

TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE: MODELS AND PRACTICES
CASE STUDY REPORT 2 WEST BELFAST / SHANKILL SCRUTINY PANEL

Contents

Introduction	2
Case Study Area	2
Establishment of the West Belfast Area Scrutiny Panel	3
Background of Tenant Scrutiny Panel Members and Community Representatives ..	5
Succession Planning	6
Tenant Scrutiny: Observation of West Belfast Panel	7
Tenant Scrutiny of Response Maintenance and Change of Tenancies.....	8
NIHE Transformation	9
NIHE Corporate Governance.....	9
Housing and Community Network and wider Community Involvement	
Infrastructure	10
Shared Space - Working across the Community Divide and the Black Mountain	
Shared Space Project	10
Super Councils and community planning	12
Tenant Empowerment and Community Enterprise	12
Conclusion	13

Introduction

This case study comprised 9 meetings and interviews undertaken over a three month period to explore current tenant involvement practice involving Housing Executive Tenants in West Belfast and Shankill. The case study was facilitated by Supporting Communities and the Housing Executive.

At the core of the case study is the story of the establishment of a single Scrutiny Panel for West Belfast and Shankill, recruitment, background and succession of Scrutiny Panel members, tenant scrutiny practice examples, and observation of the West Belfast Scrutiny Panel on May 19th. The case study also explores links to transformation and corporate governance in NIHE. Finally it considers the Housing and Community Network and wider community involvement, cross-community working and the Black Mountain Shared Space project, and the role of super councils, and the role of community enterprise in tenant empowerment.

Itinerary

5th May 2016 - Murray Watt, Liaison Officer, Supporting Communities
19th May 2016 - Attended meeting of West Belfast-Shankill Tenant Scrutiny Panel
22nd June 2016 - Tommy Holland; Scrutiny Panel Member
22nd June 2016 - Renee Crawford and Ciara Dunlop - Scrutiny Panel Members
23rd June 2016 - Sharon Beattie, West Belfast Area Manager NIHE and Paddy Kelly, West Belfast Housing Services Manager, NIHE
23rd June 2016 - Seamus Corr, Manager and Joanna Felo, Intra-Community Development Worker, Black Mountain Shared Space Project
4th July 2016 - Ian McLaughlin, Scrutiny Panel Member
5th July 2016 - Gail Green, Interface Officer, NIHE
14th July 2016 - Michelle Coughlin, Scrutiny Panel Member

Case Study Area

West Belfast extends from the Falls-Shankill 'peace-line' at Cupar Way and the Springfield Road and to Poleglass/Twinbrook and Lagmore in the west; the area also extends from the Westlink/M1 in the South and to New Barnsley and Moyard on the Black Mountain. Demand for social housing remains stubbornly high, with almost three-quarters (73%) of applicants in housing stress. Of the applicants in housing stress almost half (48%) are general family households and almost two-fifths (39%) are single households. The Shankill area spans from Brown Square in the city centre to Glencairn in the west and extends to the Ballygomartin and Springmartin Roads at the western edge of the District. The demand for social housing in the Shankill remains consistent but lower than in West Belfast. Forty-four per cent (44%) of total applicants requesting housing were in housing stress of which half (51%) were single households and almost one-quarter (23%) were older households (NIHE District Housing Plan and Local Housing Strategy, 2014-15).

At March 2014 the total NIHE stock for the 40 common landlord areas in West Belfast and Shankill stood at 8,416 units. A similar number have been sold off under the House Sales Scheme (8,137) and there were seventy voids. NIHE stock for the Shankill, which covers 15 of the common landlord areas, totalled 3,378 homes compared to 5,038 homes for West Belfast which covers the other 25 common landlord areas. In Shankill, NIHE had sold off thirty-seven per cent (1,955) of its homes compared to fifty-five per cent for West Belfast (6,182 homes). Voids rates stood at 1.2% (41 homes) and 0.6% (29 homes) for Shankill and West Belfast respectively. Following the addition of Dairy Farm to West Belfast as part of the Review of Public Administration, West Belfast now has 10,200 homes. Thus the West Belfast area now has a larger number of (NIHE) units that does the largest HA in Northern Ireland.

