

Delivering change through
involvement
Consultation paper



AFFORDABLE HOMES STRONG COMMUNITIES



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Executive summary

This paper sets out our proposals for a revised resident and community involvement policy which we plan to publish in April 2007.

In this consultation paper we:

- restate the business imperative for involvement;
- set out our objectives, policy and requirements within the Regulatory Code and Guidance;
- outline the basic building blocks of effective involvement for housing associations;
- establish a new requirement for housing associations to have at least one resident board member; and
- set out a menu of additional approaches to involvement, including the widening of housing association involvement activities to include communities.

Foreword

Involving residents and communities in decisions that affect their lives makes the business of delivering housing services more effective. Just as importantly, it builds a relationship of mutual trust between the people that use services and the organisations that deliver them.

Many housing associations know that to deliver effectively and accountably they need to focus on what people want. Where an association is committed to delivering well, involving people makes a real contribution to knowing what to do and how to do it.

When we launched our Involvement Policy for the Housing Association Sector in April 2004 it was well received. Its approach was 'bottom up' and many residents and associations found that this gave them the opportunity to develop innovative approaches or to bring new focus to existing structures.

In the two and a half years since we launched the policy involvement has moved on, increasingly becoming a part of the drive to offer customer choice and devolved decision making. The Elton review of regulatory burdens set a path for us to follow towards promoting more effective involvement.

It is in this context that the Housing Corporation wants to ensure that involvement is even more clearly embedded at the heart of housing association activity going forward.

This consultation paper sets out our thinking about how we should revise our involvement policy to ensure that all associations put the views and interests of customers at the heart of what they do. Our Gold Award for community engagement will highlight the ways that some housing associations are at the leading edge in this work.

We look forward to receiving your comments on our proposals, which will inform the revised involvement policy to be published in spring 2007.



Peter Dixon

Chairman

December 2006

Introduction

The Housing Corporation sees involvement as critical to the successful conduct of housing associations' business. Involving residents enhances the effectiveness with which housing services are delivered, brings benefits of new skills and increased confidence to residents and assists with sustaining neighbourhoods and communities.

We have already signalled our intention to increase our regulatory focus on housing association resident involvement activity, and to take firm regulatory action where necessary. This paper sets out our proposals for a revised resident and community involvement policy which we plan to publish in April 2007. We welcome your views on the proposals contained within this paper, and in particular on the key questions set out within the text. The deadline for submissions is 15 March 2007. Further details on how to respond to this consultation are set out at the end of this document.

In developing our proposals, we have sought the views of housing associations through roundtable debates and have undertaken a number of focus groups of housing association residents drawn from our national Resident Consultation Panel. We would welcome further views from residents on our proposals, and would hope that where housing associations contribute views, they make efforts to ensure that they reflect the views of their residents. To help with this, we have published a facilitators' brief to support housing associations in working with groups of residents to address some of the key issues raised by the consultation.

Why we are reviewing the policy

The Housing Corporation's Involvement Policy for the Housing Association Sector came into effect in April 2004. It consolidated the previous papers Making Consumers Count and Communities in Control. It was our first resident involvement policy, and was welcomed as a step forward from previous approaches to promoting tenant participation.

The policy includes a regulatory requirement that all housing associations develop resident Involvement Statements and undertake annual Impact Assessments. However, the policy does not prescribe how involvement should be organised and delivered, instead encouraging housing associations to take a bottom-up approach. We believe it has been valuable, allowing housing associations to develop involvement policy and practice that is responsive to the aspirations of residents.

In April 2006, we commissioned an independent review of our involvement policy to inform us of the progress that has been made and issues that need to be addressed. It showed that some housing associations and residents are unclear regarding the aims and requirements of the policy. It also highlighted that a significant minority of associations were not meeting our key requirement to have put in place an Involvement Statement, developed in consultation with their residents.

In spring 2006, the Elton review of regulatory burdens on housing associations considered resident involvement as part of its remit. It recommended that the involvement policy should be revised, that further action should be taken to ensure compliance with our involvement policy and that residents should be represented on housing association boards.

The National Housing Federation's Tenant Involvement Commission reported in September 2006. We have welcomed the conclusions of the Commission, which have contributed to the thinking behind the proposals outlined in this paper.

In October 2006, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published Strong and Prosperous Communities, the Local Government White Paper. One of the priorities in the White Paper is to strengthen community involvement and the accountability of public service providers. It also committed government to exploring opportunities for tenants of housing associations to become more engaged in the management decisions. We want housing associations to work with local authorities at the forefront of this agenda, ensuring that residents and communities have meaningful influence over the services they receive.

In October 2006 we published our Neighbourhoods and Communities Strategy, which underlines our belief that involvement of both residents and wider communities is a crucial part of delivering

Elton review

The Elton review considered the burden of regulation on the housing association sector. It made a number of recommendations about resident involvement, which said:

- the Housing Corporation should review its resident involvement policy, ensuring that associations can respond positively to neighbourhood and community policies;
- the Corporation should take regulatory action with associations that have not engaged with the current policy;
- the Corporation and the NHF should ensure that involving residents is seen as core business for all associations;
- the Corporation and partners should encourage, and in due course require, externally verified self-assessment incorporating resident feedback;
- the Corporation, Audit Commission and NHF should work with CIH to progress proposals for resident-led inspection;
- the Corporation should establish national performance indicators putting emphasis on resident satisfaction;
- national performance indicators should be supplemented by local performance targets established and reported on by associations, following agreement with residents; and
- the Corporation and NHF should work with the ombudsman to increase understanding of the latter's role.

What tenants want

The report of the National Housing Federation's Tenant Involvement Commission proposed a Customer First Plan for housing associations to develop further how they involve tenants. It undertook the first 'deliberative forum' of over 100 housing association tenants, balanced to match the tenant diversity of housing associations across England, to consider how associations and involvement could change. It showed that, above all, tenants want high quality housing services delivered with good customer service.

The Commission made challenging recommendations for housing associations, regulators, inspectors and government. Part of its recommended Customer First Plan was an accountability pledge for housing associations to adopt:

- at least one quarter of board membership open to tenants; or
- an empowered residents' panel which the board listens to; or
- regular options appraisals on how tenants might be more involved in the management of their homes and community facilities, including the possibility of tenant management.

sustainable communities. This consultation takes forward the recommendations of the Elton Report, and the commitments made in our Neighbourhoods and Communities Strategy.

The Local Government White Paper indicated the Government's intent to explore opportunities for tenants of housing associations to become more engaged in management decisions. We will be working with the Government to take forward this commitment; the outcome of this consultation will contribute to that workstream.

