the communities. Likewise the relocation of the DLO was treated with suspicion.
- 4.3.10.3 Although not directly related to the work of the Scrutiny Panel, the Black Mountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP) is an initiative aimed at fostering positive relations between the two communities in an interface area in West Belfast which is divided by a police station, the 'million brick peace wall' and other barriers. The area covers Highfield, Moyard, Springmartin, Springfield Park and Sliabh Dubh. The programme is facilitated by the NIHE and is part financed through the PEACE III Programme. The NIHE's Community Cohesion Unit's Shared Communities Programme has enabled the development of 30 shared neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland and the BMSSP was invited to take part in the Shared Communities Programme in early 2014. The NIHE's Community Cohesion Unit has also been supportive in assisting BMSSP to develop the land as shared space. The project received an award from a social enterprise to hire an architect to draw up plans to develop the space. Adjoining land is owned by the NIHE and there was a (hopeful) suggestion that community asset transfer might be a prospect for the future.
- 4.3.10.4 A shared community survey undertaken by the NIHE in October 2015 found that more than three-quarters (76%) of respondents were in favour of funding being sought for a multi-purpose shared-space community centre at the former Finlay's site; more than half (52%) stated that they or another household member would be interested in using activities/services on the site; and a majority of respondents (82%) preferred the site to be used for 'health and wellbeing initiatives'.
- 4.3.10.5 Once again the issue of trust was considered to be a key success factor in bringing both communities together: "both communities trusted the NIHE to come in and facilitate between them". It was also suggested that some tenants involved in the BMSSP had complained about the relevance of the Scrutiny Panel. This perhaps suggests a disconnect and/or a communication gap between those involved in scrutiny and those tenants who are more involved in local issues.

4.3.11 Super Councils and community planning

- 4.3.11.1 Panel members raised concerns about the prospect of new super councils assuming housing functions currently under NIHE control: "our argument is to leave the NIHE alone. No powers should be passed to the new super councils. If it is to do with housing and housing estates the NIHE should always have the lead. The group would like to see NIHE development powers restored". Some Panel members were involved in community planning with the council in their capacity as community representatives although there remained a lack of clarity: "I don't think they have worked out what community planning is; we were invited to a meeting a few weeks

ago and they are asking the same questions that they asked three years ago in Malone House. People in communities are still asking ‘what is it about?’. Panel members also expressed a number of other concerns about RPA, including sectarian attitudes within councils, certain areas being subsumed into larger boundaries and losing the sense of being represented, and a fear that community development and neighbourhood renewal funded posts could be lost if undertaken by council employees. A number of Panel members stated that they had never met with the Housing Council and some were unsure of its role and remit.

4.3.12 Tenant Empowerment and Community Enterprise

4.3.12.1 Panel members stated that some residents’ associations had had discussions about the prospect of setting up tenant management organisations. For a number of RAs it was considered an attractive proposition should NIHE stock transfer in West Belfast become a reality. “This still comes up in conversation in the context of NIHE uncertainty and we would look closely at it particularly if our homes were to transfer to HAs or go back into the council”. Another interview stated: “You have people within residents groups who talk about that but we are more like advocates for the NIHE as the overall body. It was talked about (becoming managing agents) – local RAs had those discussions a number of years ago and we set up a community trust and the Upper Springfield Development Trust. It still comes up in conversation and even more so now as we aren’t sure what the future holds for the NIHE”. Whilst members felt that West Belfast had the confidence and skills to assume control of their own stock in the event of transfer the picture was different in Shankill: “currently our community wouldn’t have skills to take on management of stock. But we are looking at social economy or enterprise projects – community business starts ups. We have a number of applications with the NIHE. We have set up with the help of the social investment fund a small environmental team”.

4.3.12.2 Despite some concerns raised during the initial stakeholder exercise about the potential for paramilitary involvement this was perceived to be less of a concern for Panel members in relation to community empowerment. TMOs were only favoured in the event of NIHE stock transfer.

4.3.12.3 The stakeholder report suggested that community enterprise initiatives were perhaps a more plausible way of achieving tenant empowerment. A number of fledgling social enterprises had recently formed in the West Belfast area, particularly in relation to childcare, recycling and one in relation to grounds maintenance in the Shankill. Another empowerment initiative for the area included a DFP funded programme to improve digital inclusion. Much work had reportedly been done with local communities to promote the development of social enterprise activity but a key concern was the ability to sustain businesses once formed: “there is a concern when developing social enterprise projects. What happens when grants run out? I see two different types. Running a business and running a service that doesn’t have the same profit. Being able to sustain the business is key.”

4.3.13 Conclusions

4.3.13.1 The case study highlights that the focus of tenant involvement efforts in NIHE at the time of the research was on scrutiny of services by residents. From the perspective of this study, this focus may be regarded as direct involvement in governance enabling tenants to recommend technical improvements to the service they receive and to monitor implementation. The case study also clarifies the wider roles played by Housing Community Networks at the district level and the unwillingness of tenants to sacrifice this longstanding form of involvement for the more technical Area Scrutiny role.

- 4.3.13.2 A major achievement in the West Belfast context has been the coming together of tenant involvement structures across community boundaries. Whilst reservations remain about the full amalgamation of the two HCNs, the collaboration at the Scrutiny Panel level sends a strong signal to other community representatives that partnership working across the community divide can lead to positive results. This cross community working also helped to dispel myths that one community gets more than the other.
- 4.3.13.3 The first service review 'repairing your home' led to a significant number of changes to NIHE policies and procedures in relation to response maintenance and to change of tenancies. The first review coincided with the NIHE 'journey to excellence' programme and it remains to be seen if future reviews lead to similar successes. Also, it remains unclear how the work programmes of the 13 scrutiny panels are co-ordinated. The South Down SP also reviewed COTs which may have resulted in duplication of time and effort and similar recommendations. Members were keen to share learning across the panels and this may be something worth further consideration.
- 4.3.13.4 The context of NIHE transformation processes was important for the case study and was seen to have been positive for the scrutiny reviews. Considerable interaction had taken place between the Scrutiny Panel and the transformation team around the use of technology by NIHE maintenance officers. One important theme to emerge from the two scrutiny reviews was the increasing importance of IT and tenants and community representatives engaging with IT changes for more responsive services. This theme was also apparent in the Choice Housing case study.
- 4.3.13.5 Corporate governance structures and links to security and networks were also considered. The prospect of tenant directorships also had members' approval, although with some caveats and considerations. Whilst there is consistency from the grass roots through to the NIHE central panel, some tenants were still unclear or unsure of the work of the Scrutiny Panel. This perhaps suggests a disconnection and/or a communication gap between those involved in scrutiny and those tenants who are more involved in local issues.
- 4.3.13.6 Wider community involvement was picked up in relation to housing associations, shared space, super councils and community enterprise. Generally Panel members were critical of housing associations and their perceived absence of long term commitment to community involvement once schemes had been built. There was a clear preference for NIHE as landlord and for new build to be undertaken by the NIHE. However, there was also some evidence of positive working with HAs and HA tenants through, for example, the involvement of the Upper Springfield Resource Centre in the NIHE swap and exchange scheme. This had helped to make best use of new HA stock in the area and also helped foster new tenant and resident groups on the new HA estates as residents moved in. There was also some support for area-based structures for tenant involvement across NIHE and HA tenants and landlords.
- 4.3.13.7 There had been significant progress with the Black Mountain shared space project but this was not seen as very well connected to the Tenant Scrutiny panel. There was little confidence in super councils in relation to housing and community strategies. Community enterprise was seen as a way of achieving tenant empowerment and there was also some willingness to consider devolved management options similar to tenant management but only in the event of NIHE stock transfer.

4.4 Choice Housing Association Case Study

- 4.4.1 A third case study, with Choice Housing Association, was undertaken from June 2016 to February 2017 and included interviews with key staff and tenant representatives, a focus group with the Choice Tenant Forum, and visits to three estates to meet local tenants and groups. This case study was very helpful in understanding the reality of tenant involvement on the ground in the HA sector in Northern Ireland and in selecting and testing the climate for the international models explored in this project. Some excellent examples of tenant involvement practice were identified and explored within the case study organisation; including an active Tenant Forum, an example of a highly active and well-organised community initiative on an estate and innovation in tenant involvement in supported housing schemes in partnership with management partners.
- 4.4.2 While it was not possible to reach agreement with officers at Choice HA to include the case study as part of this report, we would like to thank the officers and tenants of Choice HA for supporting the research, giving access to the research team and attending the project's Reality Check workshops in such large numbers. Findings from this case study along with the two NIHE case studies informed the learning points outlined in section 4.5.

4.5 Learning Points from the case studies for Future Policy

- 4.5.1 This project aimed to test the relevance of international models of tenant involvement in governance. The case studies assessed some of the important contextual factors that would affect the adoption of new models.
- 4.5.2 The Common Selection Scheme is probably the most important barrier to enabling groups of new residents to work on the design and building of communities before moving in to new social housing. This is a single access system for all social housing in Northern Ireland based on housing needs points and specified area preferences. When properties become available landlords must offer them to the highest pointed applicants choosing the (common landlord) area in which the property is located. Allocations are made only when properties are ready to occupy and there is no facility for advance allocations of general needs properties. Despite the policy focus since 2005 on 'A Shared Future'⁵ and creation of common spaces in which both of Northern Ireland's 'ethno-religious' communities can live, there is no alternative process for social housing applicants to positively choose to live together in these shared spaces rather than in the majority of 'common landlord areas' that are associated with one dominant community identity. This is recognised to be a more entrenched problem in Belfast.
- 4.5.3 There is a reluctance to involve tenants directly in design decisions for fear of slowing up an already cumbersome process with challenging supply targets and creating individual expectations that cannot be fulfilled. However there is a degree of recognition that greater involvement 'might be a better process and a better product, better for the tenant'.
- 4.5.4 Fear of paramilitary control is still seen as a barrier to devolution of housing management to tenants along tenant management organisation lines. However, there is evidence that in some places this danger can be overcome and there may be an appetite for devolved housing management as an alternative to stock transfer to a housing association. In other places tenants are taking major responsibilities for community events, gardens and childcare and this could extend into housing. There is also general support for new social enterprise initiatives bringing

⁵ NIHE staff later confirmed that the Shared Futures/TBUC schemes were carried out *entirely within* the existing Common Selection Scheme.

empowerment through employment opportunities in areas with very low labour market participation.

- 4.5.5 The scope for tripartite community planning between landlords, councils and tenants over housing strategy (Dutch model) would take some innovation to develop and would require a major input from NIHE. However, this could be the direction of travel and help to overcome some of the learning curve experienced by councils in these new roles.
- 4.5.6 The next phase of the project was in many ways the most exciting. In a series of workshops tenants had the opportunity to reality check four international models of tenant involvement in governance. This enabled us to test whether there is any enthusiasm for forms of tenant involvement in governance not currently found in Northern Ireland, the extent to which the above barriers are real, and how they might be overcome.
- 4.5.7 Whatever the outcome of this exercise the workshops provided opportunities to celebrate and refresh the many successful current forms of tenant involvement found in Northern Ireland, to share knowledge with international partners and to develop home grown solutions that fit the context.

5.0 Four Models of Tenant Involvement in Governance

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 Four model descriptions were co-produced with country experts to promote discussion at workshops with tenants of the Housing Executive and housing associations, and other key stakeholders in Northern Ireland.
- 5.1.2 The models were selected following an international literature review and an assessment of the state of the art on tenant involvement in governance in Northern Ireland.
- 5.1.3 Despite their titles they were not intended to represent overall practice on tenant involvement in their respective countries. Instead they each capture the essence of one specific model which we believe could be adapted to address gaps in current practice in Northern Ireland.
- 5.1.4 The descriptions use a common framework to present information on these models:
- why they are relevant to Northern Ireland,
 - how, where and when they originated,
 - the key principles,
 - key actors involved,
 - enablers and barriers,
 - how they work in practice, with what success and at what scale and cost,
 - and, most important of all, what are the advantages for tenants?

5.2 Austrian Model

Building participation into the development process: Developer competitions and ‘community building’ in large-scale participatory projects

Relevance: Potential gap filled in Northern Ireland
In Northern Ireland there are currently no opportunities for social housing tenants to form collaborative groups or to plan and design their housing before moving in. The Austrian model shows how this type of low level participation in governance can be built into the new housing development process by including social sustainability criteria in a developer competition and requiring developers to support tenants to form active groups to take responsibility for their new homes.
Context: city, country in which this model operates and date introduced
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional province and City of Vienna, Austria• In terms of housing legislation, Vienna is independent from the national state and can design its own housing laws, including housing subsidy system• Participation Statute for Tenants established in 1989• In 1995, the social housing department started a new model for developer competitions to raise planning and ecological quality in large-volume housing construction but avoiding higher production costs and rents - 3 pillar model (architectural, economic and ecological concept)• In 2005, a fourth pillar was added: “social sustainability”.• One of the biggest challenges for social housing in Vienna at the moment is a population increase of about 20,000+ people per year predicted for the city region. The City thus needs to build about 5.000 new flats every year.

- Example: The scheme “so.vie.so” is located in the Sonnwendviertel neighbourhood close to the new Hauptbahnhof in Vienna. This is an entirely new neighbourhood, mainly consisting of subsidised housing schemes (5,000 homes for about 13,000 residents between 2012 and 2019) but also including commercial and shopping areas as well as schools and nurseries.

Origins and background: where did the model come from and how did it develop?

- The Austrian co-operative housing model originated in an internationally known self-help movement in the 1920s.
- However, there has always been limited responsiveness by the national regulatory framework for social housing to collaborative housing.
- Social and non-profit housing regulatory bodies in Austria have traditionally strengthened the role of top-down, large-scale cooperatives as dominant providers.
- Traditional cooperative values and principles have been “buried” by paternalism and state regulation of welfare and housing.
- Some architects, such as Ottokar Uhl, began to challenge the paternalistic culture with collaborative projects in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. the council housing project Fesstgasse in Vienna).
- More recently, some large housing cooperatives in Vienna have been reviving cooperative principles with pilot projects, such as “so.vie.so”.
- The Vienna local authority has recently promoted collaborative housing by introducing social sustainability criteria in developer competitions from 2005. Non-profit developers must include participatory approaches in all new subsidised housing schemes.