The NIHE Shankill office is based at the Shankill Wellbeing and Treatment Centre on the Shankill Road, Belfast. The Centre brings together under one-roof, care and information services which had previously been delivered from different buildings and locations throughout the Shankill. It provides a range of community health, nursing and social services, allied health professionals and GP practices. Other facilities include treatment rooms, consultancy suites, conference rooms, and social areas for staff. The Centre and NIHE office is modern, bright and can be accessed either from the front entrance or the rear where there are ample car parking spaces. The West Belfast office is based in the city centre at 32-36 Great Victoria Street opposite the Europa Hotel. This building is used exclusively for NIHE business and also covers: south, east, and north Belfast offices; Belfast regional office; Belfast public and private housing benefit units; Belfast accounts unit; and the Belfast area land and property office. Sharon Beattie is the Area Housing Manager for the West Belfast office and Paddy Kelly is the Housing Services Manager.

Establishment of the West Belfast and Shankill Area Scrutiny Panel

Discussions about tenant scrutiny in Belfast started a number of years ago when Supporting Communities' staff met with the NIHE's Belfast Regional Housing Manager. NIHE asked Supporting Communities for its advice on tenant scrutiny. Prior to this Supporting Communities had worked with NIHE on a pilot tenant-led inspection and on mystery shopping and other tenant initiatives. Tenant scrutiny was considered more rigorous than the range of other initiatives that had been undertaken up until that point; the discussions between Supporting Communities and the NIHE's Regional Manager focused on what tenant scrutiny might mean for tenants in Belfast. Prior to tenant scrutiny work being initiated, tenant services tended to be RAG (Red, Amber, Green) monitored against certain objectives but this approach didn't challenge assumptions or ask if the set objectives were correct and/or appropriate. It was felt that tenant scrutiny offered an opportunity to adapt this approach (and involve tenants directly in these service assessments).

But tenant involvement is still seen as much wider than scrutiny. Although the Scrutiny Panel has been formed for West Belfast and Shankill to scrutinise key service areas, both Housing Community Networks continue to meet separately

“because their agendas are very different”. The agenda in West Belfast tends to focus on schemes, consultation and performance whereas in the Shankill it tends to focus more on response maintenance and change of tenancy issues. When the two districts became one ‘area’ (West Belfast) the tenants decided to keep the two HCNs to address their distinct issues. The rationale put forward for Belfast retaining its HCN structure was the other districts face common issues and thus can be addressed through the Area Panels whereas in Belfast the issues can be quite unique to different areas and thus the HCN structures have remained. *“If you are representing Glencairn, with the best will in the world, half the meeting will be dedicated to consultation on schemes in West Belfast. That is not going to be of relevance or of interest to the others”*. Therefore the West Belfast and Shankill HCNs continue to meet separately monthly; and collectively every quarter.

The Scrutiny Panel has managed to agree and collaborate on common issues. This approach appears unique to Belfast as HCNs in other localities have been discontinued (see stakeholder report). Local HCNs have in most cases been replaced by Area Scrutiny Panels yet Belfast retains its original HCN structures (although our other case study in Newry and South Down had also retained two HCNs as a result of tenant demand) . The thirty-five NIHE districts (HCNs) have now become thirteen ‘areas’, coterminous with the new super council boundaries. Shared learning has also occurred since the joint working of the HCNs. *“It is all about learning, common sense and communication. Some plagiarism goes on but in a positive way”*.

A draft Community Involvement strategy published by the NIHE in November 2013 proposed the creation of tenant scrutiny panels in each of its landlord areas. It stated: *“Each of the NIHE areas will develop Tenant Scrutiny Panels so that NIHE tenants will have a voice in ensuring that the local areas and outlets are delivering the services customers require and to the level of quality that customers expect.”*

The ambitious cross-community nature of the new West Belfast and Shankill Area required careful planning to stimulate involvement from all parts of the Area. A seminar with numerous workshops were then convened by the NIHE in February 2014 at Crumlin Road Gaol and attended by approximately forty community representatives from the West Belfast and Shankill Housing Community Networks and from the constituent community groups in both Districts. Conference facilities were hired at the Gaol as it was considered to be a neutral venue (as was Lusty Beg below). Tides Training facilitated workshops and discussions at the event in the Gaol and a report on the discussions was produced by Housing Staff and presented afterwards to the two respective HCNs. Workshops covered six service areas including: obtaining a home; paying for your home; repairs to your home; improving your home; sustaining your home and sustaining your neighbourhood.