What we mean by involvement

When we refer to involvement we mean:

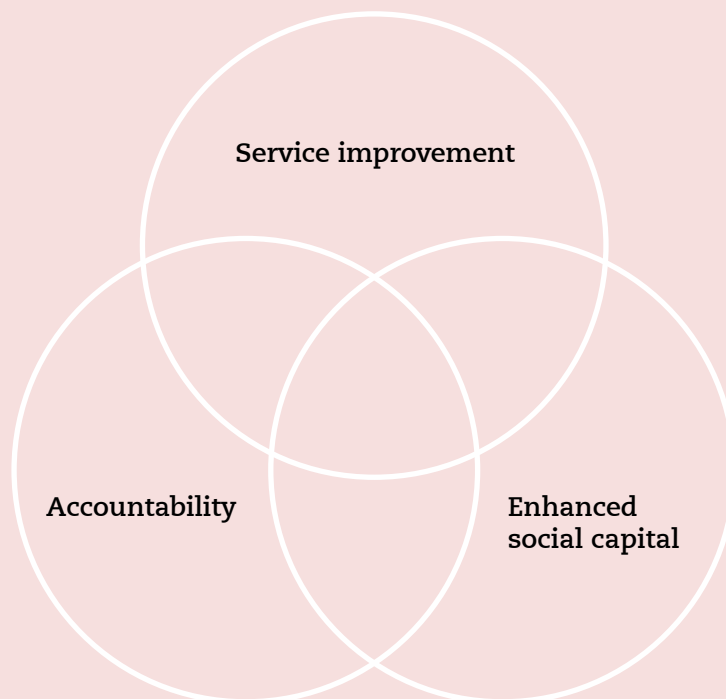
- all the activities and processes that a housing association undertakes that help it to know what its residents and communities want;
- all the activities that enable residents and communities to have more influence over decisions, when they want it;
- all the activities and resources that enable people to be involved, if they want to; and
- the framework in which involvement is delivered (e.g. the Involvement Statement and Impact Assessment).

Involvement can include everything from a resident satisfaction survey or a verbal complaint to a member of staff (and the feedback an association gives on it) to community ownership of assets.

We are not promoting involvement for its own sake. Our expectation is that associations should embrace involvement as an integral part of their business processes – involvement needs to be directed towards achieving positive outcomes for residents, communities and housing associations.

There is strong evidence of the business case for effective involvement. The 2004 Audit Commission and Housing Corporation study *Housing: Improving Services through Involvement*, in particular, shows how involvement can improve services, strengthen accountability and enhance social capital.

'Top level' outcomes



Our requirements, aims and the framework for delivery

Our requirements and targets

The proposals in this consultation paper build on the outcomes we have set in Section 2.5 of the Regulatory Code and Guidance, and on the expectations set out in the involvement policy.

Our current involvement policy requires housing associations to publish an Involvement Statement which they have agreed with their residents and an annual Impact Assessment. We believe that both are important for effective involvement and have no plans to change these requirements.

Regulatory Code

2.5 Housing associations must seek and be responsive to residents' views and priorities.

2.5.1 reflecting these interests in their business strategies.

2.5.2 giving residents and other stakeholders opportunities to comment on their performance.

2.5.3 enabling residents to play their part in decision making.

2.5.4 providing opportunities for residents to explore, and play their part in how services are managed and provided.

Regulatory guidance

2.5a The association is effectively accountable to its stakeholders. Current information about its activities is widely available to residents and other parties.

2.5.1b Residents, housing applicants and others have ready access to an effective complaints and compensation policy, administered effectively. Independent Housing Ombudsman recommendations are actioned.

2.5.2c The association considers a range of methods and opportunities to consult and obtain feedback from residents. It seeks to make an agreement, developed in partnership with residents, setting out how this will be resourced, measured, monitored and reviewed.

2.5.3d Where they so wish, residents are supported, enabling them to obtain the knowledge and skills to play an effective part in investment in, and management of their homes and neighbourhoods. They are encouraged and supported to explore options.

At present the regulatory requirements of the policy apply to all housing associations, whatever their size, structure or purpose. We propose that in future, all housing associations managing more than 1,000 homes will be required to comply with the detailed provisions of the policy.

In line with our commitment to lowering the burden of regulation on small associations, we do not intend to impose a similar obligation on associations managing less than 1,000 homes. However, we will continue to expect general compliance with the principles of the policy (subject to a different threshold in relation to the requirement for resident board membership, see below). See the section on regulating the involvement policy in associations managing less than 1,000 homes (page 25) for what this means in practice.

Question 1

What are your views regarding the proposal that housing associations with less than 1,000 homes should be required to abide by the principles of the policy, but not be subject to its detailed provisions?

Question 2

What are your views regarding the proposal that non-registered organisations should abide by the principles of the policy?

We will also expect non-registered organisations seeking housing management accreditation to abide by the principles of the policy. We will consult in due course on specific requirements we propose to require within our accreditation scheme.

We intend to require all housing associations managing more than 250 homes to have at least one resident on each of their landlord/service delivery boards. Further details on this requirement can be found in the chapter on resident board members (page 22).

We will continue to regulate compliance with the policy according to the principles of risk-based regulation. We discuss our regulatory approach in the chapter on regulation, inspection and the support that we provide (page 25).

What we want our policy to achieve

Although communities, residents and housing associations may have many reasons to engage in involvement activities, they should be united in a shared aspiration for involvement to achieve positive outcomes. By this we mean that positive change is achieved by involvement. Our aim for the involvement policy is for it to set out a framework in which housing associations undertake effective involvement which creates a culture of mutuality, a trust relationship between active communities and housing associations, so that it:

Different strokes

A housing association wants to demolish some properties. In order to decide whether, and how, to go ahead, it has to engage with three distinct groups of people.

It uses face-to-face consultation with the tenants that would be directly affected and finds that the vast majority are happy to move from the neighbourhood permanently if the compensation package offered is reasonable. It pays specific attention to older people as its financial exclusion assessment for all residents shows that this group has a more limited chance of becoming home owners.

It debates the policy reasons with residents through its policy forum and a series of self-selecting focus groups. It recognises that previous demolition has caused tensions for some black and minority ethnic communities, as they are disproportionately housed in the affected areas. In planning its current programme, it focuses on the housing that these communities aspire to and takes active steps to address emerging tensions between different ethnic and cultural groups.

In partnership with the local authority, it holds a series of public meetings aimed at the affected community. It holds confidential surgeries for individuals and small groups at the end of each meeting to discuss local or specific issues, such as blocks of flats and joint decanting arrangements.

