

## **Tenant Involvement in Governance**

### **Workshop Notes**

#### **Ballymena Workshop notes 19/10/2016**

##### **Attendance**

Around 30 with 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 – HCNs 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. May be 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 from 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 cats chance in hell' and 'we would need to be mentally deranged' to 'its 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 hAs 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 tenure 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 are (and could be) involved in design in Northern Ireland**

- 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 surroundings 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.