Principles of the model

Developer Competitions in Vienna

- The City’s strategy to meet housing demand is to purchase and redevelopment brown-field sites for affordable housing.
- The “Wohnfonds Wien” owned by the city of Vienna buys and re-develops sites and sells them to non-profit housing developers via competitive tendering to maximise public benefits.
- This strategic approach to land has in recent years focused on inner-city locations such as the area south of the new Hauptbahnhof, through mutually beneficial deals with the Austrian Federal Railways.
- Vienna’s developer competition is a four-pillar scoring system that consists of planning, cost, ecology, and social sustainability.
- Competitive bidding for land on City of Vienna development sites
- “Social sustainability” means that developers need to consider criteria of ‘community building’, ‘social mixing’ and ‘tenant participation’. This refers to “software” (e.g. organisation and processes) as well as “hardware” (e.g. communal facilities in the house and neighbourhood). **“It’s about how people live together”**.

Case study scheme at Sonnwendviertel neighbourhood

- The case project “so.vie.so” (an acronym for “Sonnwendviertel Solidarity”) represents an emerging type of large-scale resident participation in the non-profit/cooperative sector.
- The scheme “so.vie.so” consists of 111 subsidised rented apartments, communal facilities of different size, shared greenspace with the neighbouring housing schemes as well as spaces for small businesses.
- A large housing co-operative provides participation opportunities for the residents in the planning process as well as in the on-going management of the scheme that go well beyond what is offered in mainstream cooperative and non-profit housing in Vienna.
- The future tenants engage in an externally facilitated process which kicks off well before the actual

completion of the scheme.

- The idea of this professional “community coaching” is to sharpen residents’ awareness for their immediate social environment through regular meetings and workshops where they get to know their neighbours’ needs and interests.
- Therefore, they might want to engage in working groups on particular topics, such as (rooftop) gardening or fitness classes.
- Residents work together to plan use of communal spaces.
- Resident input to design and management of ground floor communal facilities such as gym, workshop, bicycle and buggy storage and library
- Roof garden and communal meeting room on roof of block
- As the participatory consultants gradually move away from the scheme, the group takes over tasks as maintaining the communication processes, organising and holding regular meetings to decide upon the allocation and use of funds or continuous activities.
- In “so.vie.so”, the residents are organised within a tenant’s advisory board.

Key actors: Who are the main people who make the model work? Who are the model’s main supporters?

- City of Vienna
 - “Wohnfonds Wien” (Housing Fund) acquires land and allocates sites in new developments
 - Professional expert Jury to decide on land allocations
- Non-profit housing developers, including large housing co-operatives
- Resident Groups formed prior to occupancy of new estates
- External consultancies specialised in ‘community building’ in housing

Enablers

- Long term political support for subsidised housing in Vienna
- Land supply and funding from local government
- Rules of development competition tie funding to social sustainability criteria
- Capacity for tenant involvement has been built up through specialist community development advisers as part of the cost of the scheme Low level community involvement is now a ‘normal’ part of the system, opportunities for much higher involvement through ‘Baugruppen’ is also available

Barriers

- There are entry barriers to housing cooperatives for new tenants.
- It is normal to make an entry payment (so called “initial, one-off financial contribution to the land and construction costs”) which is usually between 15,000 and 30,000 Euro for a medium sized to large flat. Higher initial contributions lower the monthly rents.
- At the end of the tenancy, this financial contribution is paid back (incl. 1% write off).
- Some co-op schemes offer buy-out options to tenants which is also the case in “so.vie.so”.
- The income for a single person must not exceed around 44,000 Euros per year after tax at the time of moving in. This income ceiling is fairly generous as it includes almost all working people living in Vienna (where the average yearly income after tax in 2014 amounted to just over 21,000 Euros for employed people). This generous limit is to be met only at the time of moving in since there is no control on how household income develops further on.
- There may also be some self-selection of tenants interested in participation, willing to get involved in work well in advance of moving in and able to wait for housing.
- High standards in developer competitions require housing associations and large co-ops to invest a lot in social sustainability but there is no budget for continual monitoring. This is problematic as there

is no method of securing long-term responsibility for the spaces and services provided for and developed together with the inhabitants.

- The co-operative has the right to nominate residents for the scheme from their own housing waiting list and after interviews. Also the municipality can claim the right to nominate in return for subsidies.

How the model works in practice

- In principle, the developer competition model can be applied anywhere, regardless of financial scope of a local authority.
- In practice, it requires a strategic partnership between the local authority and larger (non-profit) housing providers.
- The “community building model” addresses the needs of individual residents and families looking for an affordable home in the city. Residents are interested in increased opportunities for communal living, resident participation and self-management of their scheme.
- Many of the “So.Vie.So” residents would be considered as middle-class, and there is limited social and ethnic mix compared with the city as a whole.
- Resident participation by the future tenants is regarded as a key to democratic planning, such as the equipment and organisation of use of communal spaces.
- Large-scale participatory projects represent top-down approaches to collaborative housing where tenants participate in a predesigned structure, offered by architects and specialised consultants co-operating with large non-profit or co-operative developers.
- The “So.Vie.So” scheme at Sonnwendviertel has to be seen in contrast to smaller scale, resident-led Baugruppen projects where residents take on much greater responsibility for scheme design and management (several new developments at Seestadt Aspern in Vienna). Experts say that the “So.Vie.So” model has a better chance to be mainstreamed than the “Baugruppen” model as facilitation and construction costs are cheaper.

Evidence of Success

- Better design of communal facilities
- Culture of co-operation among residents and stakeholders
- Increased professionalisation of community development through external expertise in community building and resident participation.
- Quality of participatory housing management and governance improved with specialised external consultancies entering this field

Scale and Costs

- Developer competition system applies to all new subsidised housing throughout Vienna, which still has a large new building programme on large sites such as the Aspern urban extension and the urban regeneration site at Hauptbahnhof.
- An analysis of 18 projects realised within the framework of the limited-profit housing associations competitions came to the conclusion, that "Social Sustainability" criteria was not a significant cost driver.
- Financing for the “so.vie.so housing model” mainly comes from direct housing subsidies which are secured by the large housing co-operative in a developer competition for the specific site.
- The City provides grants to the housing provider. In return the provider guarantees affordable rents below market level and high design quality.
- Rents are fixed for 10 years and existing rent contracts can be extended beyond 10 years.

- Residents pay an initial contribution to the building costs and have to buy co-operative shares. The costs for the communal facilities and basic equipment are covered through the overall construction sum, their maintenance through service charges and donations.

Advantages for tenants?

- Sense of community and knowing your neighbours from the start
- Flexibility to decide how much you want to get involved
- In general, affordable, high quality homes and rent security

5.3 Dutch Model

**Dutch Polder model, Polder = ‘a talk between parties to overcome their differences’⁶.
Local Area Performance Agreements 2015 Housing Act.**

Relevance: Potential gap filled in Northern Ireland

Local area focus for tenant involvement to respond to the new powers of Super Councils for planning and community strategies. The need for closer working between NIHE and HA landlords at a local level.

Context: city, country in which this model operates and date introduced

Netherlands; example Amsterdam, 2015

Origins and background: where did the model come from and how did it develop?

In the late 60s/early 70s there was a lot of squatting in Dutch cities, especially Amsterdam. People needed housing which was in short supply. To avoid squatting and public unrest, talks with squatters and others were organised. These talks later developed into common practice to make political plans for social housing and urban development. There were talks between squatters and students, city councils and housing associations and later between tenants and landlords. These talks are now formalised in legislation.

This legislation is designed to improve local accountability of housing (articles 42, 43 and 44 of the Dutch Housing Act 2015).

Law on ‘Consultation Tenants / Social Landlords’ (overlegwet) building on the application of the polder model to housing

These acts settle the rights and positions of the tenants and their organisations. They cover rights from the micro level (building/complex) to macro level (cities and the whole country) and define specific rights and possibilities for tenants’ organisations and housing associations.

Principles of the model

⁶ The Dutch polder model started in the late 70s /early 80s first as a means to avoid strikes and demonstrations from labour unions. When this was successful it was used in other fields in the 80s and 90s including social housing and in urbanisation and infrastructure (roads and bridges).

Tenants are involved in drafting, implementing and evaluating performance agreements with their landlords and the local authority. This entails four steps and forms an annual cycle.

Step 1: Draft local housing policy

Each local authority should draft a local housing policy. This is a concise document outlining the local authority's main housing goals. It could take the form of a Housing Strategy or Housing Agenda for a specific time period.

Step 2: Housing association submits a local offer on how it will contribute to the local housing policy

Once the local authority has published its housing policy each housing association with local stock is required to submit a local offer on how it will contribute to this policy. This may be part of a joint proposal of all housing associations working in the municipality. The offer should include a list of activities in which the housing association makes clear its contribution to the delivery of the housing policy.

The housing association consults with its own tenant organisation on the details of the offer. The offer is considered part of the housing association's regular policy development cycle. Tenant organisations therefore should be involved in the drafting of this policy in compliance with the Law on 'Consultation Tenants/Social Landlords'.

The housing association's offer should be reasonable: investments should be in proportion to the assets of the housing association and the local housing challenges. To assess this, the Minister will make available information on the financial capabilities of the housing association to the municipality and the tenant organisation. The housing association's offer should include an invitation to discuss the drafting of the performance agreements.

Step 3 - Draft performance agreements

Housing association, municipality and the tenants' organisations discuss the proposal submitted by the housing association and use the municipal housing policy to assess whether the proposal is proportionate and adequate.

If the three parties fail to agree on performance agreements, the municipality, tenants' organisation and/or housing association may report disputes to the Minister. Parties need to do this within four weeks after the dispute has arisen. An advisory committee will assess the dispute. In this assessment, the committee will consider the municipal housing policy and the financial capabilities of the housing association. The committee advises the Minister, who then makes a binding decision.

Step 4 – Evaluate implementation of performance agreements

In May of each year, the local authority, housing association and tenants' organisation discuss the progress made on the implementation of the performance agreements in the previous year. This concerns both the implementation of the annual and the five-yearly agreements. The housing association provides insight into implementation progress in its Annual Report.

Key actors: who are the main people who make the model work? Who are the model's main supporters?

The three local level parties (city/housing associations/tenants' organisations) are described in the Act. The Act also sets out what each party has to do (giving tenants information, participation of tenants in making plans with renovation). Each year the parties have to negotiate a plan or vision for the following year.

At national level the process is controlled by a Central Government Department and Ministerial Advisory Committee.

Enablers
<p>Legal compliance; Minister and Advisory Committee</p> <p>Local authority drafting of a housing policy: without this policy housing associations cannot reasonably be expected to formulate a local offer.</p> <p>Housing associations must draft their local offer after consultation with their tenants. The offer needs to be specific for the coming year and should be complemented with a more general overview of activities for the next four years. The housing association's offer is reviewed annually. Tenants' organisations must have the capacity and resources to participate effectively. The steps they have to take as group are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. come together 2. stay together 3. work together
Barriers
<p>Existing consultation arrangements with tenants must be strong</p> <p>Effective partnerships between associations to formulate a collective view at local authority level</p> <p>Government must provide good information</p> <p>Dispute resolution process</p> <p>Tenant organisation capacity</p> <p>Defining the goals is not easy as it is difficult within a group to have common goals.</p>
Brief Assessment of how the model works in practice
<p>The system has been in operation for only one year but builds on a much longer history in which tenants' organisations have sought and achieved a degree of influence on housing policy.</p> <p>The full cycle of the Housing Act 2015 provisions is not yet complete so it is too early to judge.</p> <p>From experience it is necessary to have a leader who can build bridges between people (internal) and the other parties (external).</p>
Evidence of Success
<p>The group needs a clear vision of the process and what the goals are and how to achieve them. You will never get everything you want so there should be no promises. The most important thing is that tenants never forget the goals and that sticking together makes them strong. It is very important that tenants stick together to achieve their goals. 'Five fingers make a fist that can punch and hits hard!'</p>
Scale and Costs
<p>The legislation has made this into a national system operating in every Dutch city. Amsterdam had a similar non-statutory scheme for a longer period. Housing associations are expected to absorb this into their costs, which are now strictly controlled. It will be important that the scheme is adequately resourced.</p>
Advantages for tenants?
<p>The 2015 Act is the latest stage in a long history of legislation regulating tenants' rights and talks to a certain level. In Amsterdam tenants negotiated a higher level of participation and rights using different Acts.</p> <p>Although these Acts have improved the position of the tenants and their organisations, this is only one step in the participation of the tenants of determining their living environment and conditions.</p>

5.4 English Model

Community Gateway: tenant representation on the board and through involvement in governance structures centrally, community links and innovative ways of involving and engaging tenants locally.

Relevance: Potential gap filled in Northern Ireland
There were no tenants on the main boards of social landlords in the Northern Ireland case studies. Community Gateway provides a longstanding example of tenant representation on the board of a large stock transfer landlord and of well-developed links to local communities.
Context: city, country in which this model operates and date introduced
Preston council transferred its stock of 7,700 homes to Community Gateway in 2005. It used a new model then being piloted with the Chartered Institute of Housing and Confederation for Co-operative Housing and others. Six other gateways were established across the UK.
Origins and background: where did the model come from and how did it develop?
<p>Preston Community Gateway was one of several pilots of the gateway model promoted by the Chartered Institute of Housing and Confederation of Co-operative Housing. In the report promoting the Gateway model in 2003 the main elements were specified as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community empowerment strategy • Local community areas • Community options studies • Consulting the wider community • Giving every local community a range of options for involvement <p>The project also provided model rules for community gateway associations, process maps for set up, and menus of options for local involvement and control (including options for devolved management and community ownership).</p> <p>The 2003 guidance proposed that Gateway associations should have tenants as ‘the largest single group on the board, holding one less than the majority of board places’ (p. 39), compared to one third of places, which was common in stock transfer models at the time.</p> <p>In 2002 Preston council held a series of workshops with tenants, councillors and staff on the Gateway model and it was agreed that this met the needs of Preston better than other transfer models. The council took two years to develop robust proposals on an area basis for a place on the 2004/5 transfer programme.</p> <p>Twelve years after transfer, Community Gateway provides a well-documented and sustainable model.</p>
Principles of the model
<p><i>Governance Structures</i></p> <p>There are currently four tenants on the main board of management of the Community Gateway Association, and the organisation is chaired by a tenant. The organisation also supports a Gateway Tenant Committee from which tenant board members are selected, and through which all policies and procedures of the organisation are approved and developed prior to Board approval.</p>

Developing leadership capacity

CGA operates a qualities framework for tenant involvement that supports the development of tenants to become more involved with the organisation. CGA funds accredited training packages and delivers a capacity building programme to support engagement and involvement.