- means something to residents, communities and housing associations because it...
- focuses on delivering positive outcomes for residents and communities, and for housing associations it is part of how they do business.

There is a strong business case for involvement, provided it is focused on delivering outcomes. We believe that involvement which is focused on creating positive change can:

- improve housing associations' services;
- enhance accountability to residents and communities; and
- enable residents and communities to enhance their skills, confidence and quality of life.

This business-oriented approach to involvement seeks to address a key challenge identified by the National Housing Federation's Tenant Involvement Commission:

"[Tenants] understand why involvement is a good thing: having their say and shaping the services they receive. The problem appears to be that tenants do not believe that their association will act on what they say, or that they will be involved in any kind of genuine or meaningful way."

Question 3

How can we best ensure that involvement focuses on outcomes?

Widening the remit of the policy

Currently, the involvement policy only asks housing associations to engage with residents. On most occasions the focus of involvement activity is to engage this group in decision making about housing services. The National Housing Federation Commission noted that for tenants, core housing services are their first priority. However, on occasions housing associations need to involve different groups and/or deploy different involvement approaches with a range of groups.

Many housing associations already recognise that tenants, residents and communities need to be involved in different ways. As such, the current involvement policy does not reflect current practice in the housing association sector. By focusing on involving residents, it may present a barrier to some housing associations developing the multi-layered involvement that they need.

We expect residents to remain the core focus of housing association involvement. However, whilst we do not intend to require wider community involvement in the preparation of Involvement Statements, associations should consider how best to involve wider communities in defining wider services and holding them to account for their delivery.

Question 4

What are your views regarding our proposal to widen the remit of the policy, while leaving it to residents, communities and housing associations to decide the correct focus of involvement?

The outcomes the Corporation believes effective involvement will deliver

The independent review of the involvement policy and other feedback from residents and housing associations has highlighted a need to provide more clarity and guidance around the outcomes that involvement can deliver. Our intention is that our revised involvement policy should provide a framework within which such outcomes can be identified.

Key outcomes may include the following, which are all related to common housing association business aspirations:

- improved and/or more responsive services;
- better equality of access to services, by removing barriers;
- services which offer better value for money and/or are more efficient;
- increased transparency of decision making;
- more effective resident and/or community scrutiny of performance;
- increased capacity, confidence and skills among people that are involved;
- improved community cohesion; and
- increased influence over quality of life in neighbourhoods and communities.

The 2004 Audit Commission and Housing Corporation study *Housing: Improving Services through Involvement* provides further examples of how involvement can improve services, strengthen accountability and enhance social capital.

Resident involvement remains an under-valued element of housing management... One of the reasons for this is the uncertainty that seems to abound around why landlords should engage with their residents... Many social landlords do believe in the principle and make it work: for them, resident involvement can result in substantial benefit to the business of delivering housing services.

Housing: Improving Services through Involvement, Audit Commission and Housing Corporation, 2004

Starting from these high-level outcomes, each association will need to agree with its residents and/or communities more specific outcomes for involvement that meet local needs and aspirations.

There are areas of activity that are necessary for effective involvement. These activities contribute to delivering the outcomes that residents, communities and housing associations want. We describe these activities in the chapter on basic building blocks of effective involvement.

Question 5

What are your views regarding these outcomes?

Question 6

Do the outcomes above give a framework for effective involvement from which more specific local outcomes will be developed?

Code of practice on tenant involvement

We welcome the start of the work by the NHF on a code of practice on tenant involvement for the housing association sector, which we hope will complement the requirements of a revised resident involvement policy. Whilst our policy will set our baseline expectations of housing associations in respect of involvement, we welcome the prospect the code offers of building further on resident involvement across the sector, including the wider adoption of some of the approaches set out in the chapter on building better involvement (page 27).

Resourcing involvement

We are clear in our expectation that all associations must provide the necessary financial support to ensure that residents have the capacity to engage in involvement activity, including board membership. We are currently undertaking a regulation thematic review of involvement and will use this to investigate good practice in resourcing involvement. We will consider in the light of the review whether we need to do further research to assess the resources required to deliver effective involvement and establish clear benchmarks for the sector (see next chapter, basic building blocks of effective involvement 6).

The basic building blocks of effective involvement

Our current involvement policy includes ten statements setting out examples of involvement activities and processes that a housing association should undertake. However, we recognise that the policy could be clarified to explain that the ten statements:

- describe processes, which should lead to positive outcomes; and
- are the Corporation's view of minimum standards for involvement.

We propose, therefore, to revise these statements and redefine them as 'basic building blocks of effective involvement'. We will provide explanation as to how successful delivery of the basic building blocks should lead to positive outcomes. It is our intention that the basic building blocks should set a clear baseline for involvement and we will expect housing associations to engage with all them.

However, whilst we see the basic building blocks as being crucial to effective involvement, we do not believe we should prescribe how they are delivered. We do not see them as a comprehensive list and we are keen for communities, residents and housing associations to use them as a starting point from which to innovate.

Question 7

What support would residents and associations want in deciding the level of resources effective involvement requires in their specific circumstances?

Proposed basic building blocks of effective involvement in detail

To bring about effective organisational change, the basic building blocks of effective involvement are:

1. Ensure that people have equal opportunities to take part in involvement, and take active steps to engage with under-represented and vulnerable groups.

This should also be integral to all of the other building blocks.

Involvement that seeks to be representative of communities and builds positive community relations will contribute to improving equality of access to services and increased community cohesion.

2. Have a profile of residents in the association's homes and make positive effort to develop 'market intelligence' on their aspirations.

An association with a clear view of who its residents are and what they want, will know who to talk to and when.

3. Provide accessible information and feedback and take an open approach to providing information that is requested. This should include feedback on:

Policy in practice

Ensuring that people have equal opportunities

Funded by a partnership of social housing providers and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Innovation into Action Grant, Tung Sing Housing Association developed seven BME Residents Network roadshows, which were targeted in neighbourhoods with high proportions of black and minority ethnic communities in Manchester. They were promoted through a combination of management information available to the partner associations, community and voluntary sector groups and marketing of the events in religious buildings, community centres and schools. Attendance was encouraged through the offer of gift card rewards and by highlighting the long-term benefit to black and minority ethnic residents of having influence on the future provision of housing and other services.

The events included presentations by a number of key agencies, including the Tenant Participation Unit at Manchester City Council, Regeneration Partnerships, Crime and Disorder representatives and Manchester Council for Community Relations. A wide variety of stall holders were present to advise and support residents with housing issues, voluntary services and even demonstrate Reiki techniques. The event was designed to be fun, increase cultural awareness and provide social opportunities to network with neighbours via food, entertainment and music from around the world including judo, Bollywood dancing and tai chi demonstrations.

