

TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE: MODELS AND PRACTICES

Scoping Report: Appendix A State of the Art: Stakeholder Interviews

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1. Background

- 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 paper, 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*.
- 1.2 This report is also informed by interviews conducted with senior DSD 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).

2. Policy and Strategic Context for Tenants in Governance

- 2.1 The DSD has responsibility for the policy and strategic development of tenant participation in Northern Ireland. The NIHE has a statutory duty to consult with tenants on matters that affect tenancies. And 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 '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.
- 2.3 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.
- 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 level 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. Proposals to introduce tenant empowerment in Northern Ireland will be subject to further research by March 2018.

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**.

2.6 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. 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.

2.7 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.

2.8 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 is currently under revision. It is therefore important that while entitled tenant involvement in governance, this project also considers the 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).

2.9 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. Last month 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).

2.10 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.

2.11 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 is also currently being developed by the NIHE.

3. Existing Organisations and Structures that Facilitate Tenant Involvement

3.1 NIHE staff reported that the NIHE has always prided itself in being responsive to the needs of its communities. Back in the early 1980s the NIHE was at its zenith and 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.

3.2 NIHE's initial 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.

3.3 In the early 1990s the NIHE had a rethink of its strategic approach to tenant engagement 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"*.

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. Then along with that first phase of devolution came a new accountability for the NIHE as a public body and landlord. Peace funding for local communities during this period also meant that the capacity of community groups needed to improve in order to access funds.

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”*.

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 who have oversight and responsibility for its operational functions

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 over 600 community groups across Northern Ireland and supports almost 150 community associations providing community development expertise, training, information and funding advice.

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 were the logical and best placed organisation to undertake the role of the Independent Tenants 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.

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 liked 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 targeting the same one resource which is also used by NIHE? Is there capacity within that one organisation?”* It was suggested that there is 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 any new ITO if it meant achieving outcomes that would bring benefits to their tenants and organisations.

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 easy to ignore 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 future.

3.11 There are 22 registered HAs in Northern Ireland. Seventeen operate across the region and five are community-based. Four have 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 (isomorphic) changes as HAs adopt (mimic) 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.

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 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.

- 3.13 HA staff agreed that it was increasingly challenging to establish tenants forums for 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. One 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.

4. Existing Tenant Involvement Infrastructure in Northern Ireland

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 4.2) and its community involvement infrastructure has had to be restructured to be coterminous with the new super councils (see 4.3).

Housing Executive

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

4.3 As part of the rationalisation referred to above 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 two years.

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 are being lost resulting in less opportunity 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.

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.

- 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 HCN tier now prevents this. The District HCN was also a mechanism for channeling information up and cascading information down through the tenant involvement structures. This mechanism has been weakened at the District level. As above 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.
- 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.
- 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).
- 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.

- 4.10 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. It remains 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.
- 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. This year's theme is 'Inspiring Leadership' and will involve hard-to-reach groups.
- 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 enable less traditional groups to get involved in decision-making. This requires commitment and resources to deliver.
- 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.
- 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. A marketing strategy is being developed by the NIHE to promote tenant involvement; some thought that the current database of interested tenants is not being used to its full potential.

- 4.15 In total the NIHE (Landlord Services) invests over £4m per year to service its community involvement infrastructure. 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.
- 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.

Housing Associations

- 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 believed 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.
- 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 their 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”*.

- 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. Also HA staff 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”*.
- 4.20 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.”*
- 4.21 One HA is 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, officers will be visiting the area to hear their views. This is matched with a budget that enables 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”*.
- 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 how 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”*.

- 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”.*
- 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.
- 4.25 Much of the discussion around tenant involvement centers 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 conducts a survey 12 months after tenants move into any new development. The feedback is then used to help inform future design going forward. It was also stated that most of the negative publicity against housing associations pertains to new build development.
- 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 which is about people having a positive ethos towards living together. When tenants move into the scheme they are asked to sign up to the charter – 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".

4.27 Half of HAs have 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.

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 3 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?"*

4.29 Some stakeholders considered local knowledge/tenant experience to be just as valuable and important and 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 skill required for being a tenant representatives and company director. 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".*

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.

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"*.

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"*.

Housing Executive and Housing Associations

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 that they have embraced technology to extend their reach to tenants including use of social media, interactive websites and text messaging although some housing providers are more advanced at using these approaches than others. Language line is also widely available.

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 and have also been used for the purposes of Shared Housing schemes. 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”*.

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 leveled 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”*.

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 have a half dozen houses. We also have ESPs scattered throughout NIHE estates or private developments and you may only have 2 or 3 people amongst all the others. We moved from calling our approach from tenant participation to community involvement. A number of HAs have been working with Supporting Communities to develop their tenant/community involvement infrastructure.*

5. From Tenant Involvement to Tenant Empowerment

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 yet right.

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".*

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".*

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.

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 are on 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.**

5.6 Both NIHE and HA officials believed social enterprise activity to be a more laudable feature of tenant empowerment rather 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 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”.

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 Sainsburys 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 3-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”.*

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 reenter 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”.*

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”.*

6. Overcoming Barriers to Involvement and Succession Planning

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?”*

6.2 Most tenants tend to become involved because of a single issue (e.g. repairing issue) 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 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 paper highlights examples of ways in which resident involvement in governance can be fostered at the time of moving in to properties, particularly in new build schemes.

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 than from those who don’t normally engage. Whilst some HAs are using technology effectively others did not have access to the same level of resources or expertise. *“We have a significant systems upgrade ongoing 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”.*

6.4 Another HA official talked about how they were encouraging tenants to inform the agenda for forum meetings: *“we sent 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”.*

6.5 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 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 just exclusively promoting involvement through formal structures. This will enable progression to formal structures once confidence has been developed (see section 7.6). It was also suggested that six-week tenancy visits could be used more fruitfully to encourage tenant

engagement and to target young people.

- 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. Difficulties were cited for this client group in relation to 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.
- 6.7 Those aged between 25-40 are currently underrepresented in tenant involvement structures. It was stated that the perspectives of 16-25 year olds are 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; two young people will join the Housing Central Forum next April. Other challenges to tenant involvement were identified including child minding and geography (i.e. travelling distance).
- 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".*

7 Training and Development

- 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 age
- 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. One NIHE digital inclusion pilot project has been planned in two urban-rural communities to develop capacity building; to capacitate tenants to use the NIHE website; to promote community development and to address issues of social isolation.
- 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 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”.*
- 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 is important but so too is 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.
- 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.
- 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 in 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 are 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”*.

8 Assessment and Evaluation

- 8.1 The Continuous Tenants' 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.
- 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 a data source that can be used to effect change and improvements to organisational service delivery.
- 8.3 Each NIHE Area conducts an annual business planning process which is informed by data gathered in 8.1 and 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.
- 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.
- 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 also agreed: *“we facilitated discussions with between 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 they should be no issues with the department speaking to tenants during the inspection process”*.

- 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 of 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 SO 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.

9 Discussion Points for Stakeholder Events

- 9.1 **Discussion Point 1:** 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?
- 9.2 **Discussion Point 2:** 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?
- 9.3 **Discussion Point 3:** 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?
- 9.4 **Discussion Point 4:** 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?

- 9.5 **Discussion Point 5:** 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?
- 9.6 **Discussion Point 6:** 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?
- 9.7 **Discussion Point 7:** 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.
- 9.8 **Discussion Point 8:** 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?
- 9.9 **Discussion Point 9:** 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?
- 9.10 **Discussion Point 10:** 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 A.1 Stakeholder Interviews

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