Membership and voting

CGA is a membership organisation currently with 4,310 members. This is made up of 2,579 full members, 1,438 associate members, 67 leaseholders and 236 under 16 members. Membership is open not just to tenants but to people living and working in CGA communities. Tenants are not automatically members, they opt in to membership.

Sustaining resident and community involvement

CGA has a community empowerment strategy that supports and sustains resident and community involvement. We deliver a range of programmes to support this around digital inclusion, environment, young people, equality and diversity, employment and skills, community facilities, health and well-being.

Involving tenants locally

As well as supporting tenants to become involved centrally, CGA supports local tenants and residents associations, community centre management committees, local social enterprises, local PACT meetings, neighbourhood forums and develops neighbourhood action plans.

Key actors: who are the main people who make the model work? Who are the model's main supporters

Council
Government (approved the transfer in 2005)
New Landlord
Tenant Board members
Tenant membership
Wider membership
Mentors and advisers
Stakeholder partners
Staff
External agencies such as Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)

Enablers

National promotion and expert advice e.g. CHH, TPAS
Political support at local level
Preston Council buy in
Involved tenants and members
New tenants
CGA staff
Leadership of Chief Executive

Barriers

Sustaining early commitment and enthusiasm: keeping people involved once homes have been improved.
Leadership Succession – both staff and tenants
Challenge of new technology and willingness to be really open
Wider issues around local authority cuts

Brief Assessment of how the model works in practice
Link to the annual Community Empowerment Strategy for 15/16 presented at the 2016 AGM in September: https://youtu.be/rxbc2jPWDIg
Evidence of Success
<p>Lasted over 11 years since transfer</p> <p>Levels of participation are maintained. Membership is the highest it has ever been.</p> <p>Attendance at the September 2016 AGM was also the highest.</p> <p>Levels of tenant satisfaction with services have increased.</p> <p>TPAS accreditation for tenant involvement secured for the first time in February 2016.</p>
Scale and Costs
<p>Annual involvement budget of circa £350k from a £26m annual budget – includes just the community empowerment team staff and project costs. Costs are difficult to measure as all staff across the organisation are expected to embrace the ‘purple culture’ approach to involving tenants.</p> <p>Link to ‘Investing in Involvement’ statement for 2015/16: https://youtu.be/oB2ihBpTUiY</p>
Advantages for tenants?
<p>View expressed by tenants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenants know what tenants need in terms of their housing, neighbourhoods and community. By being involved we can ensure that service delivery meets our needs more effectively and efficiently. • By being involved we are ensuring that continuous improvement is at the heart of the housing service, and that it doesn’t become a remote and unresponsive service, as larger housing associations appear to be. • Involvement has a personal impact on those involved. It has an impact on our sense of belonging and worth. • Personal development and personal empowerment comes from our involvement. • “We work with staff as partners, and we have created a joint working culture...’the purple Gateway culture” • Wider neighbourhood issues become as important as the physical housing issues. • “We bring a wide range of life skills and experience to involvement that makes for better decisions” • Tenant experience on board and through the governance structures means we can share what’s best for our community at the heart of the organisation. We compliment, for example, independent board members by bringing the real and personal tenant experience to strategic decision making.

5.5 Welsh Model

New start up co-ops in Wales

Relevance: Potential gap filled in Northern Ireland
There are currently no opportunities for people in Northern Ireland to develop community-led models of new build housing. The Welsh model provides a way in which housing applicants and tenants can be supported to set up tenant and community controlled housing organisations by involving local authorities, housing providers and potential co-operators in a structured process.

Context: city, country in which this model operates and date introduced

In 2011, the Programme for Government committed Welsh Government to 'develop and promote new ways of providing land and funding for housing such as Community Land Trusts and co-operatives'. In 2012 a White Paper 'Housing for Wales' set a target of 7,500 new affordable homes of which 500 would be co-operative homes.

In 2012 the Welsh Government developed the *Co-operative Housing in Wales* project to achieve this target, working with experts from the co-operative and housing sectors. There are now 25 co-operative housing projects at various stages of development across Wales, covering a variety of tenures, urban and rural locations, aimed at people of different income levels, and using co-operative and community land trust approaches to fit the needs of local people.

There were three initial "pioneer" projects:

- Cardiff: Home Farm Village Housing Co-op: 41 homes rented to tenants from Cardiff Council's waiting list, developed by Cadwyn Housing Association and leased to the housing co-op
- Carmarthenshire: Old Oak Housing Co-operative: where the co-op will manage their 27 rented homes developed by Grwp Gwalia Housing Association
- Newport: Loftus Village Association: where 20 reduced cost shared ownership homes (with one market sale and one rented home) are managed by a co-operative, part of a mixed tenure urban village developed with Seren Housing Group.

In each case, the people who became residents of these schemes did not know anything about co-operative housing at the outset, but they were helped to understand the model and develop their skills to govern their co-operatives as their homes were being built.

A commitment has been made to build a further 20,000 new homes 2016-21 under the new Welsh Programme for Government, and there is an ongoing commitment that some of these will be co-operatives.

Origins and background: where did the model come from and how did it develop?

The Welsh Government established a co-operative housing stakeholder group in 2012 to explore ways to develop new schemes. This led to further work to encourage local authorities, housing associations and community organisations to develop community-led housing models. The Wales Co-operative Centre were commissioned and grant funded by the Welsh Government to provide a call off support service to organisations and groups to provide technical support to develop schemes. The Confederation of Co-operative Housing has been the principal organisation providing these support services.

Principles of the model

Basic criteria

- A set of basic criteria was developed that identified the type of housing being developed.
- Key criteria included that a democratic community membership structure would be set up that would control some or all aspects of the homes developed.
- A key principle from the outset has been that schemes would be developed in bespoke ways to suit the needs of local people.

Encouraging organisations to establish community-led schemes

- With very limited background in community-led housing schemes in Wales, three pioneer

organisations were recruited to the programme – Cadwyn Housing Association, Carmarthenshire County Council and Seren Housing Group.

- Each organisation was keen to support co-operative housing, and this was facilitated through access to the Welsh Government’s capital grant funding programme.
- Ongoing work is encouraging more local authorities and housing associations to develop co-operative housing schemes.
- Occasionally community groups have also been supported to develop schemes themselves.

Recruiting founder members

- Founder members/residents of schemes were identified in a variety of ways, but mainly through local authority or housing association waiting lists/registers.
- Founder members/residents were usually recruited around a year in advance of the homes being developed.
- Founder members/residents wanted a nice home and neighbourhood to live in, but were also attracted by the community aspect of the schemes.
- Each scheme was subsidised to make them affordable for people on low incomes.
- Those participating were required to attend a training and development programme before they could access the homes.

Training and Support for pioneer projects

- Founder members/residents met about twice a month over a period of a year to plan and develop their co-operative schemes.
- They were supported by expert facilitators and by housing associations developing the schemes.
- In each case, the developing groups have built up their skills and levels of responsibility and have made choices about how they want to manage their homes.
- They have also developed bonds and become ‘communities in waiting’.

Key actors: Who are the main people who make the model work? Who are the model’s main supporters?

Welsh Government (both at a policy level and through officers)
 Wales Co-operative Centre and Confederation of Co-operative Housing
 Housing Associations and Local Authorities
 Members of the public
 Potential and actual Co-operators

Enablers

- Strong political support
- The quality and commitment of Welsh civil servants driving the programme
- Access to the Welsh Government capital funding programme (on the same terms as other housing developments)
- Access to high quality support, advice and information through the Welsh Government, Wales Co-operative Centre and Confederation of Co-operative Housing to enable development of the co-operative groups
- Land for the schemes
- Willingness and enthusiasm of local people to participate in co-op development in order to get access to a nice home within a community
- Willingness of local authorities to enable co-operative housing and include the necessary flexibility in nominations systems for advance allocations at the community building stage
- Willingness and enthusiasm of housing associations (at governance level and amongst staff) to

<p>take a different and flexible approach to providing community-led housing; keenness amongst housing association staff to learn.</p>
<p>Barriers</p>
<p>Lack of existence of any co-operative or community-led housing schemes in Wales at the outset Consequent lack of local know-how The length of time it takes to develop new housing schemes The general barriers that face new housing schemes – obtaining land, finance, planning permission etc. Unwillingness of some local authorities and housing associations to try out different and innovative approaches Some concerns about how models including democratic control would be applied in practice and whether this would conflict with housing association good governance.</p>
<p>How the model works in practice</p>
<p>The Welsh Government has commissioned a research report and plans to produce <i>lessons learnt</i> documentation. There has been ongoing assessment in each housing association. Longer term success will need to be assessed by comparison between the co-operative housing projects and comparable housing schemes: Are they delivering good value for money? Are they leading to more satisfied residents? Are services effective? Are the communities developed functioning well? Have the individual members been able to use the skills they have developed in other ways?</p>
<p>Evidence of success</p>
<p>Initial measures of success include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The enthusiasm with which founder members have participated. • The transformation of housing staff to champions of the cause of co-operative housing and their enthusiasm to make successful schemes happen. • The snowball effect where gradually more local authorities and housing associations and communities are picking up on the idea (however, it is not yet a <i>fast-moving</i> snowball). • Gradual networking between co-operative members – still early days. • The impact of the Welsh programme in England – demonstrating how a community-led housing programme can be developed. • The Wales Co-operative Centre has now attracted private sector funding to augment funding provided by the Welsh Government. • General ongoing enthusiasm in the Welsh Government Stakeholder Group to the cause of co-operative housing over several years with the group now taking the lead to develop its own strategy moving forward; new ideas emerging in Wales about how to develop further.
<p>Scale and Costs</p>
<p>Scale: Around 25 co-operative and community-led schemes are now at various stages of development in Wales. These are general smallish scale new build schemes that are dependent on land and finance availability. Most of the schemes are between 20 and 40 homes – although there are some schemes of several hundred homes.</p> <p>Costs: are dependent on prevailing costs for scheme development generally. The capital cost of each co-operative housing scheme development has been comparable to equivalent non-co-operative schemes. If there is a need for new build homes (or to renovate existing buildings) then their capital costs are largely the same whether they are co-operative or not.</p> <p>Developing co-operative housing schemes does require some revenue support for the development of the co-operative groups.</p>

Advantages for tenants and shared owners?

The first completed scheme in Wales had only been in existence for less than six months at the time of this study, but there was evidence of the success of community-led schemes in England. Potential advantages include:

- Development of strong supportive communities
- As good, if not better, housing management
- High resident satisfaction
- Development of skills amongst co-operative members

5.6 Conclusions

This chapter has set out information on the four selected international models co-produced by the research team with expert advisers from each country familiar with the four models and how they work in practice. This information was circulated to all workshop participants in advance of the workshops (see chapter 6).

Workshop participants were invited to consider how relevant these models might be to future practice on tenant involvement in governance in Northern Ireland. They were asked in advance of the workshops to use the following criteria to check out the models and to think of questions they would like to ask speakers at the workshop.

- **Could this work here?**
- **Would tenants want to take part?**
- **What are the key similarities and differences in context**
- **Who is likely to be interested/support in Northern Ireland?**
- **What changes would it take to make it work here?**
- **What would be needed to sustain involvement?**
- **What might make this model attractive to tenants?**

6.0 Three Reality Check Workshops

6.1 Introduction and Purpose

- 6.1.1 Three workshops were held in October 2016 to enable tenants of the Housing Executive and housing associations, and other key stakeholders in Northern Ireland to discuss the relevance of the research on models of tenant involvement in governance.
- 6.1.2 The main purpose of the workshops was to identify and reality check the four international models outlined in Chapter 5, to assess their relevance and potential for adaptation and adoption in Northern Ireland.
- 6.1.3 These workshops provided much food for thought and suggested that all four models could fill gaps in existing opportunities for NI tenants to become involved in governance. One of the models could be developed in an incremental way building on existing NIHE involvement structures. The other three would require more fundamental changes to be implemented wholesale, but smaller step changes and pilot demonstration projects are suggested as a way to test the models.
- 6.1.4 The proposed new Independent Tenant Organisation with Supporting Communities could provide a significant enabling and training role in taking these models forward in line with the empowerment remit. Political support and input from stakeholders in DfC, NIHE, NIFHA, HAs and local councils would also be important to successful adoption. Most importantly, such models will only succeed with the support and active participation of tenants and landlords. Making the models attractive to tenants will therefore be fundamental.

6.2 Attendance and Participation

- 6.2.1 Thanks to Supporting Communities' extensive network of tenant and resident contacts, these workshops were well attended, exceeding the target numbers. In all around 120 people attended the three events. A range of interest groups were represented with the largest groups comprising NIHE tenants, HA tenants, HCN Central Forum and scrutiny panel members, representatives from NIHE-funded hard-to-reach fora (e.g. Rural Residents Forum, Disability Forum), migrant centre and local community associations. Others present included Supporting Communities staff and board members, HA and NIHE staff, Department for Communities, local councillors and council staff, one political party member officer, and the Director of Housing Rights.
- 6.2.2 In order to give all tenants the opportunity to attend, the workshops were held in three locations: Ballymena, Belfast and Craigavon. In practice there was much greater demand from tenants and other stakeholders for places at the Belfast workshop. There were also two complaints that no workshop was held in Derry/Londonderry or in the west.
- 6.2.3 The workshops were lively events with all participants taking the opportunity to express views through the post-it walls, small group discussions and plenary question and answer slots.

6.3 Programme and Method

- 6.3.1 Each workshop had a common programme, beginning with a chance to hear and comment on the research findings on the state of the art of tenant involvement in governance in Northern Ireland based on policy review, stakeholder interviews and three case studies.

- 6.3.2 A short presentation then summarised the international research process which comprised a literature review, typology and selection of models of tenant involvement in governance that appeared to fill gaps in the current options available in Northern Ireland.
- 6.3.3 The main part of each event then comprised a direct presentation of two (workshops 1 and 3) or three (workshop 2) of the four models by country experts followed by a reality check with tenants and other stakeholders, the method for which is set out below.
- 6.3.4 Appendix 2 includes a sample workshop programme, and the guidance notes which were provided to all attendees, together with the detailed model descriptions set out in Chapter 5 of this report.
- 6.3.5 The workshops aimed to ‘reality check’ four international models for relevance to Northern Ireland.
- Expert speakers introduced the four models using a common format based on a detailed pre-circulated report.
 - Detailed reality checking took place in a total of seven workshop groups held over the three days.
 - Each of these seven workshops was convened by a member of the Supporting Communities team and a member of the research team.
 - There was an opportunity for direct questions from tenants and other stakeholders to clarify how these models work in practice and how they might work in Northern Ireland.
 - All workshop participants had an opportunity to comment on the models using a ‘post it wall’ and a considerable number of these comments are presented in the workshop notes (Appendix 2).
 - We attempted to sum up views with a ‘reality check’ vote based on common criteria; however this was only achieved in the final workshop by which time the logistics had become better established.