In June 2014 representatives from the two HCNs came together again at a residential in Lusty Beg to review the discussions and reports that emerged from the seminar and workshops and to examine the potential for an Area Scrutiny Panel. It also included a dinner and opportunities for networking which helped participants to interact. Gail Green (NIHE) had worked with both HCN groups and it was stated that

the groups' trust and familiarity with this staff member coupled with the common desire to scrutinise key services resulted in congenial and collaborative working. There were a number of agreed outcomes as a result of this exercise including:

- aspects of housing management to be subjected to tenant scrutiny;
- tenant expectations and aspirations around service delivery;
- a priority list of management services to be scrutinised;
- key questions to be asked pertaining to each of the services; and
- how the area scrutiny panel was to be supported and facilitated.

The residential concluded with agreement that an Area Scrutiny Panel be established to undertake an initial scrutiny exercise of a key service area by the end of the 2014 calendar year. Area Scrutiny Panel members were then nominated at subsequent HCN meetings. Eight members were nominated by the two Housing Community Networks; four from each network. In August 2014 Panel members participated in some basic tenant scrutiny awareness training, delivered by Supporting Communities and it was agreed that the first service area for scrutiny would be response maintenance and change of tenancy repairs (the 'repairs to your home' service area noted above). This was accepted by the NIHE as the Panel's first priority. An NIHE staff member also carried out research on tenant scrutiny in the English context which complemented the Panel member training.

Scrutiny Panel meetings now occur bimonthly and in March 2015 the Panel met with NIHE senior staff and board members. Some members thought this was a worthwhile exercise but others were less convinced: *"on the twice I have met with NIHE board they have been more interested in hearing presentations from other bodies than hearing about drilled down work of the tenant scrutiny panel. Also, there are times that I feel that the central panel is paid lip service by the board. I don't understand how relevant it is meeting the board. Would there be more relevance in having two members attend NIHE board meetings? One from urban and rural settings and their role would be to report back to their networks?"*

Supporting Communities facilitates the discussions and minutes Scrutiny Panel meetings.

In 2015 the Scrutiny Panel was also shortlisted for a 'Working Together' award at the Chartered Institute of Housing Northern Ireland's annual awards ceremony.

Background of Tenant Scrutiny Panel Members and Community Representatives

Members include community representatives some of whom are ex-tenants who had exercised their RTB; it remains unclear how many Panel members are current NIHE tenants. Panel members stated that the NIHE empowers residents associations to speak on behalf of its tenants. All five Panel members interviewed were community representatives working in posts funded by a raft of revenue streams one of which was part-funded by the NIHE.

Members felt that when community representatives deliver messages, tenants are more willing to accept the responses. Whilst this was considered to be effective by the interviewees some respondents in the State of the Art review paper raised the query about professionalised tenant/community representatives. No (NIHE-tenant) Panel member interviewed was without a community-funded post. Some members were relatively new to community work whereas others have been community activists for almost four decades. Two of those interviewed worked for a women's group in the community; these posts were funded by the Department for Communities (formerly DSD). Others worked for community partnerships, community associations, one was a coordinator for a federation of residents associations and another two were public representatives.

Bringing the two HCNs together was considered to be a major success, as some group members had not mixed with or visited neighbouring estates across the community divide. At the beginning bus tours enabled Panel members to gain a visual perspective of the communities and estates just a short distance away. For one Panel member it was her first time in Ballymurphy in over 30 years.

The Upper Springfield Resource Centre receives tripartite funding from Belfast City Council, NIHE and the Department for Communities. The centre provides an administrative function for residents groups and an NIHE funded newsletter is widely distributed to residents across West Belfast every quarter. The Resource Centre has a citizens' advice (CAB) satellite office, an NIHE satellite office, and a local councillor attends one day a week to deal with community issues.

