



Workshop Report October 2016

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Attachments

A Ballymena Workshop Note October 19th

B Belfast Workshop Note October 20th

C Craigavon Workshop Note October 21st

Introduction and Purpose

3 workshops were held in October 2016 to enable tenants of the Housing Executive and housing associations, and other key stakeholders in Northern Ireland to discuss the relevance of the research on models of tenant involvement in governance.

The main purpose of the workshops was to identify and reality check four international models that may be relevant to adapt and adopt in Northern Ireland (notes are attached)

These workshops provided much food for thought and suggested that all four models could fill gaps in existing opportunities for NI tenants to become involved in governance. One of the models could be developed in an incremental way building on existing NIHE involvement structures. The other three would require more fundamental changes to be implemented wholesale, but smaller step changes and pilot demonstration projects are suggested as a way to test the models.

The proposed new Independent Tenant Organisation with Supporting Communities could provide a significant enabling and training role in taking these models forward in line with the empowerment remit. Political support and input from stakeholders in DfC, NIHE, NIFHA, HAs and local councils would also be important to successful adoption. Most importantly such models will only succeed with the support and active participation of tenants and landlords. Making the models attractive to tenants will therefore be fundamental.

Attendance

Thanks to Supporting Communities extensive network of tenant and resident contacts, these workshops were well attended, exceeding the target numbers. In all around 120 people attended the three events. A range of interest groups were represented with the largest groups comprising NIHE Tenants, HA tenants, HCN Central Forum and scrutiny panel members, representatives from NIHE funded hard-to-reach fora (e.g. rural forum, disabilities forum), migrant centre and local community associations. Others present included Supporting Communities staff and board members, HA and NIHE staff, Department for Communities, local councillors and council staff, one political party member officers, and the Director of Housing Rights.

In order to give all tenants the opportunity to attend the workshops were held in three locations: Ballymena, Belfast and Craigavon. In practice there was much greater demand from tenants and other stakeholders for places at the Belfast workshop. There were also two complaints that no workshop was held in Derry/Londonderry or in the west.

Programme

Each workshop had a common programme, beginning with a chance to hear and comment on the research findings on the state of the art of tenant involvement in governance in Northern Ireland based on policy review, stakeholder interviews and three case studies. A short presentation then summarised the international research process which comprised a literature review, typology and selection of models of tenant involvement in governance that appeared to fill gaps in the current options available in Northern Ireland. The main part of each event then comprised a direct presentation of two (workshops 1 and 3) or three (workshop 2) of the four models by country

experts followed by a reality check with tenants and other stakeholders, the method for which is set out below.

Method

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

- Expert speakers introduced the four models using a common format based on a detailed pre-circulated report.
- Detailed reality checking took place in a total of seven workshop groups held over the three days
- Each of these seven workshops was convened by a member of the Supporting Communities team and a member of the research team.
- There was an opportunity for direct questions from tenants and other stakeholders to clarify how these models work in practice and how they might work in Northern Ireland.
- All workshop participants had an opportunity to comment on the models using a 'post it wall' and a considerable number of these comments are presented in the attached workshop notes
- We attempted to sum up views with a 'reality check' vote based on common criteria; however this was only achieved in the final workshop by which time the logistics had become better established.

The four models

The attached detailed workshop notes (attachments A, B and C) summarise the discussion and assessment of each of the four models. The following bullets briefing summarise the reactions so far:

- **The Austrian model** fills a gap by giving new tenants a significant input into design and formation of new communities well before moving in to new housing developments. Moreover community building is supported by the funding and regulatory system in Vienna. In contrast new tenants of housing association schemes in Northern Ireland are not identified until just before letting through the common selection scheme and their views on design may only be considered around a year after the letting, but this information is generally not used systematically to influence future design. Key barriers to implementation in NI are the common selection scheme and existing management and development practices. New housing funding does not currently provide incentives for community building, although the TBUC and shared futures approach may provide a prototype for building communities at the point of allocation.