6.4 Workshop Outcomes

- 6.4.1 These events each achieved high levels of participation and discussion of the models and their relevance to Northern Ireland. The atmosphere at the three events was very positive and discussion went on well beyond the formal times allowed. Participants made contacts with the country experts and research team members that are likely to result in follow up action and longer-term impact. There was excellent feedback on the events from the evaluation forms issued by Supporting Communities.
- 6.4.2 It was observed in each workshop that questions and discussion could have lasted much longer. In each workshop participants provided feedback using the suggested methods, but it was felt that a more detailed scrutiny and assessment of the detailed model outlines circulated before the event would have required a longer and more structured process.
- 6.4.3 There is potential for further events to be held, for example as part of a new Independent Tenant Organisation training programme, for tenants to work through the international models reports in a structured way and hold peer learning activities including study visits or virtual study visits via video conferencing with tenants and officers involved in the models in practice. Such work fits well with the empowerment brief of the Independent Tenant Organisation. Full reports on each of the workshops are included in Appendix 2.
- 6.4.4 A brief summary of each of the events is provided here.

- 6.4.5 The **Ballymena** event was attended by a mixed group of 30 tenants, staff and board members from NIHE and housing associations. There was strong support for existing NIHE involvement practices especially in relation to rural communities and regeneration schemes but some felt that tenants should have more input into design and allocations. There was recognition of the gap filled by the Dutch model – *‘finally the penny dropped – we got it and could see how the model could empower tenants and power shifts to the super councils and a more level playing field is needed for HA and NIHE landlords in responding to tenants; greater transparency and legal back up’*. The Austrian context was seen as very different to Northern Ireland and while *‘we would love the subsidised land and associated social clauses requiring tenant involvement’* the case seemed more like middle class housing. Nevertheless there were aspects that could be adapted to involve tenants more in design. It was suggested that tenants of recently completed schemes could be used to give feedback so that learning is used to inform future designs. There was also scope to establish affordable housing initiatives outside of the Common Selection Scheme with a focus on community involvement in design and management similar to the Austrian model.
- 6.4.6 The **Belfast Castle** event was on a larger scale, with 65 participants including HA tenants, NIHE scrutiny panel members, central forum members, housing association staff, NIHE staff, local councils, a political party member, Housing Rights and Supporting Communities staff. There were three discussion groups covering the English Community Gateway model as well as Austrian and Dutch models. There was a lot of interest from tenants in becoming involved in the design of new properties. NIHE was said to have *‘an open door for widening involvement options’* including tenant involvement in multi-agency groups at local authority level. Discussion with tenants from Preston Community Gateway highlighted the value of tenant board membership. Discussion highlighted the need for capacity building and skills development to support tenant board members and the potential opportunities of future NIHE transfers to pilot similar empowerment models. However the need to establish tenant interest as well as capacity for involvement was highlighted: *‘The Holy Grail is managing to secure volunteers to help’*.
- 6.4.7 The **Craigavon** event attracted 24 participants with a strong representation from NIHE Scrutiny panels, Central Forum and Supporting Communities staff. There were further fruitful discussions with the Preston tenants and the information sharing session was lively and could have continued for much longer. This suggests the potential value of a study visit to Preston for informal peer sharing of knowledge. A new model was introduced from the recent flowering of housing co-ops in Wales. The model had benefited from support from the Welsh government which gave a strong policy and funding commitment within its Programme for Government. Other key barriers to introduction in Northern Ireland were seen to be the Common Selection Scheme and fear of paramilitary control. However, the practical experience of how co-ops could be built from a zero base by a partnership between housing associations, a local intermediary (the Wales Co-operative Centre) and the specialist Confederation of Co-operative Housing indicated tried and tested model of how progress could be made from a similar zero baseline in Northern Ireland. While *‘it’s not for everyone and it would need gradual learning process’* as in Wales, there was little doubt that it could achieve similar support from participants once the projects were established.
- 6.4.8 In the next four sections (6.5-6.9) we provide an overview of discussion and assessment of each of the four models.

6.5 The Austrian model

- 6.5.1 The approach taken by municipal government in Vienna to enabling tenant participation in new build schemes fills an important gap in tenant involvement in Northern Ireland. It provides new tenants with a significant input into design and formation of new communities well before moving in to new housing developments.
- 6.5.2 Moreover community building is supported by the funding and regulatory system in Vienna. In contrast new tenants of housing association schemes in Northern Ireland are not identified until just before letting through the Common Selection Scheme. Their views on design may only be considered around a year after the letting, but this information is generally not used systematically to influence future design.
- 6.5.3 Key barriers to implementation in NI are the Common Selection Scheme and existing management and development practices. New housing funding does not currently provide incentives for community building, although the TBUC and shared futures approach may provide a prototype for building new communities at the point of allocation.
- 6.5.4 **Workshop participants felt that the Austrian model could fill a gap but would be hard to implement, with major changes required to existing systems. However if the model were implemented it would be expected to gain support from active tenants and could be very attractive to new tenants.**

6.6 The Dutch model

- 6.6.1 The tripartite consultation model of local performance agreements introduced in the Dutch Housing Act 2015 would also fill a gap in Northern Ireland and one that would match the super councils introduced in Northern Ireland with enhanced community planning and housing powers.
- 6.6.2 This model would enhance tenant voice in local strategic planning between councils and housing providers (community strategies and planning for new build). This could be regarded as an incremental change since the NIHE scrutiny panels have already moved to be conterminous with the super council areas and HAs and HA tenants have been encouraged to attend inter-agency meetings at the local level.
- 6.6.3 It could also help in aligning consultation and engagement arrangements with social housing tenants more closely across the HA and NIHE sectors. However, it could be argued that an area based model is less attractive to landlords than one which enables tenants to directly influence their landlords.
- 6.6.4 However, the underlying change is a much more fundamental step change and something that hasn't been done in Northern Ireland since planning powers were removed from the councils in the 1970s.
- 6.6.5 The Dutch model also required legislation to move from voluntary to legally backed annual agreements between landlords, tenants and local authorities. This could also be regarded as an overly bureaucratic approach.
- 6.6.6 **On balance, workshop participants felt that the model could fill a gap but would be hard to implement, requiring changes in mind sets and systems and requiring knowledge and capacity**

building for all parties. However, if the model were implemented it would be expected to gain tenant support and could be attractive to some tenants.

6.7 The English model

- 6.7.1 The Community Gateway model adopted in Preston for a stock transfer in 2005 would fill an important gap in involving tenants as voting members of their association with the largest representation at the highest level of governance, the board.
- 6.7.2 While this appears a major difference to NI and required a large scale stock transfer to achieve in Preston, it could be regarded as an incremental change for the NIHE engagement structure. It could extend the existing structure of tenant representation within NIHE from the Housing Community Network, Scrutiny Panels and Central Forum to include board representation and a tenant membership structure. It might be worth considering in connection with the small-scale stock transfers by NIHE which have to date been more concerned with stock improvement than tenant empowerment.
- 6.7.3 **Workshop participants were very impressed by the presentation and Q&A with Preston tenants and were convinced that the model fills a gap and could work in NI with support from tenants and landlords.**
- 6.7.4 **The current programme of small scale stock transfers by the NIHE to HAs to invest in the refurbishment of estates could also provide an opportunity for local communities to become involved in decision making.**

6.8 The Welsh model

- 6.8.1 An initiative similar to the recent programme of new housing co-operatives being promoted by the Welsh Government through the Wales Co-operative Centre and the Confederation of Co-operative Housing could also fill an important gap in Northern Ireland's housing landscape. It would enable local residents to get involved in running small-scale housing schemes for themselves with support from landlords, enabling and promotional agencies.
- 6.8.2 There are currently no housing co-operatives in Northern Ireland and this was felt to be partly related to fears of 'paramilitary capture' but also to a lack of institutional support in government, the NIHE or HA sector. However, the latter could have been said of Wales ten years ago, and this has been turned around through political will and effective enabling partnerships.
- 6.8.3 **Workshop participants felt that the model could fill a gap but would be hard to implement, requiring changes in mind sets and systems and requiring knowledge and capacity building for all parties.**
- 6.8.4 **If the model were implemented it would be expected to gain tenant support and could be attractive to some tenants, but perhaps not for those in the greatest and most immediate housing need.**

7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

- 7.1.1 This project has provided the opportunity for a systematic review of the current state of the art on tenant involvement in the governance of social housing in Northern Ireland and an evidence review of the wider range of governance models in operation in GB and Europe.
- 7.1.2 These two reviews (Chapters 2 and 3) have provided the platform to consider a range of steps that could be taken to enhance levels of involvement that align with the key directions of change in NI. Relevant contextual changes include The Social Housing Reform Programme, Tenant Participation Strategy and TP Strategy Action Plan; the growth of the housing association sector to provide nearly a third of all social housing in NI through a smaller number of larger HAs; and further changes in delivery of NIHE housing including the Transformation Programme and strategies for Community Empowerment and Social Enterprise, which build on 30 years of successful tenant engagement through the Housing Community Network and more recently through Scrutiny Panels.
- 7.1.3 A typology of approaches to tenant involvement in governance was developed from the evidence review. This identified the importance of underlying assumptions about the purpose of tenant involvement and the problems that it is intended to address, and the scale and organisational arrangements within which it is introduced. One clear conclusion is that the question of tenant involvement in governance is far wider than how many, if any, seats on the main governing bodies of social housing providers should be held by tenants.
- 7.1.4 A key contribution of the project has been to identify some specific governance models that are operating successfully in different policy and organisational contexts across Europe and which appear to be relevant to current gaps in tenant involvement opportunities in the governance of social housing in Northern Ireland. An iterative and collaborative approach was taken to the task of identifying and testing the models and the gaps. In the second stage of the project purposive case studies were undertaken in Northern Ireland and in Austria, the Netherlands, England and Wales. In the final stage of the project, workshops were held to establish a dialogue between experts on the models and tenants and other stakeholders in Northern Ireland social housing governance.
- 7.1.5 Case studies of current governance practice in NI were helpful in clarifying the strengths of current practice and the nature of current gaps. Four key strengths were identified:
- The three case studies highlighted the **wide range of approaches** to involving tenants of social housing in Northern Ireland, many of which may be considered to be relevant to tenant involvement in governance.
 - These include central and regional tenant forums with direct links to decision making bodies within the landlord organisations, tenant scrutiny of landlord services, networking of local tenant and community associations, menus of involvement enabling tenants to choose methods that suit them, and social enterprise models for local employment of tenants.
 - Despite limited links between tenants groups in the two sectors, and a degree of suspicion particularly of housing associations by NIHE tenants, there is a remarkable **similarity in the approaches being developed**.
 - These similarities probably owe much to the **expertise, coordination and support of both sectors by Supporting Communities** and the emerging regulatory expectations for tenant involvement.

- 7.1.6 The case studies also revealed four significant current gaps in tenant involvement in governance in NI:
- There are currently no tenants on the main boards of the landlords.
 - There are no local areas where tenants can control the management of their estates to the extent found in models such as co-operatives and tenant management organisations.
 - There is no support for tenants' groups to form prior to moving in to their properties or to influence the design and management of new housing schemes.
 - Relationships of housing organisations with Northern Ireland's 11 new local authorities (known as super councils because they are larger and have more powers than the 26 local authorities they replaced) are developing. But there is currently no provision for tenants to have a voice in these developing relationships.
- 7.1.7 Case studies of four alternative governance models found in four countries showed the potential for adaptation and adoption in NI in the context of social housing reform and the creation of an Independent Tenant Organisation:
- The **Austrian** case study makes a particular contribution to the involvement of tenants in design and in forming community governance groups before they move into new estates, thereby building in involvement from the start.
 - The **Dutch** case study addresses the involvement of tenants in the wider governance of social housing at a local authority level by empowering residents to negotiate annual performance agreements and plans with their landlords and with the local authority.
 - The **English** case study of the 'Community Gateway' model provides a longstanding sustained example of the benefits of involving tenants in governance at the board level while also ensuring links to opportunities for involvement at local community level.
 - The **Welsh** case study provides a further example of involving tenants in the design and governance of new social and affordable housing projects by establishing housing co-operatives. It shows what can be achieved in a housing system which – like Northern Ireland's – had no local tenant managed housing co-operatives until five years ago.
- 7.1.8 The workshops were carefully structured to include key findings from the earlier evidence review stages of the project to bring participants up to speed with project thinking. The central focus was to enable direct discussion of the relevance of the four international models with NI tenants and experts. In the case of Preston Gateway (the English model) there was a direct dialogue with two tenant members of the governing board and the chair of the tenant forum, and in the case of the Dutch model the dialogue was with a tenant member of the Amsterdam Tenants Federation.
- 7.1.9 The workshops established that all four proposed models could potentially fill some of the gaps in existing opportunities for Northern Ireland tenants to influence housing governance. While there was greatest support for adapting the Community Gateway model from England, some suggestions were made on how each model could be explored further in Northern Ireland by involving tenants and other stakeholders in an incremental process of exploration and change.
- 7.1.10 The establishment of an Independent Tenant Organisation in Northern Ireland, as an outcome of the Social Housing Reform Programme and Tenant Participation Strategy will provide an ideal opportunity to explore these models further⁷. This could start with fact-finding activities to establish support and interest from relevant stakeholders in Northern Ireland for elements of

⁷ An Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO) for Northern Ireland was due to be established in 2017 following consultation by Government on proposals developed in the Tenant Participation Strategy as part of the Social Housing Reform Programme. A key aim of the ITO is to ensure consistency across the Northern Ireland social housing sector and to implement the Tenant Participation Strategy. This report is relevant to the latter aim.

the four models, and in particular the Community Gateway Model which secured the greatest support at the workshops, to be adopted in Northern Ireland.

- 7.1.11 The following section (7.2) sets out the suggestions emerging from the three workshops, while the final section (7.3) identifies a specific set of policy recommendations to three groups of policy actors to enable these suggestions to be taken forward.