One innovation and success for the Upper Springfield Resource Centre was facilitating and managing an NIHE swap and exchange scheme. This had the advantage of making links with new housing association schemes in the area and assisted in setting up HA resident associations. The community representative was able to liaise and negotiate on behalf of tenants when offered new homes in order to help create sustainable communities: *"we are able to negotiate and we noticed first time tenants didn't want to move into this new estate – they would have stayed 1 year and a day then put in a transfer request. We knew who wanted to live here and we worked with allocations officers to move people about. Members of two residents associations and a few others in community development work moved into this new estate and this meant they had their own residents group right from the start"*.

The linkage between the HCNs and the Scrutiny Panel was considered to be very important and the community expertise and background of Panel members meant they were all well placed to scrutinise NIHE service areas. Two of the Scrutiny Panel members also sit on the Housing Central Forum.

Succession Planning

Panel members considered succession planning an issue for every group. Some intimated that they would like to see younger tenants get involved with their local HCNs and for the NIHE to engage with younger people to better understand their housing aspirations. It was also stated that the difficulties of succession planning are not unique to West Belfast and Shankill. One respondent summed it up as: *“on the one hand having the same faces has it pluses as you build up trust. On the other hand the downside is that those involved might not challenge”*. Others mentioned how longstanding community representatives are considered the stalwarts of community development and there is an expectation that these members will lobby on important community issues.

One interviewee suggested the reason tenant associations were renamed ‘residents associations’ was to reflect the enthusiasm and involvement of ex-tenants who had exercised their RTB. Family commitments were considered to be key constraints on involvement and succession planning. *“I could fill an auditorium tomorrow if NIHE was coming to do a [new build development] scheme. When I ask people to set a working group you can see the dust rising as they leave the door.”* However, there was evidence of succession planning in terms of community representatives. In at least three cases, Panel members talked about younger colleagues in paid employment and who were learning from their more experienced community activist mentors. *“Every community group should have succession planning. There are younger people coming through this office now who came here as young volunteers and have since moved into PT employment. My message to them is clear; your goal is to get my job. We are trying to skill them up to critique and challenge”*.

Tenant Scrutiny: Observation of West Belfast Panel

The meeting took place on the 19th May at the NIHE office in the Shankill Wellbeing and Treatment Centre. Panel members received an update on response maintenance following the service review. The NIHE area manager also provided staffing updates and in particular highlighted the high level of vacancies in the maintenance division and the external recruitment drive to reconcile this. The Panel was also informed that NIHE maintenance officers now operate agile working and are connected to the NIHE’s IT network which should result in enhanced visibility of maintenance officers on estates. Some of the discussion focused on specifications (e.g. a new bathroom spec) and it was suggested that new approaches in respect of planned and response maintenance may follow following the recent appointment of a new Director of Asset Management. New maintenance contracts were up for renewal in September 2016 and the NIHE was imminently due to announce the new provincial wide contractors.

The Panel heard how the new contractors would also focus more on social clauses, working with communities, promoting social and community enterprise activity, and things like furniture storage. The contract tendering process had been reversed to focus on 60% quality / 40% price compared to the previous arrangement of 60% price / 40% quality.

Further discussions took place around the move to an appointments based system between the DLO and tenants in an attempt to reduce costs associated with no access and the potential for community representatives to order repairs on behalf of tenants. The importance of technology had been a consistent theme in the stakeholder interviews for aiding tenant engagement with hard to reach groups. The Scrutiny Panel highlighted the importance of user-friendly services and advocated for the phone number to be shortened and for greater use of text messaging. NIHE's CSU was also devising a piece of technology to include all possible repairing items in a home so that orders could be processed on site and sent directly to the contractor. The Panel also made a point about how they might go about scrutinising social clauses and mentioned that they have not been involved in shaping them in the first instance.

The Scrutiny Panel then discussed 'change of tenancies', how to reduce re-let periods, tenancy sustainment and the tenants' charter. Finally it received a presentation followed by a short discussion on the NIHE commissioned 'Tenants in Governance' research and obtained a copy of a Peabody report on tenant scrutiny towards the end of the meeting. All members actively and enthusiastically took part in the discussions and clearly had significant community expertise.