There was an important consultation element to the roadshows, with attendees invited to communicate issues, concerns and views about their housing options, the local area and their future aspirations.

The network wanted the roadshows to be as inclusive as possible and organised interpreters in several key languages with access to language line support. Tung Sing's United Nation-style simultaneous interpretation equipment was available at each event so everyone could enjoy and participate fully at each roadshow. Tung Sing also offered bilingual community members the free opportunity to become accredited community interpreters and establish a social enterprise.

Against a target of 350 attendees, the roadshows attracted over 700 people. The results of the 210 consultation questionnaires completed at the events are being put to good use. The BME Residents Network is using the evidence from the roadshows, with other information it has gathered, to develop a shared code of practice for engaging with people whose first language is not English, and the consultees are becoming a constituted group to influence further the future provision of services and to develop their own skills. Against a target of 15, Tung Sing Housing Association has also been successful in accrediting 50 community members as community interpreters.

- performance, comparison with peers and action taken to improve;
- how involvement has brought about change; and
- complaints and lessons learnt, and changes made;

Access to information, presented in a way that enables residents to ask searching questions, is an essential starting point for enabling residents to influence decisions and hold associations accountable.

4. Develop a range of methods of involvement, with active residents, and/or communities, that allow people to be involved on their terms (often described as a ‘menu of involvement’).

A range of options will maximise the number of people that are engaged in the association’s work. A larger pool of active residents and communities will, with a commitment to action, lead to housing associations that are better at meeting aspirations, while not being an end in itself.

5. Negotiate with residents, and/or communities, the terms of reference for involvement activities (e.g. constitutional requirements for funded community groups, timescales for consultation).

This information will enhance transparency and accountability by ensuring that the aims of involvement activities and necessary

Policy in practice

Community profile and market intelligence

West Kent Housing Association was the first association to receive three stars in its Audit Commission inspection. The Audit Commission noted its strong record in involvement.

The association has undertaken a census to enhance the information it holds about its residents. This helps it contact them in a way that suits them and tailor its services. It spoke to another housing association that had undertaken a similar project in order to learn the best methods for success.

As it further develops its census project, it is aiming to achieve 80% coverage of residents in its homes.

The census information is used to flag particular resident needs and West Kent Housing Association automatically tailors the information it provides to those needs.



Policy in practice

Investment in neighbourhoods and communities

Somer Community Housing Trust works with residents to identify areas that will benefit from a Somer Community Action in Neighbourhoods (SCAN) project.

Since 2001, SCAN has brought an additional £1.2 million investment into targeted neighbourhoods that were in decline. Residents and communities help to determine priorities for investment and changes in management practice and are encouraged to play a full role in delivering solutions.

SCAN outcomes range from high-quality security systems and extensive landscaping programmes to the refurbishment of play areas and creation of new community facilities.

A significant proportion of the annual SCAN budget is committed to small-scale projects initiated by residents and decided upon by area panel tenant representatives.

commitments of both associations and communities are clear.

6. Enable involvement by providing properly resourced capacity building and training for residents, staff and, where appropriate, communities. This should include:
 - activities within the housing association which create an involvement culture;
 - providing resources that allow formally constituted groups to perform their basic functions (e.g. produce newsletters, hold open meetings and hold an annual general meeting);
 - providing appropriate support for people to be involved (e.g. travel expenses, child care, personal assistants and any other reasonable out-of-pocket expenses);
 - providing or sourcing appropriate capacity building and/or training to allow people that want to be involved in policy or practice to perform effectively. This work need not be entirely resourced by the association; and
 - providing support to ensure that people can identify and deliver their own aspirations for involvement (e.g. developing community based projects and new skills). This work need not be entirely resourced by the association.

Housing associations should build the capacity of all people that are involved to enable them to:

- better meet their expectations;
- empower individuals and groups; and

- bring about effective organisation change.
7. Develop, with residents and/or communities, ways to negotiate service targets, influence corporate decision making and hold the association to account. (In most cases this work will be focused on residents.)

Increased influence and scrutiny over decisions will help associations to focus on meeting people's aspirations.

8. Develop and sustain mechanisms, with residents and/or communities, which enable influence over investment in and the design of affordable homes, and where relevant, wider neighbourhood priorities.

Where residents and/or communities influence the future of their neighbourhoods they will feel more committed and will contribute to improved quality of life.

9. Consider with residents and/or communities the value for money of involvement activities, including the added value that involvement creates.

By identifying value for money improvements in as many areas of the association's work as possible, resident involvement activities will improve the housing association's business.

Policy in practice

Neighbourhood target setting

Pennine Housing 2000 (PH2K) deploys a number of methods to ensure that residents have influence at the neighbourhood level. PH2K undertook wide-ranging consultations, using a variety of methods for reviews of local housing services such as environmental works and caretaking services.

PH2K's open-access area panels make decisions about how environmental budgets are used.

At the estate or neighbourhood level, PH2K has scheme panels for capital works and undertakes estate walkabouts to ensure that small-scale environmental works, such as fence repair, are up to date.

PH2K has negotiated two neighbourhood-level compacts with tenants and resident associations which had requested formal agreements as a method for holding a range of service providers to account.

10. Develop with residents and/or communities appropriate neighbourhood level targets and scrutiny where they want this, and it is relevant.

Many residents and communities rightly prioritise the quality of life in their neighbourhood, not just in their homes. Associations should seek to adapt their services and support residents and communities in efforts to adapt the services of other agencies in the neighbourhood. This will improve associations' services, make them more accountable and help to deliver improved quality of life.

Question 8

Is the basic building block approach helpful in clarifying our expectations in respect of resident involvement?

Question 9

Have we picked the right basic building blocks?

Involvement Statements and Impact Assessments

Involvement Statements

We see no reason to change our requirement for housing associations to have Involvement Statements. Any major area of a housing association's work requires a statement, strategy or policy to set its direction and describe the framework in which success will be achieved. This may be within, or at least within the context of, the business plan. We believe that this is as true for involvement as for tenancy management or development.

We do not intend to prescribe the content, design and name of Involvement Statements as our independent review of the involvement policy showed that for some residents and associations the process of creating a statement from the bottom up reshaped their approach to involvement. However, we think that the best way for an association to organise its involvement is to have one clear document (see note below), negotiated with stakeholders, which identifies:

- priority outcomes of involvement;
- how involvement fits into its business strategy;
- a method for monitoring success of the statement and of reviewing it;
- a range of ways in which stakeholders can be involved on their terms, when they want to be; and
- the resources available to enable involvement.