Workshop participants felt that the model would fill a gap but would be hard to implement, with major changes required to existing systems. If the model were implemented it would be expected to gain tenant support and could be very attractive to tenants.

- **The Dutch model** would also fill a gap by enhancing tenant voice in local strategic planning between councils and housing providers (community strategies and planning for new build). This could be regarded as an incremental change since the NIHE scrutiny panels have already moved to be conterminous with the super council areas and HAs and HA tenants have been

encouraged to attend inter-agency meetings at the local level. However, the underlying change is a much more fundamental step change and something that hasn't been done in Northern Ireland since planning powers were removed from the councils in the 70s. It could also help in aligning consultation and engagement arrangements with social housing tenants more closely across the HA and NIHE sectors. However, it could be argued that an area based model is less attractive to tenants than one which enables them to directly influence their landlords. The Dutch model also required legislation to move from voluntary to legally backed annual agreements between landlords, tenants and local authorities. This could also be regarded as an overly bureaucratic approach.

Workshop participants felt that the model would fill a gap but could be hard to implement, requiring changes in mindsets and systems and requiring knowledge and capacity building for all parties. If the model were implemented it would be expected to gain tenant support and could be attractive to some tenants.

- **The English model** fills a gap in involving tenants as voting members of their association with the largest representation at the highest level of governance, the board. While this appears a major difference to NI and required a stock transfer to achieve in Preston, it could be regarded as an incremental change for the NIHE engagement structure, extending the structure of tenant representation within NIHE to include board representation and a tenant membership structure. It might also be worth considering in connection with the small scale stock transfers by NIHE which have to date been more concerned with stock improvement than tenant empowerment.

Workshop participants were very impressed by the presentation and Q&A with Preston tenants and were convinced that the model fills a gap and could work in NI with support from tenants and landlords.

- **The Welsh model** would fill a gap by enabling local residents to get involved in running small scale housing schemes for themselves with support from landlords, enabling and promotional agencies. There are currently no housing cooperatives in Northern Ireland and this was felt to be partly related to fears of 'paramilitary capture' but also to a lack of institutional support in government, the NIHE or HA sector. However, the later could have been said of Wales ten years ago, and this has been turned around through political will and effective enabling partnerships.

Workshop participants felt that the model would fill a gap but could be hard to implement, requiring changes in mindsets and systems and requiring knowledge and capacity building for all parties. If the model were implemented it would be expected to gain tenant support and could be attractive to some tenants, but perhaps not for those in the greatest and most immediate housing need.

Outcomes

These events each achieved high levels of participation and discussion of the models and their relevance to Northern Ireland. The atmosphere at the three events was very positive and discussion went on well beyond the formal times allowed. Participants made contacts with the country experts and research team members that are likely to result in follow up action and longer term impact. There was excellent feedback on the events from the evaluation forms issued by Supporting Communities.

It was observed in each workshop that questions and discussion could have lasted much longer. In each workshop participants provided feedback using the suggested methods, but it was felt that a more detailed scrutiny and assessment of the detailed model outlines circulated before the event would have required a longer and more structured process.

There is potential for further events to be held, for example as part of Supporting Communities training programme, for tenants to work through the international models reports in a structured way, hold study visits or virtual study visits via video conferencing with tenants and officers involved in the models in practice. Such work could also fit well into the empowerment brief of the proposed Independent Tenant Organisation.

The model descriptions report could provide a valuable resource for such activities:

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/SPSW/Housing/2016/international-models-of-resident-involvement-in-governance-model-descriptions.pdf>

Extending the Reality Check

As an immediate action, views of participants are requested on models that they did not have the opportunity to reality check at the events. For consistency we are asking for views on the following six questions (used in the initial reality checks):

- Does this model fill a gap in NI?
- Could it work here?
- Would tenants want to take part?
- Who else is likely to be interested/support in NI?
- What changes would it take to make it work here?
- What might make this model more attractive to tenants?

In order for these to be included in our final report we would request comments to d.w.mullins@bham.ac.uk by November 14th 2016.

