

‘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 lifeskills 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' 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>