Note

We are aware that some housing associations, such as large scale voluntary transfer organisations, have been unsure whether they need a separate statement to mirror or supplement their compacts or policies. Provided their existing strategy documents conform to the principles we set out, we see no reason to require a new or separate document.

In developing their Involvement Statements, associations should consider how the outcomes they want link to the basic building blocks of involvement. We do not intend to prescribe that Involvement Statements should go into detail about how the basic building blocks are delivered. Residents, communities and associations should negotiate the best way of describing and disseminating the relationship between strategy and the methods of delivery.

Question 10

What are your views regarding the right way to achieve outcome-focused involvement while leaving the design and content of Involvement Statements open to negotiation between residents, communities and housing associations?

Question 11

What other support would associations, residents, and/or communities welcome in preparing Involvement Statements?

Policy in practice

Impact Assessment

For its first Impact Assessment, Adactus Housing Association reviewed all its main involvement activities. It started from its stated corporate aims for involvement and included the specific aims of particular projects and activities.

All project participants were invited to provide their own assessments by completing comprehensive postal questionnaires.

Feedback from residents and staff, together with available statistical information on costs and outcomes, were compiled and presented to a working group of staff and active residents. The panel assessed the impact of the association's activities by using 'traffic light' coding. Where activities were 'amber' or 'red', the working group suggested ways that activities could be changed or improved.

Impact Assessments

We have received feedback that some housing associations are unclear about how to design and undertake Impact Assessments. We believe that Impact Assessments should be flexible tools that feed into involvement priorities and drive continuous improvement. Hence, the way that impact assessment is undertaken and the measures used to assess impact must be specific to the way a housing association works with its residents and communities.

However, we believe that Impact Assessments will be more effective if they are designed using the following principles. Impact Assessments should:

- start from intended outcome(s). Any activities undertaken should be measured against their success helping to deliver the outcome(s);
- look both backwards, by assessing the impact of activities undertaken in the previous year, and forwards, to inform intended outcomes, activities and measures for the coming year; and
- assess the impact of activities according to the priority of their intended outcome, by focusing impact measures on the most important priorities for change.

We are minded to require housing associations to assess the impact of their activities against two outcomes we consider are crucially important. These are:

- Equality of access; and
- Improved value for money

By value for money we do not necessarily mean cutting costs. Instead, we wish residents, communities and housing associations to think of involvement in terms of how it creates demonstrable savings and/or added value across housing associations' work.

Several organisations have developed toolkits or model frameworks in which to develop Impact Assessments. We will provide further technical guidance with models for impact assessment to assist housing associations to develop their approach, if needed. Associations may wish to refer to this guidance in developing Impact Assessments.

Question 12

Do the principles we suggest for Impact Assessments strike the right balance between setting a framework and leaving room to innovate?

Question 13

What are your views regarding our proposed required measures of equality of access and value for money?

Question 14

Are there other required measures we should include?

Involvement Statements and Impact Assessments in group structures

We believe that housing associations in group structures should negotiate with their residents and/or communities the best place to locate their Involvement Statement and Impact Assessment. Depending on how the group is organised, the Involvement Statement and Impact Assessment could be centrally located, located in subsidiaries or designed as an overarching statement with subsidiary statements and Impact Assessments.

Resident Board Members

Residents bring a unique perspective to the board by offering the direct experience of service users to the housing associations' accountable body. As those housing associations that have resident board members know, in many cases resident board members offer a wide and distinctive skill base that directly benefits good governance. Resident board membership must be seen within the overall context of an involvement culture. All associations should have an open and welcoming board so that residents (and other new board members) can fit in and be effective.

Following our acceptance of the Elton Review recommendations our requirements are that:

1. All housing associations should have at least one resident board member on each board or committee with a service delivery remit. We see this as our minimum requirement and expect that many associations will wish to recruit, or retain, more than one resident board member.

Note

We define boards and committees with a service delivery remit as those bodies with formal powers under the constitutional rules of the association to make decisions regarding the provision of housing services. We do not require non-stock holding group boards to include resident board members.

2. Resident board members (and other board members) should be able to demonstrate their contribution to the board both before and during their membership.

Note

In recruiting resident board members, we believe that associations should value life skills and wider experience, as well as professional or academic skills and qualifications. We expect housing associations to put in place, and to meet the full of cost of, appropriate capacity building approaches to ensure that they increase the pool of residents with the necessary qualities to be board members and, where necessary, to provide ongoing support to resident board members.

3. The default position for recruiting resident board members should be election.

Note

Most housing associations will develop 'hybrid' systems, which suit their organisation and stage of development, whereby an initial selection based on board candidate qualities takes place followed by an election from a short list of candidates. We will not prescribe how elections should be organised or the electoral system (i.e. whether election takes place from the whole resident body or through an 'electoral college' such as a residents' forum). Some housing associations may choose to use a different approach where they can demonstrate that their residents do not want election.

4. Housing associations should make clear the roles and responsibilities of resident board members.

Notes

We particularly want housing associations to give careful attention to how they explain board members' fiduciary duty, i.e. their duty to act in the best interests of the association. This requires housing associations to make clear that board membership does not equate to resident board members being representatives of the resident body and acting in the interests of the resident body alone.

The Elton Review recommended that the tax and benefit rules for resident board members in housing associations that pay their board members should be revisited. The Department for Communities and Local Government/Housing Corporation joint action plan for delivering the Elton recommendations confirms that this matter has been raised with the Department for Work and Pensions. Regrettably, there are no plans to change the tax and benefit system at this time.

Policy in practice

Engaging 'specialists' in governance

Lookahead Housing and Care provides housing and support services to over 3,000 homeless and vulnerable people in London and the South East. The association has been developing and piloting innovative ways of empowering vulnerable customers to be involved at all levels of service delivery.

Lookahead has a board advisory panel which plays a key role in monitoring the performance of service delivery. The panel comprises 12 customers, two board members and two directors, and meets monthly. Lookahead is developing a formal training programme to reach vulnerable and hard-to-reach customers to expand and develop their skills to make meaningful contributions in the board advisory panel and with several other customer involvement initiatives.

Lookahead's Customer Involvement Programme, of which the board advisory panel and training programme are a part, won first prize in November 2006 in the Andy Ludlow Homelessness Award.

Exemptions and flexibilities in our resident board member policy

We propose to exempt housing associations managing less than 250 homes from our requirement to have resident board members. The challenge of achieving resident board membership for these associations outweighs the potential improvement in governance. When managing over 250 homes, associations begin to become large enough that resident perspectives become increasingly necessary.