Tenant Scrutiny of Response Maintenance and Change of Tenancies

Scrutiny Panels afford members the opportunity to delve into certain areas in more depth than could be achieved at HCN meetings. Some Panel members acknowledged that they were unaware of how 'sophisticated' NIHE systems and operations were prior to the scrutiny of the 'repairing your home' service area. The newly formed Area Scrutiny Panel embarked on a number of study visits in October 2014. These included visits to the Belfast Customer Services Unit (CSU) in Great Victoria Street and to the Shankill Office front counter to see how operational staff delivered the repairs service.

Some Panel members had expressed concerns about the NIHE's response maintenance contract and in particular the relocation of the DLO from Argyll Street (Shankill) to Stockman's Way (South-west Belfast). The DLO subsequently hosted a meeting with the Panel to explain working practices and allay concerns. Perceptions of a lesser or diminished service in the Shankill were addressed directly by the contractors during this meeting. It also gave the Panel a better insight into how the repairs process worked once orders had been raised by NIHE maintenance officers.

The first Area Scrutiny Panel meeting for West Belfast and Shankill took place on 17th November 2014 facilitated by Supporting Communities and attended by six community representatives and six NIHE staff including district staff and the CSU manager. In total 17 recommendations were agreed by the Scrutiny Panel for further investigation (see Appendix A.1). At the time of writing 14 had been completed and 3 were in progress. A second Area Scrutiny Panel meeting was held in January 2015 to scrutinise the Change of Tenancy (COT) procedures at which 12 recommendations

were agreed (see Appendix A.2). Eleven had been completed and one remains in progress. It was also agreed that the HCNs would receive regular reports from the Panel and that representatives who attended the workshops at Crumlin Road Gaol and Lusty Beg would receive feedback on the review. All recommendations in relation to response maintenance and COT repairs were also fed back and tested by the NIHE redesign team. An action plan was devised and some recommendations resulted in changes to policy and procedures, some were fed into the NIHE 'journey to excellence' programme and others led to questions being included in the NIHE Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey. It was agreed at the June 2015 meeting that 'obtaining a home' would be the next Scrutiny Panel priority.

NIHE Transformation

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

NIHE Corporate Governance

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

Housing and Community Network and wider Community Involvement Infrastructure

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

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

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

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

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

In the round of stakeholder interviews, a number of respondents highlighted how the Shankill had benefitted more from the joint working in terms of being able to learn from West Belfast's more advanced community development structures and expertise. However, those who worked most closely with the Panel discounted this argument. One stated that: *"both sides have learned from each other and no one side has taught the other a lesson"*.

Other respondents mentioned how the Shankill HCN perceived the joint working initiative between the HCNs as a threat as it felt overwhelmed by West Belfast's stock size and community background and there was a fear amongst some that they would lose out on potential schemes. 'Poor cousins' and 'arranged marriage' were some of the terms used to describe the coming together of the two HCNs. This may explain why at the observed Scrutiny Panel meeting some members requested a break down of the schemes being delivered in each of the communities. Likewise the relocation of the DLO was treated with suspicion.

Although not directly related to the work of the Scrutiny Panel, the Black Mountain Shared Space Project (BMSSP) is an initiative aimed at fostering positive relations between the two communities in an interface area in West Belfast which is divided by a police station, the 'million brick peace wall' and other barriers. The area covers Highfield, Moyard, Springmartin, Springfield Park and Sliabh Dubh. The programme is facilitated by the NIHE and is part financed through the PEACE III Programme. The NIHE's Community Cohesion Unit's Shared Communities Programme has enabled the development of 30 shared neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland and the BMSSP was invited to take part in the Shared Communities Programme in early 2014. The NIHE's Community Cohesion Unit has also been supportive in assisting BMSSP to develop the land as shared space. Recently the project received an award from a social enterprise to hire an architect to draw up plans to develop the space. Adjoining land is owned by the NIHE and there was a (hopeful) suggestion that community asset transfer may be a prospect for the future.

A shared community survey undertaken by the NIHE in October 2015 found that more than three-quarters (76%) of respondents were in favour of funding being sought for a multi-purpose shared-space community centre at the former Finlay's site; more than half (52%) stated that they or another household member would be interested in using activities/services on the site; and a majority of respondents (82%) preferred the site to be used for 'health and wellbeing initiatives'.