7.2 Workshop Suggestions

- 7.2.1 Following the three workshops, reports of each workshop were compiled (see Appendix 2.3) and an overview report was published through the project website and promoted through a blog posted in the Supporting Communities e-zine, with the following suggestions for how the four models could be taken forward.

- 7.2.2 **The English Gateway Model** gained the greatest support in the workshops and might form the basis of early follow up action to include:

- Fact-finding visits to Preston (and perhaps to other Gateways) to develop a tenant-led proposal for a bespoke gateway model to fit NI.
- Ongoing dialogue via social media and video conferencing.
- These activities and more structured exploration of the descriptions of governance models compiled for this project could be part of an empowerment training programme initiated by the Independent Tenant Organisation.
- Discussions with NIHE Board to establish support to adapt existing NIHE tenant engagement system to include tenant board members and a membership model. This could be developed incrementally by building on the existing Housing Community Network, Scrutiny Panel and Central Forum structure. Capacity building and training for potential board members could be taken forward by the Independent Tenant Organisation. This would not necessarily require a radical single change as in the English stock transfer ballot.
- Establish a working group with interested parties coordinated by the new Independent Tenant Organisation with HAs, NIHE, NIFHA and DfC to identify scope for Gateway models for HAs could be explored as a separate pilot. The NIHE stock transfer programme could provide a ready vehicle for small scale gateway governance models.
- There could be further research on the level of support for such proposals from tenants in the areas to form part of the next generation of small scale transfers by NIHE.

- 7.2.3 **The Welsh Co-op Model** was viewed positively by some tenants. The main barrier identified to this model was the lack of institutional support from political parties, and existing housing agencies. The Welsh example shows how such barriers can be addressed by creating demonstration projects and pilots through partnerships between enabling agencies:

- Identify a local partner to work with CCCH in a similar way to the Welsh Co-op Centre. This could be a role for the new Independent Tenant Organisation as part of their empowerment brief. Supporting Communities currently provide training and support on tenant involvement and workshops on co-op options would be a natural development.
- Establish a working group with interested parties co-ordinated by the new Independent Tenant Organisation with CCCH, HAs, NIHE, NIFHA and DfC to identify scope for a small pilot programme similar to the Welsh programme.
- Carry out further research to attract support from tenants and housing applicants interested in the co-operative option.
- Establish demonstration projects on a pilot basis without major system changes.
- Develop an affordable rent or low cost ownership model outside of the Common Selection Scheme to avoid barriers to tenant selection for co-operatives.

- Work with a small housing association interested in retaining its community identity to move towards a mutual model with its existing tenants. This would also avoid the common selection scheme as participants would already be tenants.
- As above, a co-op option could also be included for small scale NIHE stock transfer.

7.2.4 **The Austrian model** was seen as interesting but coming from a very different context to NI in terms of the amount of new affordable housing being built and the favourable procurement regime for funding tenant involvement initiatives. There are two main ways in which this inspiring example could be followed up. First, by finding alternative mechanisms to involve tenants in design and, second, to develop demonstration projects building on the Shared Futures model and with affordable rather than social housing schemes:

- Enhance existing feedback from new residents a year after occupancy and ensure feedback influences design of future schemes including Housing Association Design Guide
- Establish a working group coordinated by the new Independent Tenant Organisation with interested HAs, NIHE, NIFHA and DfC to identify scope for a small pilot programme for tenants to be involved in design and community participation for their new homes
- Establish Demonstration Projects on a pilot basis without major system changes; two possibilities are suggested:
 - Support a group of residents moving in to a Shared Futures TBUC scheme on influencing design and community building.
 - Create a pilot for an affordable rented scheme outside of social housing.

7.2.5 **The Dutch Model** was seen by some workshop participants as consistent with the existing direction of travel but by others as a radical change and involving unnecessary complexity. However, the underlying change is a much more fundamental step change and something that hasn't been done in Northern Ireland since planning powers were removed from the councils in the 1970s. Furthermore, an area based model may be less attractive to tenants than one that enables them to directly influence their landlords. However, there is scope for exploration of the model without taking the strong legal and local accountability steps implied in the full Dutch model under the Dutch Housing Act 2015:

- Area Scrutiny Panels are already coterminous with the new super council areas. There are also existing inter-agency meetings in some areas which are attended by HA staff but not HA tenants.
- Scrutiny Panels could include liaison with local councils and HAs on their agendas within their existing remit over the next year to see what opportunities may arise for a more formal accountability system similar to the Dutch one.
- Within the next year each scrutiny panel could undertake a scrutiny review on a theme that involves the local authority and HAs. One possibility is 'the new build programme, planning and meeting local housing needs' another might be 'involvement of tenants in local community strategies'.

7.3 Policy Recommendations

- 7.3.1 The establishment of an Independent Tenant Organisation in NI, as an outcome of the Social Housing Reform Programme and Tenant Participation Strategy provides an ideal opportunity to explore these models further. This could start with fact-finding activities and establishing support from relevant stakeholders in NI for elements of the four models, and in particular the Community Gateway Model which secured the greatest support at the workshops, to be adopted in NI.
- 7.3.2 After reflection on the project as a whole and discussion of the findings with the project advisory group in February and subsequently considering all comments on the draft report, the following targeted recommendations are proposed for four groups of policy actors. Together these recommendations could provide a framework for taking forward this evidence-based learning in a realistic way that reflects the interest of tenants and the changing policy context.
- 7.3.3 Our recommendations for policy are addressed to four main groups of policy actors as indicated against each recommendation:

- A: *the Housing Executive;***
B: *the Department for Communities;*
C: *the independent boards of housing associations; and*
D: *the Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO)*

1. To consider the value of involving tenants in governance and where this is appropriate:
 - to put in place arrangements to enable and encourage suitably skilled tenants to join boards and sub-committees .
 - to ensure that relevant training, induction and support is provided to tenant board and committee members.

Recommendation made to:
B (for NIHE Board);
C (for Housing Associations)
2. To use the opportunity provided by the planned programme of stock transfers to embed future tenant involvement (as evidenced by Preston Community Gateway).

Recommendation made to:
A and B to introduce as part of the competitive procurement process; and
C as part of post-stock transfer governance
3. To explore opportunities for social housing tenants to be involved in discussing local area plans and agreements with social landlords on issues that pertain to their interests as part of Community Planning processes.

Recommendation made to:
A, B and C
4. To follow up the four international models as part of the ITO's work on the Tenant Participation Strategy Action Plan.

Recommendation made to:
D

5. To provide training and peer learning opportunities for tenants to explore the international models first hand.
Recommendation made to:
D
6. To initiate a dialogue with Department for Communities and social landlords on practical steps to take forward the aspects of the models that have tenant interest and support.
Recommendation made to:
D
7. To support pilot initiatives emerging from this dialogue by capacity building and information sharing with tenants and to promote this with the Department for Communities and social landlords.
Recommendation made to:
D
8. To support practical initiatives to take forward the tenant involvement aspects of the Social Housing Reform programme.
Recommendation made to:
B
9. To consider ways in which significant barriers such as the common selection scheme can be overcome to allow positive pilot programmes for tenant involvement to happen.
Recommendation made to:
B
10. To embed tenant involvement opportunities into future procurement arrangements for social and affordable housing (learning from the Welsh and Austrian models).
Recommendation made to:
B

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Proposals for a new regulatory framework for social housing providers in Northern Ireland
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Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

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Appendix 1 - Research Instruments

A 1.1 Topic Guide for State of the Art Review NI

SCOPING INTERVIEWS – TOPIC GUIDE

1. Explain project in outline terms using participant Info sheet/project plan

Ask to sign **consent form**

Background to Organisation: Role of the interviewee and previous experience; main purpose and remit and how things are changing over recent and next few years

2. **Background to policy context:** role of tenant involvement strategy; scenarios of NIHE future management; scope for greater resident involvement in governance?

3. **Tenant and Resident involvement: how does it work now in NI?**

4(a). Northern Ireland Housing Executive

- board level in NIHE
- regional forums and committees
- estate level governance initiatives
- role of SCNI and other agencies in enabling participation
- intersect between TP and governance structures
- estate level transfers
- any devolved management of services...estate budgets etc.?
- why no tenants on NIHE board?
- strengths and weaknesses
- enablers and barriers

4(b). Housing association sector

- current issues for tenant and resident involvement
- growth and mergers
- regulation
- why are there no co-ops in NI?
- why are there so few residents on boards?

5. Models of tenant and resident involvement

- What models of resident involvement in governance is the interviewee aware of from other jurisdictions?
- Strengths and weaknesses of different models
- Stock transfers Scotland and England ...community mutuals Walesresident led large scale social housing in Denmark, large scale co-ops in Austria etc
- Relevance to NI and to NIHE and to HAs in NI
- Would co-op models be relevant and at what scale level?
- Would a quota of residents on main board of NIHE be a good thing?
- Would more formal resident-led governance at regional and estate level work within NIHE?
- How could NI HAs increase tenant involvement in governance?

6. Training, development and skills Issues

- Training needs analysis

- Motivation for tenants and residents to get involved?
- Skills and benefits of involvement in governance
- Support and networks needed to enhance effectiveness of involvement.

7. **What do you hope our project might achieve?**

- How might it best achieve this?
- Who else should we interview in NI experts stage? (other bodies....residents associations/ Reps with extensive experience)
- How to select the case studiesoptions. Of a regional level case within NIHE/SCNI projects, of estates transfers from NIHE, of HA resident governance structures.
- Aim of case studies to find out what *is* and to test what *might be*. Is there support? How would it work? Informed by international models but fit to NI context and possibilities.
- How best to organise the three policy forum events

8. **Other issues suggested by Interviewee**

9. **Summing up**

- Next steps in the research

A.1.2 Stakeholder Interviews NI

Apex Housing Association

Sheena McCallion

Choice Housing Association

Michael McDonnell

Clanmil Housing Association

Collette Moore and Tim O'Malley

Department for Social Development

Bernie Rooney

Donald Heaney

Shane Clements

Disability Action

Patricia Bray

Fold Housing Association

Eileen Patterson

Helm Housing Association

John McPeake

Housing Community Network

Linda Watson

Housing Rights

Janet Hunter

Newington Housing Association

Anthony Kerr

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Gerry Flynn

Caroline Connor

Colm McQuillan

Jennifer Hawthorne

Gerry Duffy

Deirdre Crawford

Rural Community Network

Kate Clifford

Aidan Campbell

Supporting Communities

Colm McDaid

Laura O'Dowd

Triangle Housing Association

Chris Alexander

A 1.3 Brief for International Evidence Review

TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE BRIEF FOR LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of the project is to explore the relevance of international models and practices of tenant involvement in governance to evolving governance of social housing in Northern Ireland. In the first part of the project we will identify a typology of models used to facilitate tenant involvement in housing governance in Great Britain (GB) and Europe. This will involve a literature review and expert input. The typology will be used at later stages of the project to test and develop relevant approaches to fit the Northern Ireland context. This note provides a brief for the literature review.

OUTPUT

The output will be a short Evidence Review paper (10-15 pages) and a Typology of models and approaches (1-2 page table).

PROCESS

- Search recent academic and practice literature on housing governance and resident participation with search parameters **Europe, GB, Scotland, England, Wales, since 2000** and search terms: **resident/tenant involvement, participation, empowerment, AND social/public/non-profit housing AND corporate governance, boards, committees.**
- Add purposive search based on expert recommendations from David, Peter and European advisory panel.
- Shortlist from initial search population to maximise range and provenance of evidence, focusing on practical implementation experience rather than governance design and structures, whilst minimising volume to identify set of sources that can answer our questions, build a typology and support an authoritative review paper of only 10-12 pages in length.
- Review evidence against the main **themes and questions** suggested below and the main dimensions of the typology.
- Edit review into the 10-15 page paper and 1-2 page typology.

THEMES AND QUESTIONS:

What do we know about resident involvement in governance?

- Governing Boards: extent of resident representation
- Governing Boards: balancing representation and skills based recruitment
- Connections between board representation and wider tenant involvement structures
- Geographical scope of tenant governance: estate, community, local authority, national
- Economic costs and benefits of resident involvement in governance
- Resident governance and stock transfer/stock reinvestment/community regeneration
- Resident governance and decision making processes, devolved budgets and local decision making
- Domains of decisions residents involved in: housing management, community services, repairs and maintenance, reinvestment, new stock investment, community investment, corporate strategy, corporate finance, HR and staff employment
- Support for resident involvement in governance: capacity building, training, mentoring
- Organisational culture and barriers/enablers to resident involvement in governance
- Organisational Forms: TMOs/estate management boards, Co-ops, Community Mutuals, Community Based Housing Associations, community-led housing organisations, local authorities, housing associations.

A 1.4 Template for International Model Descriptions

Name of Model:	
Relevance: Potential Gap Filled in Northern Ireland:	
Context: city, country in which this model operates and date introduced	
Origins and background: where did the model come from and how did it develop?	
Brief description of the principles of the model	
Key actors: who are the main people who make the model work? Who are the model's main supporters	
Enablers:	
Barriers:	
Brief assessment of how the model works in practice	
Evidence of success:	
Scale and costs:	
Advantages for tenants?	

A 1.5 Participant Information Sheet (Example)

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TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for taking part in this study. The Housing and Communities Research Group at the University of Birmingham has been commissioned by The Northern Ireland Housing Executive to undertake this study of Tenant involvement in Governance: models and practices. This participant information sheet sets out the aims of the study, how it will be conducted and other useful information.

The aim of the project is to explore the relevance of international models and practices of tenant involvement in governance to evolving governance of social housing in Northern Ireland.

In the first part of the project we will identify a typology of models used to facilitate tenant involvement in housing governance in Great Britain (GB) and Europe. This will involve a literature review and expert input. We will also identify the current context for housing governance in Northern Ireland (NI) through scoping interviews with stakeholders in Northern Ireland.

In the second part of the project we will undertake case study work to understand more about how the GB and Europe models work in practice and the appropriateness of different models to the housing sector in NI. There will be three case studies selected after consultation with experts including Supporting Communities NI and Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and the Project Advisory Group.

In the final part of the project we will consult with NI stakeholders including tenants and residents through a series of three consultation events to be held in May and June 2016. This will include a NIHE Intelligence Exchange event and two regional workshops facilitated with Supporting Communities NI.