We are also aware of the need to provide flexibility for two groups of associations that will face particular challenges in complying with the policy:

- charitable housing associations (if their tenants are regarded as beneficiaries and so are barred from being trustees) must have a timescaled action plan to make alternative arrangements, such as establishing formal sub-committees to comment on plans and propose a course of action to the board; and
- specialist housing associations that work with vulnerable groups and those that work exclusively with short-term tenancies must have a timescaled action plan to undertake resident capacity building to achieve resident board membership. We recognise that a small number of associations that work with very vulnerable and/or transient people will find it impossible to comply with the policy.

Housing associations that fall into the groups above should discuss their plans with regulatory staff. We will provide waivers for associations where necessary.

Question 15

What are your views regarding our proposed exemptions and flexibilities?

Question 16

Are there other types of organisation that should have exemptions or flexibilities?

Regulation, inspection and the support we provide

Regulating compliance with the policy

We have already signalled our intention to take a firmer regulatory stance around involvement, taking action where housing associations fail to engage with our policy.

We intend to regulate the policy according to our risk-based approach. We will use the following indicators to identify risks:

- the Self Assessment Compliance Statement (SACS) shows that a housing association does not have an Involvement Statement or Impact Assessment;
- a housing association has no resident board members;
- poor performance against customer-focused performance indicators; and
- evidence from inspection reports.

The basic building blocks of effective involvement will not play a part in the risk assessment.

Where there is evidence of risk and subsequent investigation and/or regulatory action is taken we will use the basic building blocks as the basis for performance assessment.

In keeping with risk-based regulation, we will assume that affirmative answers for Involvement Statements in SACS represent an assurance from the associations' board that the statement has been satisfactorily developed. We will not use Involvement Statements as part of our risk

assessment. However, we will use them to inform our activity where risk has been identified. We will also use Involvement Statements for periodic reviews of the sector as a whole and for identifying good practice. Should associations wish to submit their Involvement Statements to us voluntarily, we will be pleased to accept them for use in our own good practice research. We may share them with other agencies in the sector which research and disseminate good practice.

Question 17

What are your views regarding the risks we identify?

Question 18

Does our proposed approach define an effective framework for intervention when necessary?

Regulating resident board membership

We plan to add a question to the Regulatory Statistical Return (RSR) for housing associations to report on the number of resident board members they have.

Regulating the involvement policy in associations managing less than 1,000 homes

We propose that associations managing less than 1,000 homes should achieve general compliance

Current performance indicators

- Vacant General Needs Dwellings;
- General Needs Re-let time (for managed stock);
- Average SAP rating;
- Failing Decent Home Standard;
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with quality of repairs;
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with landlord's services;
- Percentage of tenants satisfied that their views are being taken into account;
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with the quality of their homes (those allocated new homes in the last three years);
- Routine repairs completed in target;
- Current tenant rent arrears at year end;
- Shared ownership satisfaction overall; and
- Percentage of shared ownership purchasers satisfied with sales process.

with the principles of the policy. In practice we expect that these associations will engage with the basic building blocks of effective involvement in a meaningful and proportionate way. For instance, a small neighbourhood-based association will be unlikely to find it feasible or effective to develop separate corporate and neighbourhood approaches to delivering resident influence. However, we would expect it to have a mechanism for ensuring residents can influence and monitor its service standards and for it to develop as wide a 'menu of involvement' as is practicable.

We will not require small associations to report whether they have Involvement Statements or Impact Assessments, but believe that many will find that these documents will help them focus their attention on effective involvement.

We will continue to use customer-focused performance indicators, inspection reports and resident board membership (in associations managing more than 250 homes) as risk indicators.

Inspecting and regulating involvement now, and in the future

The Audit Commission is responsible for inspecting housing associations. The existing inspection framework means that a housing association will need to have effective involvement if it wishes to gain three stars.

The Audit Commission's expectations for involvement are set out in Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) 5 Resident Involvement and partially in its cross-cutting themes customer care, access to services and user involvement.

We believe that the proposals in this paper are consistent with the Audit Commission's expectations.

We encourage housing associations, residents and communities to familiarise themselves with the involvement expectations set out in KLOE 5 and throughout the Audit Commission's framework.

The Local Government White Paper sets out a vision of a revised inspection approach based on assessing the public services delivered into an area. We will work with the Audit Commission, and other partners, to test new approaches to inspection and regulation.

The Department for Communities and Local Government is currently undertaking a review of the institutional framework in which housing and regeneration is delivered. As part of that review it is considering the future for regulation.

As part of our response to the Elton review, we have commissioned the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) to examine options for how approaches to resident-led self-regulation might offer more resident-focused services and lead to potentially lighter touch regulation and/or inspection. We believe that this work is consistent with the National Housing Federation

“In a rapidly changing world, communities need strategic leadership to help bring together various local agencies and groups in order to build a vision of how to respond to and address a locality's problems and challenges in a co-ordinated way... Today [local authorities] are much more likely to discharge their place-shaping role through partnership: by developing a joint vision, by supporting and working with other agencies and services and by commissioning others to work on solutions – rather than delivering services directly themselves.”

Strong and Prosperous Communities: Local Government White Paper (2006)

Commission's recommendation that we investigate tenant-focused deregulation.

The CIH project, which is due to report in July 2007, is an initial options investigation. We are clear that any change to the regulatory framework must take place in the context of the wider review of regulation.

Best practice and other support

Many residents already take an active part in decisions affecting the management of their homes. In order for them to be able to raise the level and quality of their participation and to enable other residents to begin to participate, it is essential that they have the information, skills and

confidence to make a real difference. We make clear in the section on resourcing involvement (page 11) of this consultation our expectation that housing associations will provide the resources necessary to support effective resident involvement within their organisations.

The Corporation provides some support and access to information resources by providing abstracts of good practice projects and links to the organisations that ran these projects on our website.

We will continue to work with sector partners to ensure that residents, communities and associations can access the extensive body of good practice around effective involvement. For example, we are at present providing support to the National Communities Resource Centre, with the intention of helping it become self-supporting over the next two to three years. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations currently hosts the governance hub for Change-Up, the Government's capacity building programme for the voluntary sector. We would welcome views on the most effective ways of providing access to good practice and other information resources.

In supporting the further development of good practice, we will seek in particular to encourage the sector and partners to focus on the following areas of work which we believe will take involvement forward in the next few years:

- developing locally specific measures of involvement outcomes;
- building relationships that enable resident and/or community influence in the neighbourhood;
- approaches to resident-focused self-regulation;
- new approaches to involving the resident as consumer;
- investigating ways for housing associations to develop resident management and ownership models; and
- strengthening the accountability of associations to residents and communities.