Once again the issue of trust was considered to be a key success factor in bringing both communities together: *"both communities trusted the NIHE to come in and facilitate between them"*. It was also suggested that some tenants involved in the BMSSP had complained about the relevance of the Scrutiny Panel. This perhaps suggests disconnect and/or a communication gap between those involved in scrutiny and those tenants who are more involved in local issues.

Super Councils and community planning

Panel members raised concerns about the prospect of new super councils assuming housing functions currently under NIHE control: *“our argument is to leave the NIHE alone. No powers should be passed to the new super councils. If it is to do with housing and housing estates the NIHE should always have the lead. The group would like to see NIHE development powers restored”*. Some Panel members were involved in community planning with the council in their capacity as community representatives although there remained a lack of clarity: *“I don't think they have worked out what community planning is; we were invited to a meeting a few weeks ago and they are asking the same questions that they asked 3 years ago in Malone House. People in communities are still asking what is it about”*. Panel members also expressed a number of other concerns about RPA including sectarian attitudes within councils, certain areas being subsumed into larger boundaries and losing the sense of being represented, and a fear that community development and neighbourhood renewal funded posts could be lost if undertaken by council employees. A number of Panel members stated that they had never met with the Housing Council and some were unsure of its role and remit.

Tenant Empowerment and Community Enterprise

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

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

The stakeholder report suggested that community enterprise initiatives were perhaps a more plausible way of achieving tenant empowerment. A number of

fledgling social enterprises have formed recently in the West Belfast area, particularly in relation to childcare, recycling and one in relation to grounds maintenance in the Shankill. Another empowerment initiative for the area included a DFP funded programme to improve digital inclusion. Lots of work has reportedly been done with local communities to promote the development of social enterprise activity but a key concern is the ability to sustain businesses once formed: *“there is a concern when developing social enterprise projects. What happens when grants run out? I see two different types. Running a business and running a service that doesn't have the same profit. Being able to sustain the business is key.”*

Conclusion

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

A major achievement in the West Belfast context has been the coming together of tenant involvement structures across community boundaries.. Whilst reservations remain about the full amalgamation of the two HCNs, the collaboration at the Scrutiny Panel level sends a strong signal to other community representatives that partnership working across the community divide can lead to positive results. This cross community working also helped to dispel myths that one community gets more than the other.

The first service review ‘repairing your home’ led to a significant number of changes to NIHE policies and procedures in relation to response maintenance and to change of tenancies. The first review coincided with the NIHE ‘journey to excellence’ programme and it remains to be seen if future reviews lead to similar successes. Also, it remains unclear how the work programmes of the 13 scrutiny panels are coordinated. The South Down SP also reviewed COTs which may have resulted in duplication of time and effort and similar recommendations. Members were keen to share learning across the panels and this may be something worth further consideration

The context of NIHE transformation processes was important for the case study and was seen to have been positive for the scrutiny reviews. Considerable interaction had taken place between the Scrutiny Panel and the transformation team around the use of technology by NIHE maintenance officers. One important theme to emerge from the two scrutiny reviews was the increasing importance of IT and tenants and community representatives engaging with IT changes for more responsive services. This theme was also apparent in the Choice Housing case study.

Corporate governance structures and links to security and networks were also considered. The prospect of tenant directorships also had members' approval although with some caveats and considerations. Whilst there is consistency from the grass roots through to the NIHE central panel, some tenants are still unclear or unsure of the work of the Scrutiny Panel. This perhaps suggests disconnect and/or a communication gap between those involved in scrutiny and those tenants who are more involved in local issues.

Wider community involvement was picked up in relation to housing associations, shared space, super councils and community enterprise. Generally Panel members were highly critical of housing associations; and their absence of long term commitment to community involvement once schemes had been built. There was a clear preference for NIHE as landlord and for new build to be undertaken by the NIHE. However, there was also some evidence of positive working with HAs and HA tenants though involvement of the Upper Springfield Resource Centre in the NIHE swap and exchange scheme. This had helped to make best use of new HA stock in the area and also helped foster new tenant and resident groups on the new HA estates as residents moved in. There was also some support for area based structures for tenant involvement across NIHE and HA tenants and landlords.

There had been significant progress with the Black Mountain shared space project but this was not seen as very well connected to the Tenant Scrutiny panel. There was little confidence in super councils in relation to housing and community strategies.