Follow up

The workshops established that all four proposed models could fill gaps in existing opportunities for NI tenants to influence housing governance. Some suggestions are made on how each model could be explored further in Northern Ireland by involving tenants and other stakeholders in an incremental process. This would start with fact finding activities and establishing support from relevant stakeholders and could move on to some pilots in the next few years if relevance to NI and advantages for tenants were confirmed.

English Gateway Model

This model gained the greatest support in the workshops and might form the basis of early follow up action to include:

- Factfinding visits to Preston (and may be to other gateways) to develop a tenant-led proposal for a bespoke gateway model to fit NI.
- Ongoing dialogue via social media and video conferencing.
- These activities and more structured exploration of the descriptions of governance models compiled for this project could be part of the Supporting Communities training programme
- Discussions with NIHE and Board to establish support. to adapt existing NIHE tenant engagement system to include tenant board members and a membership model. This could be developed incrementally by building on NIHE structure and developing capacity building and training for potential board members and would not necessarily require a radical single change as in the English stock transfer ballot.
- Establish a working group with interested parties coordinated by the new Independent Tenant Organisation with Supporting Communities, HAs, NIHE, NIFHA and DfC to identify scope for Gateway models for HAs could be explored as a separate pilot. The NIHE stock transfer programme could provide a ready vehicle for small scale gateway governance models
- Further research on whether these proposals might attract wide support from tenants, perhaps starting the next generation of small scale transfers by NIHE

Welsh Coop Model

The main barrier identified to this model was the lack of institutional support from political parties, and existing housing agencies. The Welsh example shows how this could be turned around to create demonstration projects and pilots:

- Identify a local partner to work with CCCH in a similar way to the Welsh Coop Centre. This could be a role for the new Independent Tenant Organisation when established as part of their empowerment brief. Supporting Communities currently provide training and support on tenant involvement and workshops on coop options would fit well here.
- Establish a working group with interested parties coordinated by the new Independent Tenant Organisation with Supporting Communities, CCCH, HAs, NIHE, NIFHA and DfC to identify scope for a small pilot programme similar to the Welsh programme
- Further research to attract support from tenants and housing applicants interested in cooperative option

Establish Demonstration Projects on a pilot basis without major system changes.

- Possibly develop an affordable rent or low cost ownership model outside of the common selection scheme

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

Austrian model

There are two main ways in which this inspiring example could be followed up. First by finding alternative mechanisms to involve tenants in design, second to develop demonstration projects building on shared futures and with affordable rather than social housing schemes:

- Enhance existing feedback from new residents a year after occupancy and ensure feedback influences design of future schemes including Housing Association Design Guide
- Establish a working group coordinated by the new Independent Tenant Organisation with interested Supporting Communities, HAs, NIHE, NIFHA and DfC to identify scope for a small pilot programme for tenants to be involved in design and community participation for their new homes
- Establish Demonstration Projects on a pilot basis without major system changes, Two possibilities are suggested;
 - To support a group of residents moving in to a shared futures TBUC scheme on influencing design and community building.
 - To create another pilot for an affordable rented scheme outside of social housing and therefore not constrained by the common selection scheme.

Dutch Model

This model was seen by some workshop participants as consistent with existing direction of travel but by others as a radical change. There is scope for exploration of the model without taking the strong legal and local accountability steps implied in the full Dutch model

- Area Scrutiny Panels are already coterminous with the new super council areas. There are also existing inter-agency meetings in some areas which HA staff attend but not HA tenants.
- However, the underlying change is a much more fundamental step change and something that hasn't been done in Northern Ireland since planning powers were removed from the councils in the 70s. Furthermore an area based model may be less attractive to tenants than one which enables them to directly influence their landlords.
- Nevertheless, Scrutiny Panels could include liaison with local councils and HAs on their agendas within their existing remit over the next year to see what opportunities may arise for a more formal accountability system similar to the Dutch one.
- Within the next year each scrutiny panel could undertake a scrutiny review on a theme that involves the local authority and HAs. One possibility is 'the new build programme, planning and meeting local housing needs' another might be 'involvement of tenants in local community strategies'