All participants in the study will be asked to give informed consent and will have the right to withdraw at any stage. Individual tenant and resident participants will be anonymous. Organisations taking part in the study will be asked for permission to include material they have supplied in project reports, webpage and learning events. We aim to complete the study by September 2016 and will share the results with all study participants via a webpage:

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/social-policy/departments/social-policy-social-work/research/projects/2015/tenant-engagement-in-governance.asp>

What will the interviews cover?

In the first stage of the project we will be undertaking depth interviews in NI with key experts and stakeholders to understand more about the context for tenant involvement in housing governance. This will include recent policies for housing delivery and regulation in NI, the promotion of tenant participation and good governance of the housing sector. Interviewees will also be asked for their perspectives on different governance models and practices and on enablers and barriers and costs and benefits of more participative models. We will also be seeking advice from an expert panel to enable us to develop a typology of governance models for social housing from GB and European countries. This advice will guide our state of the art literature review and selection of follow up case studies.

What will the case studies cover?

Our follow up case studies of tenant governance models will follow desk research and website analysis to identify key scheme features building on the typology from stage 1. The main focus of these follow up telephone interviews will be to clarify how the various models work in practice.

We will also undertake three case studies in NI to establish how tenant involvement in governance currently operates and to test views on alternative governance options. Each case study will include interviews with executive staff and board members and a focus group with tenants and residents.

What will the sharing of learning and consultation on options involve?

Tenants and residents and other stakeholder from across Northern Ireland will be invited to participate in three consultation events. Two of the three will be for tenants and residents exclusively and will be convened with Supporting Communities NI. The other will be for a mix of stakeholders with an interest in the future governance of social housing in NI and will be part of a NIHE Intelligence Exchange.. Events will be publicised through existing networks and a project webpage. This web page will also be used to share information and promote dialogue. Participation is entirely voluntary. Permission will be sought to share any information on the website or through learning events.

Do I have to take Part?

Your involvement in this project is important in helping us to better understand the options and their relevance to NI. We believe your views are important so that they can feed into the development of

future governance arrangements for social housing in NI. If you do decide to take part you are free to withdraw at any time.

How information is stored

We will digitally record interviews. The transcript of your interview and/or a digital file of the recording will be held securely on a password protected computer at the University. The raw information we collect will be accessible by the researcher team only. Processed information from the project will be disseminated with permission via our project webpage.

Study Team

The scoping study is being undertaken by Professor David Mullins, Peter Shanks and Dr Halima Sacranie.

Finding Out about the Research Results

Participants will receive short summary reports of each of the three stages of the project. Findings will be made accessible via the project webpage.

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/social-policy/departments/social-policy-social-work/research/projects/2015/tenant-engagement-in-governance.asp>

Contact/ Further Questions

If you have any further questions about the research please contact: Professor David Mullins
d.w.mullins@bham.ac.uk.

A 1.6 NI Case Studies Summary Topic Guide

CASE STUDIES - DRAFT TOPIC GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

- **How housing governance works now in case study**
 - Governance structures
 - How decisions are made
 - Role of tenants and residents
 - Board level
 - Consultation structures
 - Tenant scrutiny

- **Views on the typology emerging from Stage 1 of the project (international models and practices)**
 - Discuss pros and cons of different models
 - Discuss whether and how models might work in NI and in case study specifically
 - Explore barriers and enablers to change

- **Views on how housing context is likely to change in NI in next five years**
 - Impact of social housing reform programme – future arrangements for NIHE
 - Impact of DSD Tenant Participation Strategy
 - Impact of change in HA sector

- **Summing up on most relevant approaches to future involvement of tenants and residents in governance**
 - Feed into report conclusions
 - Possible recommendations

A 1.7 Discussion Points from State of the Art Review

- i. How do we reconcile the need for streamlined management and administration with the need to allow spontaneity and bottom up community engagement and accountability? What do tenants feel about the current NIHE community involvement infrastructure; its operation and effectiveness?
- ii. How best can HAs respond to the tenant participation agenda? Should they develop their own centralised structure like the NIHE? Should they continue as they are? Can they engage more formally with existing NIHE structures? Do stakeholders favour the establishment of Housing Provider Forums? If so, who would act as the enabler?
- iii. The NIHE tenant involvement infrastructure is well developed. The next stage along the continuum is tenant directorships. How do tenants feel about being given the opportunity to sit on social landlord boards / apply for board positions? Or would members prefer an external challenge role?
- iv. What would be deemed as acceptable evidence in terms of meeting the consumer standard of regulation? Should tenants have a role to play in the regulation process? If so, what might that look like?
- v. Is there potential for closer working relationships between the Northern Ireland Housing Council the NIHE Central Housing Forum? How can the HA sector respond to councillor concerns of numerous HAs operating within certain local communities? Would cross-sector forums of tenants, HAs, NIHE organised around the new super council areas be a good way forward?
- vi. What are the motivating factors for tenants becoming involved? What makes them continue to stay involved? How can we avoid dangers of self- interest and 'professionalized tenant representatives'? How can we ensure the tenants are representative of the diversity of people who have and who need housing? How can landlords engage more effectively with easy to ignore groups including supported housing tenants? Should recruitment and appraisals be introduced for Area Scrutiny Panel and Central Housing Forum members?
- vii. Should community engagement structures cater for all tenures, social tenants, leaseholders, home owners and private tenants? The case *for* is that all may be affected by decisions made by NIHE and HAs in their neighbourhoods. The case *against* is that other tenures may be seen to dilute tenants' rights to accountability from their landlord.
- viii. How can landlords promote the benefits of becoming involved? What measures can be used to ensure succession planning? What role can technology play in promoting tenant engagement?
- ix. How do stakeholders including tenants feel about community empowerment and assuming control of housing stock? What issues/opportunities might arise? Should stock transfer occur might this create opportunities for greater community involvement/empowerment? If so, what structures and practices would stakeholders like to see implemented?
- x. Should the promotion of social enterprise and community investment in social housing neighbourhoods be regarded as a key part of the debate about tenant involvement in governance? Such initiatives can do much to transfer power to poor communities with low levels of employment, and increase their influence in their neighbourhoods.

Appendix 2: Workshop Documents

A 2.1 Sample Programme

PROGRAMME for Friday 21st October 2016 in Marlborough House, Craigavon from 10am -1pm

10.00 am	Arrivals and networking
10.10 am	Welcome and background to the Project – Colm McDaid and David Mullins
10.20 am	Findings from State of Art Review and Case Studies in Northern Ireland – Peter Shanks, University of Birmingham: <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Strengths of tenant involvement in governance in NI➤ Views on main barriers and enablers for the future➤ Specific steps for HAs and NIHE and others
10.40 am	Plenary discussion of possible next steps
10.50 am	International Models Overview and introduction to reality checking exercise – Professor David Mullins, University of Birmingham <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What can we learn from different contexts?➤ Four models worth exploring in Northern Ireland➤ How can strong involvement be established from the start?➤ What kinds of partnerships can be established with landlords to build resident involvement?➤ How can tenants and communities be involved in governing large social landlords?➤ How can tenants be involved in governance of housing across a council area?
11.05 am	Q&A
11.15 am	Tea and Coffee
11.30 am	Reality Checking Specific Models – participative workshops

We have invited four international speakers to each present one of the models¹ highlighted in the international review for critical discussion of relevance to Northern Ireland.

- **Austrian Model** – building participation into the development process – Richard Lang, University of Linz (**Workshop 1 Wednesday 19th October**)
- **Dutch Model** – Local Area Agreements 2015 Housing Act – Daniel Bosch, Board Member Amsterdam Tenants Association (**Workshop 2 Thursday 20th October**)
- **Welsh Model** – new start up coops in Wales – Nic Bliss, Confederation of Cooperative Housing (**Workshop 3 Friday 21st October**)
- **English Model** – Community Gateway - tenant representation on the board, community links & innovative ways of involving and engaging tenants – Paul Kelly with Veronica McLintock, David Yates,

and Angela Ayres, Tenant Board Members Community Gateway Association (**Workshop 4 Friday 21st October**)

There will be two presentations of 15 minutes before we split into two groups to consider relevance of each to Northern Ireland.

12 noon **Small Group discussions introduced by Supporting Communities**

The response on relevance to Northern Ireland will be led by a member of the Supporting Communities team followed by your questions and assessment.

12.45 pm **Round up Discussion** – Supporting Communities

1.00 pm **Close**

A 2.2 Guidance Notes

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TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE: MODELS AND PRACTICES

'Reality Check'

PREPARATION FOR TENANTS PARTICIPATING IN REALITY CHECK OF 4 INTERNATIONAL MODELS OF TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE AT WORKSHOPS IN BALLYMENA, BELFAST AND CRAIGAVON
OCTOBER 19-21 2016

Purpose

3 workshops have been organised to enable you as tenants of the Housing Executive and housing associations, and other key stakeholders in Northern Ireland, to discuss the relevance of recent research on models of tenant involvement in governance.

The purpose is to identify and reality check four international models that may be relevant to adapt and adopt in Northern Ireland.

The reality check comes at the end of the workshop after discussion of research findings that led to the selection of the four models.

Attached to the email you will find two other documents. The workshop programme (A) and a full description of the international models (C)

Method

The workshops aim to 'reality check' four international models for relevance to Northern Ireland.

- Expert speakers will introduce the models using a common format.
- Members of the Supporting Communities team will then say a few words about relevance to Northern Ireland, using a common format.
- There will then be an opportunity for direct questions from tenants and other stakeholders to clarify how these models work in practice and how they might work in Northern Ireland.
- All workshop participants will be able to comment on the models using a 'post it wall' and a 'reality check' vote based on several common criteria.
- As participants will only have the opportunity to check one model at each event, provision will be made for comments by social media and email afterwards based on all four model summaries and workshop notes.

What you need to do to participate

The four models are summarised here. You have been allocated to a group that will be checking one of these models in detail so it would be good if you could think about that one before the workshop using the fuller model descriptions (attachment C).

Model Summaries

Austrian Model

- Builds participation into the development process: Developer competitions and ‘community building’ in large-scale participatory projects
- Non-profit housing developers are required to support tenants to form active groups to take responsibility for their new homes as a condition of their funding.
- Social sustainability is one of the criteria for land and funding for the large scale new affordable housing being built in Vienna (5,000 a year). This includes ‘community building’, ‘social mixing’ and ‘tenant participation’ -“It’s about how people live together”.
- “So.vie.So” is a good practice scheme of 111 new homes on former railway land in the city centre. Residents worked together before moving in to plan use of communal spaces and formed a tenants’ advisory board
- With help from consultants (funded as part of the development costs) they designed and managed ground floor communal facilities such as a gym, workshop, bicycle and buggy storage and library, and a rooftop garden and meeting room.
- This model has a number of advantages for tenants including a sense of community and knowing your neighbours from the start and flexibility to decide how much you want to get involved. In principle the model could be applied anywhere.

Dutch Model

- Dutch Polder model, Polder = ‘a talk between parties to overcome their differences’. There is new provision in 2015 Housing Act for local performance agreements between all social landlords, tenants and the local authority.
- The Act sets out what each party has to do (landlords give tenants information, tenants participate in making plans with their landlords and with the local authority). Each year the parties negotiate a plan or vision for the following year.
- The local authority focus means that all landlords and tenants in a city are part of single process which could extend to planning new housing and community strategies. This could fit well with the role of the new super councils in Northern Ireland.
- Each housing association must draft a local offer after consultation with their tenants. The offer needs to be specific for the coming year and should be complemented with a more general overview of activities for the next four years. This must fit with the local authority strategy. This is intended to enhance accountability.
- Tenants see this as the latest stage in the polder model. They have learned that they need the vision, capacity and resources to participate effectively by coming together, working together and staying together: “five fingers makes a fist that can punch and hits hard!”.
- This is a new system and will depend on adequate resourcing, good quality information, trust and dispute resolution between the parties. The statutory backing of the scheme should also help.

English Model

- Community Gateway - tenant representation on the board, community links & innovative ways of involving & engaging tenants locally
- Stock transfer model developed in 2002-4 with support from Chartered Institute of Housing and Confederation of Cooperative Housing to provide for a range of levels of tenant and community involvement in governance in a large scale landlord with nearly 8,000 homes covering a whole local authority area.
- Community Gateway enables greater tenant involvement than earlier transfer models with tenants as ‘the largest single group on the board, holding one less than the majority of board places’
- It also allows for local level tenant and community involvement, consulting the wider community and undertaking community options studies and giving communities a range of options for involvement.
- Tenants have identified many advantages of the Gateway model:

“We work with staff as partners, and we have created a joint working culture...’the purple Gateway culture”

“We bring a wide range of life skills and experience to involvement that makes for better decisions”

Welsh Model

- In 2012 the Welsh Government set a target of 7,500 new affordable homes of which 500 would be co-operative homes. There are now 25 co-operative housing projects at various stages of development across Wales. This has been achieved from a standing start in 2010 through collaboration between housing agencies in Wales with strong Government backing.
- These new cooperative projects house tenants and shared owners in housing need who were recruited mainly through local authority or housing association waiting lists/registers.
- Residents did not know anything about co-operative housing at the outset, but were helped to develop their skills to govern their co-operatives as their homes were being built, starting a year or so before they moved in
- Their new homes were developed in bespoke ways to suit local needs. Housing associations worked with the Welsh Co-operative Centre and Confederation of Cooperative housing to provide the training and support residents needed.
- The main advantages for residents are the development of strong supportive communities, as good, if not better, housing management, high satisfaction and development of skills amongst co-operative members.

Assessment Criteria

Please use the following criteria to check out your model and use this to think of questions you would like to ask the speaker at the workshop.

- Could this work here?
- Would tenants want to take part?
- Key similarities and differences in context
- Who is likely to be interested/support in NI?
- What changes would it take to make it work here?
- What might make this model attractive to tenants?

How the Reality Check will work

At the workshop

Expert speakers will present each model and Supporting Communities will provide an initial response on relevance to Northern Ireland. You will then have the chance to put your questions to understand the models and how they work in practice.

In the final part of the reality check your views will be sought using a ‘post it note wall’ and shows of hands using the assessment criteria set out above.

After the workshop

A short report of each reality check will be written up by the research team soon after the events and circulated to all participants in all three workshops.

You will be able to vote and comment on all four models by email and social media

Why these models?