Question 19

How should good practice be made available?

Question 20

What are your views regarding the areas in which we particularly want to encourage innovation?

Building better involvement

We expect high-performing associations to demonstrate their commitment to resident involvement by going over and above the minimum requirements we set out above and fully embedding involvement into their organisational culture.

In the section below we suggest a further range of approaches that we believe will help residents, communities and associations to get more involved in their organisation's decision making and service delivery. The approaches fall into the following key areas of involvement:

- resident influence as consumers of services;
- resident influence over service delivery and design;
- widening accountability;
- strengthening governance; and
- involvement in neighbourhoods and communities.

Potential approaches

The following options are examples of ways in which associations could go over and above our minimum requirements to strengthen the outcomes that involvement helps to achieve.

Resident influence as consumers of services

The National Housing Federation Commission was the latest report in a long line of research that shows that most residents want to relate to

housing associations as consumers. They want to be involved, often on an ad hoc basis, in a way which allows them to comment on services as individuals and see the change that has come about because of their comments. Some ways in which the 'consumer' approach to involvement could be developed further include:

- making more use of new technologies (e.g. text voting, internet comment/reader groups and hand-held IT comment on service provision);
- ensuring more use of 'contact' time between officers and residents (e.g. the time that support workers spend with people receiving housing-based support);
- developing further the use of service checking processes (e.g. post repair 'ring backs' on a percentage of works);
- expansion of tenant liaison approaches (often used in capital works programmes);
- developing new approaches to seeking the views of residents (e.g. mobile housing offices and 'back-to-the-floor' exercises);
- developing new approaches to providing feedback (e.g. public comment and feedback conferences and senior officer 'face-the-people' sessions); and
- ensuring that all officers have involvement targets or relating officer performance to customer satisfaction measures.



New technologies in resident involvement

Rosebery Housing Association used Housing Corporation Innovation and Good Practice grant funding to develop text messaging as a consultation and information tool.

Rosebery now has over 1,000 mobile numbers on its database. The project has been particularly successful in increasing the level of communication with residents under the age of 35.

Rosebery is currently considering the best way of mainstreaming texting into its involvement activities. Research has shown that in order to increase its effectiveness, texts will need to be more specifically tailored to users' interests and expectations.

However, Rosebery and its residents are confident that texting opens up new possibilities for rapid, targeted consultation and more responsive services around making appointments and other areas of 'personalised' housing service.

Resident influence over service design and delivery

Where residents wish to be more actively involved there are a large number of options that we think associations could investigate in more depth.

These include:

- resident-led product development and service review (resident majority groups that consider new products or required changes to services);
- officer/resident product development and service review;
- devolved budgets under full resident control or with resident input (e.g. estate environmental improvement budgets devolved to resident associations/area forums);
- formal estate audit;
- a wide range of approaches to resident-led audit/inspection (e.g. mystery shopping);
- use of citizens' juries in strategic decisions (a citizens' jury is a panel of lay people that takes evidence on an issue and suggests a course of action);
- use of participatory budgeting (participatory budgeting invites views from a wide range on stakeholders on spending priorities);
- use of community planning approaches (e.g. planning for real) in the design of new development, or the regeneration of existing neighbourhoods;
- greater involvement of residents in staff recruitment and retention; and
- greater involvement of residents in the design and specification of contracts.

Widening accountability

Board governance is just one of the ways in which housing associations are accountable. Housing associations could consider with residents and communities whether they should:

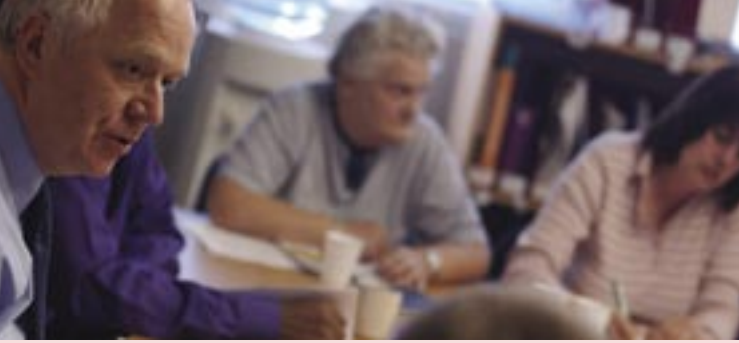
- seek to support and sustain resident scrutiny bodies that are independent of the association. This proposal is consistent with one of the options for accountability proposed by the National Housing Federation's Tenant Involvement Commission;
- undertake neighbourhood options appraisals to assess the demand and capacity for tailored neighbourhood-level management approaches. This proposal is also consistent with one of the NHF Commission options;
- seek to outsource some of the involvement functions (e.g. training and capacity building or approaches to engaging with particular under-represented groups) to an independent resident (or other voluntary and community sector) body;
- seek to work with other active people engaged with local agencies and/or associations' peers to give an independent view on the association's performance; and
- set up mechanisms for managing complaints that are independent of the association (e.g. resident-led complaint scrutiny).

Mystery shopping

Notting Hill Housing Trust lead a project in partnership with Stadium Housing Association to train residents to undertake mystery shopping exercises on services. The trained residents carry out 'shops' on each other's homes and Stadium tenants have now 'shopped' Notting Hill Housing Trust services.

This programme is well into its first year and is working effectively. Some of these shoppers have now joined Notting Hill Housing Trust's resident and repair forums and one is on its housing services committee.

Notting Hill currently has 24 mystery shoppers and by February 2007, it hopes to have at least 30 trained shoppers on its list. The mystery shoppers look at services delivered across the group and measure quality indicators as part of Notting Hill Housing Trust's service standards, such as the quality of letters being sent out. The association hopes to develop its mystery shopping into a full tenant inspection regime.



Community options appraisal

Community Gateway Association in Preston is the first housing association to be established using the community gateway model. The model is designed to ensure that involvement is locked in to the way the association works.

It has articles in its constitution that require it to engage in community capacity building. Tenant board members form the largest single group on the board and it widely promotes its shareholding membership which ensures a direct say for residents in governance. The association's Gateway Tenant Committee has a strategic role acting as the main committee of the organisation, submitting ideas to the board and scrutinising decisions.

Among its many distinctive features is a task force in each of its ten local community areas. The task force is made up of tenants, community representatives, local councillors and staff. Each task force arranges for community options studies to take place in each of its sub-areas to establish a vision for each area including how involvement should develop. The option study can range from involvement by consultation to tenant management, and all points in between.