Community enterprise was seen as a way of achieving tenant empowerment and there was also some willingness to consider devolved management options similar to tenant management but only in the event of NIHE stock transfer.

Appendix A.1: Response Maintenance Scrutiny Review Recommendations

1. It is important that appointments are made and kept by contractors and should be made on the basis of 9am to 1pm and 1pm to 5pm Monday to Friday but might be broadened to include weekends and early evening calls. These should be agreed in advance with tenants.
2. Housing Executive CSU staff should have, at the very least, have access to the appointments system and to be able to track the progress of repairs and be able to communicate that information to tenants on request.
3. In emergency of extreme circumstances, such as extreme weather and related conditions or where there is a backlog of outstanding requests logged, Housing Executive CSU should be in a position to be able to contact tenants directly to indicate delays to repairs or cancellation of appointments.
4. COT work should have a post-completion rate of 100%.
5. Whilst CSU has a current post-completion rate of 8% for call backs, the Panel believed that this should be higher for certain types of repair, as high as 100% where possible, or at least a phone call for low value works.

6. Greater priority should be given to the recruitment, training and maintaining a permanent full-time maintenance staff complement.
7. CSU should be able to instruct immediate callout when deemed necessary.
8. After hours emergency call out service should also have the same capacity as DLO in undertaking repairs. After hours call out service should have the capacity to complete reinstatement of heating works where it is possible to do so, particularly in periods of cold weather or in support of vulnerable households. Consideration should also be given to the enhancement of the quality and availability of temporary heating where repairs cannot be completed under emergency call-out.
9. The pilot scheme should be retained as a permanent service.
10. Where there are some waivers on recoverable charges operated by the CSU in Belfast, these should be extended to the emergency after hours service, e.g. broken windows due to vandalism, broken or faulty locks etc.
11. Housing management provide a monitor through KPIs etc on the accessibility of the contractor and the successful delivery of the repairs service.
12. Repair requests should be accepted from tenants, from neighbours, from civic representatives and from community organisations; a reasonable expectation is that CSU should take all repair requests as genuine.
13. Housing Executive should ensure it has the capacity to retain trained staff in CSU and in local outlets and there should be consistency of staff in both; consideration should also be given to the employment of apprentices as part of the contracts.
14. The current telephone number is too long and might benefit from being shortened.
15. The telephone and the repairs system should be marketed more effectively.
16. Calls to the CSU should be recorded for training purposes and to ensure greater accountability.
17. The CSU and outlet counters should be fully staffed, particularly at peak periods

Appendix A.2: Change of Tenancy Scrutiny Review Recommendations

1. There should be a step-by-step guide to terminating/changing a tenancy, including a full explanation of housing benefit rules governing same.
2. There should be a 'termination' interview, much along the same lines of a new tenant visit – this should apply to ALL terminations.
3. There might be better communication between the neighbourhood officer and local community groups/representatives on tenancy change.
4. Training and information sessions on the termination process for community groups.
5. Provide clear advice and instruction to outgoing tenants as to when the tenancy will terminate and when the keys are due and the cost implications where Housing Executive have to force access to change locks etc.
6. Identify ways in which there is involvement of community groups to encourage access to the property to housing staff by the outgoing tenant.

7. Awareness raising and information should be provided to tenants on the policy and approach to recoverable charges and for damages and tenants' own repairs
8. There should be a full and complete review of policy and approach to recoverable charges and for damaged and tenants' own repairs with a view to energetic pursuit of high cost recoverable charges.
9. Housing Executive should consider allowing a certain amount of flexibility in a deviation from standard within reason and within the scope of health and safety considerations, e.g. leaving a tenants own shower over the bath in situ where this is deemed to be in good working order and serviceable.
10. In the interests of tenancy sustainment and assisting people in making Housing Executive property their home, there is a need to look at what additional support might be given to incoming tenants, i.e. the provision of certain types of furniture or reconditioned white goods where it is possible and desirable to do so.
11. All viewings should be accompanied by neighbourhood officer or appropriate housing staff.
12. All new tenants should be visited within 3 months of tenancy commencing by their neighbourhood officer or appropriate housing staff.