Each model addresses a specific gap in current opportunities for tenants to get involved in governance based on our state of the art review in Northern Ireland. These gaps are identified in the following summary of our Northern Ireland case study findings:

- The three case studies highlighted the wide range of approaches to involving tenants of social housing in Northern Ireland, many of which may be considered to be relevant to tenant involvement in governance.
- These include central and regional tenant forums with direct links to decision making bodies within the landlord organisations, tenant scrutiny of landlord services, networking of local tenant and community associations, menus of involvement enabling tenants to choose methods that suit them, and social enterprise models for local employment of tenants.
- Despite limited links between tenants groups in the two sectors, and a degree of suspicion particularly of housing associations by NIHE tenants, there is a remarkable similarity in the approaches being developed.
- This probably owes much to the expertise, coordination and support of both sectors by Supporting Communities and the emerging regulatory expectations for tenant involvement.

However, another common feature of the three cases is that:

- There are currently no tenants on the main boards of the landlords.
- There are no local areas where tenants can control the management of their estates to the extent found in models such as cooperatives and tenant management organisations.
- There is no support for tenants groups to form prior to moving in to their properties or to influence the design and management of new housing schemes.
- Relationships of housing organisations with Northern Ireland's 11 new local authorities (known as super councils because they are larger and have more powers than the 26 local authorities they replaced) are developing. But there is currently no provision for tenants to have a voice in these developing relationships.

We hope that you will enjoy taking part in the 'reality check' and that it will lead to positive change for tenants in Northern Ireland. Supporting Communities will be seeking your feedback on the event and process.

Find out more about the research

You can get full access to all of this research project which is being undertaken by the University of Birmingham for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Reports completed so far can be found at the following webpage. This page will be updated with the results of the workshops.

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/social-policy/departments/social-policy-social-work/research/projects/2015/tenant-engagement-in-governance.aspx>

A 2.3.1 Workshop Report Ballymena

Attendance

Around 30 attendees: a mix of NIHE tenants, community association members, Central Forum and Scrutiny panel members, Supporting Communities staff and board member, HA staff and Neighbourhood renewal.

Plenary Discussion Notes

- TMOs – paramilitaries do want to get involved and it would be a mistake not to involve them
- NIHE social contract on properties should also include anti-social behaviour. HAs have good neighbour contracts
- There are not massive gaps in the current strategy – community forums are useful in linking tenants with other stakeholders
- NIHE involvement system is strong and makes a real difference to tenants – HCN and Scrutiny panels are seen to be working well but there may be a gap at district level after the move to the 11 super council areas.
- There is quite a bit of interagency working at local level, especially where HA estates are adjacent to existing NIHE estates
- Tenants should have more input into design and allocations. Poorly sound proofed flats require better design, informed by tenant feedback and sensitive allocations.
- There is a need for landlords to engage with tenants across the range of their services, not just housing management. This requires a lead from the board and a culture change across HAs supported by training.
- There is more community engagement in regeneration schemes where local people are rehoused than in general needs schemes where people are housed through the common selection scheme.
- There are some good practice examples of consultation in rural areas and some engagement by Central Forum members with local authorities. This is a good direction of travel.
- We need to consider the impacts of welfare reform and Sale of NIHE properties

Final Plenary feedback from workshops

Dutch case

Amsterdam showed advantages of a geographically focused approach.

This is a gap in NI and tenant involvement needs to follow governance shifts to the super councils. As one Central Forum member pointed out, to some extent the model is already being developed in NI though this is patchy between councils and not very well known amongst tenants.

Not all the group were convinced in the early stages of the discussion.

Some aspects of the case study were bewildering – the Dutch HAs loan guarantee fund and impact of individual HAs poor decisions on this (financial risk taking and ill-fated purchase of ship as catering training venue for young people).

One participant reported that ***‘finally the penny dropped – we got it and could see how the model could empower tenants and power shifts to the super councils and a more level playing field is needed for HA and NIHE landlords in responding to tenants; greater transparency and legal back up’***.

Austria case

We did all get it – the model was very clearly explained

While the idea was hard to lift and fit in totality, elements could be usefully picked up in NI

Would love the subsidised land and associated social clauses requiring tenant involvement.

We can learn more from tenants who have moved in to new properties and feedback to design – Apex does this one year after occupancy.

We liked the idea of good communications and a joined up system

Aspects could be applied to new HA developments such as Apex's 500 new homes in Derry. But the case seemed more like middle class housing, income ceiling, rents and substantial deposit on entry. Maybe there is scope to do something similar in private sector housing in NI? Surprised at the sustainability issues, drop outs from participation and limited consultation role of the tenants committee.

Final Plenary Questions

What does 'so vie so' stand for? - Neighbourhood solidarity

Dutch workshop notes

Initially the group was not convinced on relevance of Dutch model and moving the focus of tenant involvement away from an exclusive focus on the landlord organisation to a geographical focus to link with the local authority and other landlords in the area.

Detailed information on some of the current problems the Amsterdam tenants' organisation is grappling with did not increase confidence in the model. We heard about the impact on tenants' rents of some celebrated failures of individual Dutch HAs (the derivatives trading losses of Vestia and the asbestos ridden cruise ship purchase by Woonbron in Rotterdam). These rent impacts came because of the loan guarantee system which is mutually supported by all of the Dutch HAs as an alternative to the GB model of loan finance with banks by individual HAs.

Tenants asked about how scrutiny of services such as maintenance works in the Dutch system, what happens when the boiler needs replacing, how new build and repairs are funded and what the role of the local authorities is. The reasons for strengthening LA and tenant roles after a period of freedom for HAs to set their own agendas became clearer.

In the summative discussion on **whether there is a gap in NI which this idea could fill**, the main gap was seen as related to the super councils and the need for more consistency between HAs and the NIHE. Transparency and legal back up could help here. On the second question, **whether the idea would work in NI** initial opinions varied from 'not a cat's chance in hell' and 'we would need to be mentally deranged' to 'it's already happening here with the move of scrutiny panels to be coterminous with super council areas'. On the question of **would tenants want to take part** there were mixed views and much would depend on the rules of engagement and opportunities for new tenants to get involved.

One participant summed up the discussion as '**finally the penny dropped**' and we realised that this could empower tenants and enable them to take ownership. It was clear that for the group as a whole any shift to a geographical multi-organisation focus for tenant involvement should not be at the expense of the tried and tested landlord focus of involvement within NIHE. Meanwhile, council-landlord relationships should focus on community investment, community infrastructure, community needs and public service provision for some the HA monopoly of new build and inconsistencies between NIHE and HA practices was a clinching argument for a more joined up system.

Post-it Notes from Dutch workshop

Yellow- who would support it?

(+) 2 comments. Stormont committee needed to make new rules and standards. Good luck with buy in.

(-) 3 comments. NIHE already inform tenants of changes to rents, renovations etc. and report to local councils with housing plans. Not suitable for NI.

Green – What changes needed to make it work?

(+) 4 comments more tenant involvement. Need more regulation. More sharing of tenant ideas and thoughts. More tenant ownership of all aspects of housing

(-) 1 comment tenants are already consulted from every area of work from building to maintenance

Pink – what would make it more attractive to tenants?

(+) 10 comments more partnership working; more efficient; more control for tenants; more clarity; greater consistency (fewer HAs); more tenant responsibility empowering tenants; more accountability; more transparency; just having 6 housing associations would be easier to manage greater control for tenants

(-) 1 comment I feel that a lot of these practices are in place in NI

Austrian Workshop note

The workshop asked a number of questions about the Austrian model and established that:

- The Austrian model is about tenants being involved at the design and development stage for new developments. Attendees asked what happens after the design and development has been completed. In the Austrian case approximately 50% remain involved and 50% take a more passive role.
- The Tenant Advisory Board manages its own budget and has a consultative role but is not a management board. Also, the tenants are not involved in the governance (board) of the landlord provider.
- The main objective of social housing policy in Vienna since the Second World War has been to avoid stigma. Consequently social housing accounts for approximately one third of the overall stock in Austria and as much as sixty per cent in Vienna. Social housing accommodates many middle class families in comparison to Northern Ireland's residualised social housing estates that are characterised by high levels of social and economic deprivation.
- A key learning point from the Austrian Model was the acceptance of the communal areas that were co-designed by tenants. On completion, tenants are less likely to complain as they were involved in the design process.

Discussion considered the ways in which tenants in Northern Ireland are (and could be) involved in design

- NIHE tenants are involved in home refurbishment design works. Apex seeks tenant feedback one year after tenancy start date (e.g. on fabric, design, operating costs) with learning used to inform future developments. For new developments, housing associations consult with tenants/residents in surrounding areas. Rule 48 of the Common Selection Scheme also allows for purpose built accommodation in exceptional cases. But "there is still a gap that needs to be plugged" in terms of tenants on the waiting list having input into the design and development stages for new schemes that they would themselves live in. More tenants might engage with their landlord if they believe that they can actually influence design.
- A key challenge and question being asked by one of NI's largest developing HAs (Apex) is how best to assess and provide for the wider community infrastructure and public service requirements. A multi-agency and joined up approach across government was considered imperative. Participants felt that community planning will have a positive impact on inter-agency/multi-agency working within councils. However no funding is attached to the community planning remit of councils. One respondent (Apex) asked how can the community sector engage with Council local area plans to ensure social capital and services are developed?
- Feedback on tenant engagement is important particularly if being filtered through community representatives
- Building standards (Department of Finance) and the Department for Communities' Design Guide stipulate much of the new build requirements for private and social housing developments. How much capacity will tenants have to influence actual design against the prescriptive Design Guide and standards? (e.g. Lifetime Homes, Secure by Design, Code for Sustainable Homes)
- Instead of identifying tenants who would be due to move into new schemes, it was suggested that tenants of recently completed schemes could be used to give feedback so that learning is used to inform future designs. Two recent examples of learning using this approach included

noise transfer between floors in Duplex accommodation, and on-street car-parking being used by members of the public.

- It was suggested that this model could possibly be piloted for private (rented) accommodation – which HAs are starting to do – as this would avoid the constraints of the common selection scheme
- Another suggestion was to establish a panel of tenants from the waiting list that could be used to inform design and development. They don't need to be the actual tenants moving into the completed scheme.

Austrian Case Post-It Notes

Yellow - who would support it?

(-) 1 comment. NI and Austria coming from different perspectives

(+) 3 comments Yes but difficult to identify potential tenants. Easier to consult with recently housed tenants and learn from them. Can pick up some points and use – overall NI and Austria didn't fit.

Green - What changes needed to make it work?

(-) 6 comments. changes to legislation/common selection scheme. It is hard to identify potential tenants. All departments and councils would need to join up. Change in mind-set. Local authorities have no land to start the process, councils and government mind-sets would need to change. More social housing to be built.

Pink - what would make it more attractive to tenants?

(+) 2 comments – use people who have lived in property for a year and get feedback from them. Community planning process an opportunity for joined up approach.

A 2.3.2 Workshop Report Belfast

Attendance

Around 65 including HA tenants, NIHE scrutiny panel members, central forum members, Housing association staff, NIHE staff, local councils, and one political party member, Housing Rights, supporting communities staff, Community Gateway, Amsterdam Tenants Organisation and University.

Plenary Discussions

This was a well-attended and lively workshop with three parallel streams covering the Austrian, Dutch and English models. These streams were unevenly attended with the biggest turnout to meet the Community Gateway tenant board members.

The opening plenary discussion identified a lot of interest from tenants in becoming involved in the design of new properties. HAs clarified the main focus of consultation on new schemes is with the local community in connection with securing planning permission rather than with the future residents.

There was a strong welcome from NIHE for the models with Gerry Flynn saying that there is an open door for widening involvement options including tenant involvement in multi-agency groups at local authority level. He also said that the NIHE was about to undertake a review of its Community Involvement Strategy.

Summary of Workshop on “Austrian Model”

Participants: ca. 15 people, NIHE and HA tenants (different age groups); executives from NI housing associations.

Topics in general discussion:

- relationships between tenants and communities and local councils are generally bad as the latter are not receptive for concerns or suggestions
- in one particular scheme, activation of tenant relationships and community building started shortly after opening day and arranging activities for children
- some tenant involvement takes place under the framework of the “good neighbourhood agenda”
- refurbishments and improvements of homes take place without consulting residents which leads to frustration (although in the Ballymena workshop NIHE had been praised for tenant engagement in refurbishment)
- hardly any intergenerational schemes: the Housing Executive does not respond to requirements of older residents in shelters
- case of an older woman who moved in sheltered homes but found herself in mixed community with people in need of special assistance in terms of mental health which caused even more stress for her but points systems makes it impossible for her to change home again
- hobby rooms are provided but have to be equipped by individual committed residents who do not get credit for such active participation by the housing association
- parallel between Austrian and NI sector seems to be that there is always a particular group of residents very active and the majority passive

Reality Check – Post it Wall and Votes

Could it work here? (yellow)

- Don't think Austrian model would work in NI
- Yes ownership for/from tenants
- Potential to run a similar pilot

What changes would be needed to make it work? (blue)

- Can individual people plan two years ahead?
- Change in C.S.S./local lettings policies
- Start with Stormont
- Consistency in new built consultations; HAs must meet and work with existing communities
- To encourage NIHE/HAs to engage at an early stage with future tenants and establish their real needs, hopes and aspirations for the future
- Common selection scheme constraints
- Selection scheme
- Austrian models were transfers, not off a waiting list
- To get tenant involvement from the beginning. But it has to be discussed in layman's terms, because talking at people doesn't work

What are the advantages for tenants? (pink)

- Sounds great, what about anti-social behaviour?
- Involving tenants in design. Getting it right
- Getting to know your neighbours early on
- Early planning involvement; community projects – gym etc.
- Improved ownership; cohesive community; less ASB issues
- “buy in” from local communities; your voice matters
- idea of interacting communities – not everyone wants to get involved
- gives tenants empowerment for their community to be designed the way they want it
- the fact that occupants were engaged from the pre planning

Dutch Workshop Note

This was a small but diverse group including a housing association tenant, a community association officer, a migrant centre worker, a political party member, a housing association officer and a Supporting Communities staff member.

The discussion was also wide ranging with most attendees wishing to find out more about the relevance of the Dutch model with its provisions for HA accountability to tenants and local authorities through a system of annual performance agreements. The group discussed:

The different interests of tenants, communities, landlords and local authorities and what might motivate them to take part in discussions.

- Potential further barriers of different interests within the tenant group (religion, HA/NIHE, location etc.)
- housing association tenants have never been able to see themselves, and in turn be seen as, a single bloc with common and similar interests
- The current lack of trust e.g. of some HAs by tenants
- The potential conflicts of interests around issues of the accountability of housing associations as landlords and as charities (within the context of the Charities (NI) Act 2008)

The power and information imbalance between the parties and the role of training

- Differences between talking and listening, and barriers to devolving power
- The role of the law in the Dutch case to avoid the problems of voluntary agreements not being honoured
- There hasn't been, to date, a consensus on the business and management benefits of tenant participation and the lack of enthusiasm by government to legislate accordingly

The scope of the Dutch agreements:

- their focus on new investment, maintenance and rent policies and subsidies
- the need for tenants to acquire expertise and knowledge

Differences in the NI context

- The NI Ireland Act 1975 and equality schemes demonstrate the need to legislate as well as encourage and nurture participation
- But we have had a series of unconnected initiatives in NI, e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal, Building Successful Communities and now Community Planning, none really learning from the success or otherwise of the others inhibits a process of participation at the level or the scope of the Dutch model
- The Common Selection Scheme and the limits it places
- The move of all new build to HAs from 1990s and the development of multi-tenure neighbourhoods and communities viewed as distinct at the local neighbourhood level with little commonality of interest with others...more competition than co-operation
- The recent emergence of super councils with planning powers and responsibility for community strategies
- Community tensions and fear of paramilitaries

Post-it notes (2) both identified common selection scheme as an area that would need to change
Vote

The group felt that this model could fill a gap in NI, but were not sure that it would work without considerable amendment. As there was only one tenant in the group we could not decide whether tenants would support it.

English Workshop Note

There was extensive questioning of the Community Gateway representatives covering the following topics:

Background and Organisation of Community Gateway:

- The board comprises five tenants, two councillors and four independent members
- Approximately 92% of the Community Gateway's income comes from rental revenue
- Some initial funding was available at the time of stock transfer to undertake improvement works (this capital funding was in place for the first 7-8 years). All improvement works were completed in the first 5-6 years
- Preston CG recently produced its Corporate Strategy and asked: "Do we still want to be a Gateway even though the homes have now been improved?" There is still support for the model and enthusiasm for wider community benefit
- This model has a requirement for the organisation to produce a Community Empowerment Strategy written into its rules

Capacity Building and skills development:

- In relation to tenant directorships, Preston CG has developed an equalities framework based on a gold, silver and bronze rating system. Prospective (tenant) board members must undertake this comprehensive training programme before applying for board membership. Ultimately the committee decides on who gets elected to the board. There is no automatic election or succession; all positions are skills and development (not representative) based
- Preston CG invests heavily in skills development and training. It is important for prospective (tenant) board members to realise that involvement at board level is about the interests of the

organisation; but equally boards are about holistic skill sets – not just finance – and the tenant voice is important.

Discussion then turned to relevance to Northern Ireland:

- In Northern Ireland there has been some small-scale stock transfer (to Choice and Apex) and there are further plans to transfer circa 2,000 homes to HAs. Reductions in the sale of assets and the consequent reduced capital budget make it increasingly difficult for NIHE to maintain its homes.
- A wider political discussion is needed on stock transfer in Northern Ireland
- There are gaps in relation to capacity building and skills development for governance roles in Northern Ireland.
- The role of the NIHE in ensuring fairness and objectivity in allocations was considered important
- Concern expressed about the roles of councils being conservative and having a negative perspective on social housing. The benefits of social housing need to be sold to the new councils.
- One tenant in attendance stated that she lived in an isolated complex (block of 21 flats) and queried the appropriateness of the Preston CG model given that NI HA stock is so dispersed (Preston was a locality based stock transfer)

The following key learning points emerged

- The Holy Grail is managing to secure volunteers to help. Preston CG board members are all volunteers. The younger generation want to leave the work to the older generation
- Key message from Preston to Northern Ireland (in context of stock transfer) is to remain optimistic. It was a radical decision to establish Preston CG initially and today it retains the spirit of doing things differently, and engaging with new people and new audiences
- Preston CG now has 4,300 members and in 2016 had more attendees at its AGM than ever before; its membership is getting bigger year on year
- Last year Preston CG celebrated its 10th birthday; some people have been involved from the start and this can be a de facto barrier that prevents others from getting involved. Creating the right atmosphere is important so people feel comfortable to get involved
- Preston CG has a Young Gateway Action Group (YGAG) which are a group of young people aged 16-25 who get involved in gateway activities and who have a strategic role within the organisation

Post-It Notes

Yellow- who would support it?

(+) **5** NIHE, HAs tenants, Supporting Communities, community organisations, MLAs and local political representatives likely to support this model.

(+) **3** Majority of tenants would support this model particularly existing groups like the District HCNs. Less so for community groups / organisations still in their infancy

(-) **1** There may be Executive support but reservations about whether there is the political maturity to create such a model

(-) **1** Section 75 groups and the working class!

Green – What changes needed to make it work?

(+) **5** Culture Change. For this model to work participants agreed that the political will needs to exist and that a significant culture change is required both in the minds of politicians and in social housing landlords. Common agreement is needed across the sector; not just a directive coming from the politicians and/or the NIHE.

(+) **5** This model will require buy-in from the top down (boards and executives) and bottom up (tenants). Sub-committee in each area might make it more feasible, which feed into larger committees that in turn feed into central forums

(-) **2** A reformed allocations system. The current system is too rigid; more diversity is needed.

(-) **2** Larger scale stock transfer processes would be needed to make this model work in Northern Ireland. The Preston CG governance model was devised in response to a council stock transfer in England. Although concerns were raised about potential for a third model of social housing (e.g. NIHE, HA and CG models).

(-) **2** Changes to legislation and policy to enable stock transfer and to support the formation of this new governance model and to create a legal right to tenant participation

(-) **1** Investment in Community Planning and community infrastructure

(-) **1** Better communication with tenants; vetting of tenants and investment in up-skilling and training of tenant board members; more diversity of those involved at governance level

(-) **1** Perhaps best to be piloted in an interface area or area of dereliction

Pink – what would make it more attractive to tenants?

(+) **8** Better-informed tenants with decision-making powers; more say and control over their communities and more interaction with one another and with executives

(+) **6** Financial resources could act as an incentive. Preston CG had a 7-8 year funding stream to improve new homes at the start (leading to better housing quality and stock improvements)

(+) **3** Greater levels of openness, transparency and accountability

(-) **3** Divergence into social enterprise activity; creation of employment opportunities and training and development

(-) **1** Legislative protection for tenants

(-) **1** Opportunities for both community cohesion and more collaborative working

(-) **1** Reassurance on rents

A 2.3.3 Workshop Report Craigavon

Attendance

Around 24 including NIHE scrutiny panel members (6), central forum members, Housing associations, Supporting Communities staff (7), Community Gateway, CCCH and University.

Plenary Discussions

There were a number of comments on the NI state of the art and case study research:

- Important to include PRS tenants, especially in former RTB properties on NIHE estates. PRS current accountability gap. Leaseholders unevenly included between Scrutiny Panels (e.g. excluded in Causeway).
- Disability Forum – a best practice example, should be spread to cover HA tenants
- More consistency needed between NIHE and HA tenants; Supporting Communities could achieve this. HAs were invited to HCNs several years ago, but attendance has been patchy and varied between districts. ITO should aim for greater consistency across social housing.
- Support from tenants in the group for Supporting Communities as the ITO.
- Interagency groups should develop in all super council areas. It was reported that Gerry Flynn had said at yesterday's event that NIHE *'door is open to this'*.
- There were differences of view on how many District level HCNs survived when council area scrutiny panels were created. It was said that only two areas did not still have district HCNs (Causeway and Mid Ulster). Peter Shanks asked for this to be confirmed by Supporting Communities, and whether District HCNs are formally supported/recognised by the NIHE for the final version of the report.
- Some tenants felt that the shift to scrutiny from networks had been detrimental and there were problems with the boundary changes to achieve 'coterminosity'. It was suggested that a different option could be to merge the scrutiny panels to work across NI on service reviews, or at least sharing learning between the panels while maintaining local level for HCNs.

English Community Gateway workshop note

This was a very lively and well facilitated discussion with two tenant board members, the Tenant Chair and Empowerment Officer from Preston. Participants asked a wide range of questions covering:

- How tenants mobilised to support the gateway model and how long it took (tenants worked with the council and advisers (CCCH and CIH) over several years to formulate and sell the proposal to all tenants – this was the secret of the high level of support in the ballot)
- The membership system (4,300 'opted in' tenant members control the association through annual meetings)
- Youth involvement policy: 236 under 16 youth members
- Tenant involvement structure (several tiers similar to HCNs (10 area committees each represented on the central committee) but including the largest group of board members at the peak)
- Number of staff (160) and properties (6,600), the Preston economy and social background of tenants
- Rent collection and arrears levels and collection and interventions (this is an interesting area – just because the association is tenant led does not mean it is a 'soft touch'; *'Don't misunderstand. We are a business and I am a tenant'*)
- What about the no voters? – majority vote
- Can you turn troublesome tenants away? – tenancy conditions apply similar to other HAs, now using 12 month probationary tenancies

This information sharing session was lively and could have continued for much longer. This suggests the potential value of a study visit to Preston and informal sharing of knowledge between tenants if there is any possibility of moving towards a gateway model in NIHE or HAs.

Participants then divided into three groups, each with a Gateway adviser to complete the Post-its as follows:

Post it Notes from English Community Gateway workshop

Yellow- who would support it?

(+) 8 comments. Tenants, Politicians and civil servants, NIHE, HAs, Councils, tenants, businesses, schools, employers, churches

(-) 3 comments. Not all tenants would support it – it would depend on the deal and how it was sold

Green – What changes needed to make it work?

(+) 10 comments common selection scheme (2), funding (2), further research, cultural changes to allow tenants more control and avoid tokenism, legislation, representation (equality), people's attitudes, local agreements

Pink – what would make it more attractive to tenants?

(+) **11 comments** Talking to the Gateway tenants! (3), membership rights (2), ownership & control of our homes and communities, more grass roots bottom up approach, having a voice, making decisions for ourselves, ownership of the issues and capacity to deal with them

Vote on English Model

The voting in this workshop provided very positive support to explore this idea a little further to establish what it could mean in NI. The workshop included several Supporting Communities staff and some NIHE tenants.

Is this a gap for NI? All agreed it is a gap

Would it work in NI? Most agreed that it could work but it would take a lot of work and require political support.

Would tenants support it? Most felt that tenants would support it, although further research would be needed to establish the level of support for a specific version of Gateway to fit NIHE or HAs in NI. There were also concerns about the rights of those voting against.

Welsh co-op model Workshop Discussion

The workshop asked questions about the Welsh co-op model and how it had come about to take Wales from a situation similar to Northern Ireland with no housing co-ops 10 years ago to 25 at various stages of development at the time of the study.

- One of the first completed schemes was The Home Farm Co-op in Cardiff which has 41 rented homes let to Cardiff Council's waiting list. One third of its members are heavily involved; one third would participate in fun days and the other third (facetious comment) think they still belong to the council
- The model has benefited from support from the Welsh government, which gave a strong commitment both in policy terms and the funding support needed to establish the co-operative sector.
- It also required a local enabling agency, the Welsh Co-operative Centre, to work with the Confederation of Co-operative Housing, housing associations and local authorities to make it work.
- The board of each local co-op is made up of tenants and they can decide on how much ownership they want to have over service delivery.
- Initially, allocations were nominated one year in advance to build the co-operative model. Therefore it was not suitable for those in urgent need. Households in moderate housing need

who were able to wait longer than a year applied. (In NI some households can spend this amount of time or longer in temporary accommodation.)

- Once the model is up and running, the Co-operative model allocates according to normal allocation practices.

Discussion of relevance to Northern Ireland

The group discussion picked up a number of points on the fit of the model to NI and how it would work in NI. Without Department for Communities support or political buy in it is hard to see how a co-operative sector could be established in NI. The Welsh example had shown the importance of recognition in the Programme for Government. There was interest in the extent to which co-ops have to be bottom up and bespoke to particular contexts, the Welsh example had shown how this could be achieved within a planned programme. The key barriers were seen to be the Common Selection Scheme and fear of paramilitary control. To overcome the first barrier it was suggested that there might be an affordable housing pilot to begin with rather than a social housing project.

Post it Notes from Welsh co-op model Workshop

Yellow- who would support it?

(+) **3** Developers, NIHE, Community Groups, voluntary bodies, smaller housing associations

(-) **2** At the moment not sure anyone would support it

Green – What changes needed to make it work?

(+) **3** Department for Communities support / political buy in

(+) **3** Funding and resources to support the formation of the co-op (seeding funding)

(+) **2** Flexibility to the allocations framework

(+) **2** Paramilitary influences within estates could undermine the potential for tenants to manage budgets, control bank accounts. But co-op models can decide on the range of things you want control over so checks and balances can be put in place.

(-) **1** Co-ops should form organically and not be officer / politically driven

Pink – what would make it more attractive to tenants?

- Each co-operative is unique; each co-op is bespoke to the needs of the community it serves.
- Improved communication and co-operation among co-op members
- Might be more appropriate for an affordable housing pilot to begin with, as opposed to a social housing project. HAs are now involved in building low cost affordable schemes. One scheme in Leeds is based on a collective mortgage where members buy equity
- Higher satisfaction levels, lower rents and better services
- Education – tenants need to be educated of the benefits of this model; need to raise the awareness of political representatives also.

Vote on co-op model

Does it fill a gap? All agreed there is nothing like this in NI at present.

Could it work in NI? Generally agreed that it could work if significant barriers such as the Common Selection Scheme were overcome for small pilots.

Would tenants support it? It's not for everyone and it would need gradual learning process as in Wales. However, there was little doubt that it could achieve similar support from participants to that found in Wales once the projects were established.



About Housing and Communities Research Group

Led by Professor David Mullins, the Housing and Communities Research Group undertakes leading edge research and teaching as part of the School of Social Policy at the University of Birmingham. Housing and Communities has long been a key area of interest of research and teaching at the University of Birmingham, both in the School of Social Policy, and building on the 40-year tradition of housing research in the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies.

Housing and Communities is an important arena for current policy, practice and governance challenges in relation to housing policy, welfare reform, public expenditure reductions, homelessness, housing supply shortages, financial inclusion, Localism, and the role of third sector in service delivery. Research and knowledge transfer on these topics plays a key role in the University's civic engagement agenda.

This project was undertaken by Professor David Mullins with Research Associate Peter Shanks, who is now a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Birmingham and Dr Halima Sacranie.

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