Strengthening governance

As housing associations review their governance arrangements they could consider how they might strengthen their relationship with residents and/or the community. Two of the ways they might achieve this is by considering:

- the number of resident board members they need to help them to develop a balanced board with a range of views; and
- whether extending, or promoting more widely, their shareholding membership will provide stronger accountability.

Neighbourhoods and communities

In October 2006, we published our strategy for neighbourhoods and communities, which covers this area of work in depth. We believe approaches to involvement and neighbourhoods and communities should be taken together.

Housing associations should take account of the NHF Commission's observation that tenants want associations only to undertake wider work when they already deliver quality core services. We believe that both for core services and wider aspirations, neighbourhood working is a good way of achieving improved resident satisfaction and quality of life. Good housing is a prerequisite of sustainable communities. By engaging in broad neighbourhood working housing associations should ensure sustainability and added value in their assets. In this section we have focused on

aspects of the neighbourhoods and communities agenda that are immediate to the provision of 'core' housing services. We have not covered the extensive body of good practice that has built up around activities that go beyond housing, sometimes described as community development, such as diversionary activities for young people.

The following suggestions are some of the ways we think involvement in neighbourhoods and communities could be strengthened.

Working closely with local authorities and other housing agencies

As strategic community leaders local authorities have a vital role to play in addressing neighbourhood and community issues. They are key partners in most of the suggestions we make below. For instance, their skills and expertise will be vital in developing community profiles and market intelligence.

Housing associations could consider:

- how they work with local authorities to enable resident and community influence over local and neighbourhood charters, as they develop out of the Local Government White Paper;
- whether they could share community involvement resources with local authorities and other organisations;
- how their involvement arrangements relate to the changing roles of ward councillors as they develop out of the Local Government White Paper.

Neighbourhood action planning

The Barton Community Development Project was set up by Oxford Citizens Housing Association to promote greater community involvement and to give residents a say in the future of Barton. The project employed and trained local residents to undertake community research in Barton to find out about the needs of local people and how the community could address those needs.

Since the project started, it has involved over 700 local people.

The Barton Community Development Project was assessed as an excellent Investor in Communities by independent assessors.

Resident management in housing associations

WATMOS Community Homes was set up by eight tenant management organisations. It was established in 2002 and registered as a social landlord in March 2003 with the transfer of around 1,840 homes from Walsall Council.

Each tenant management organisation carries out the full range of housing services including allocations/lettings, repairs, environmental improvements, tenancy and estate management and housing advice, including building strong and sustainable communities through a programme of extended social activities and community facilities.

Redditch Co-operative Homes is a partnership between the Accord Group and Redditch Borough Council which develops community-controlled housing co-operatives in newly built homes, funded by the Housing Corporation across the borough. Four co-operatives are already running under this arrangement.

“Councillors have a key role to play in ensuring that local people’s concerns are listened to by the appropriate authorities, whether they are raised formally or they become aware of them through their engagement with the community... Often councillors will be able to solve communities’ problems themselves. Many authorities are developing new ways to support them in doing this. For example, several authorities provide their councillors with a small budget to spend on projects in their local communities.”

Strong and Prosperous Communities: Local Government White Paper (2006)

Developing neighbourhood targets and action plans

We have included a basic building block on negotiating neighbourhood-based targets for housing services. Housing associations could go further by seeking to develop neighbourhood action plans which include how they will work to research and meet communities’ wider aspirations for quality of life in their neighbourhood.

Resident and community calls for action

Housing associations could investigate whether there are options to provide a mechanism whereby residents or communities could require a response when services fall below an agreed level. The Local Government White Paper states that

public authorities (not housing associations) will be subject to community calls for action raised through local councillors.

Resident influence in rationalisation

Housing associations could develop mechanisms for residents to influence the choice of lead landlord in stock rationalisation, ensuring that rationalisation decisions include consideration of a housing association's ability to make a good 'service offer'.

Resident influence in mergers and group structures

It is already a regulatory requirement to consult residents on group structure and merger proposals. Housing associations may wish to go further and develop ways for residents to comment on, influence and scrutinise merger and group proposals. This might include a full test of opinion on proposed mergers and group structures or other ways of ensuring that residents have influence, such as early surveys on residents' aspirations.

Support and encouragement for community management and ownership options

Housing associations could offer a wide range of resident management options on a scale from scrutiny of individual services to outright ownership of assets. We believe that promotion and support of these options empowers people

and may benefit communities in driving up services and taking control of their quality of life. The Local Government White Paper announced that the Department for Communities and Local Government has commissioned a review of the current approach to community management and ownership of assets. The White Paper also includes a commitment to streamline the current Right to Manage regulations for local authority tenants and to investigate ways for housing association residents to become more engaged in management decisions.

Full list of consultation questions

Question 1

What are your views regarding the proposal that housing associations with less than 1,000 units should be required to abide by the principles of the policy, but not be subject to its detailed provisions?

Question 2

What are your views regarding the proposal that non-registered organisations should abide by the principles of the policy?

Question 3

How can we best ensure that involvement focuses on outcomes?

Question 4

What are your views regarding our proposal to widen the remit of the policy, while leaving it to residents, communities and housing associations to decide the correct focus of involvement?

Question 5

What are your views regarding these outcomes?

Question 6

Do the outcomes above give a framework for effective involvement from which more specific local outcomes will be developed?

Question 7

What support would residents and associations want in deciding the level of resources effective involvement requires in their specific circumstances?

Question 8

Is the basic building block approach helpful in clarifying our expectations in respect of resident involvement?

Question 9

Have we picked the right basic building blocks?

Question 10

What are your views regarding the right way to achieve outcome focused involvement while leaving the design and content of Involvement Statements open to negotiation between resident, communities and housing associations?

Question 11

What other support would associations, residents, and/or communities welcome in preparing Involvement Statements?

Question 12

Do the principles we suggest for Impact Assessment strike the right balance between setting a framework and leaving room to innovate?

Question 13

What are your views regarding our proposed required measures of equality of access and value for money?

Question 14

Are there other required measures we should include?

Question 15

What are your views regarding our proposed exemptions and flexibilities?

Question 16

Are there other types of organisation that should have exemptions or flexibilities?

Question 17

What are your views regarding the risks we identify?

Question 18

Does our proposed approach define an effective framework for intervention when necessary?

Question 19

How should good practice be made available?

Question 20

What are your views regarding the areas in which we particularly want to encourage innovation?

Question 21

Are there other thematic areas or involvement activities that we should add to our 'menu'?

Next steps and contact information

We welcome comment and invite views and suggestions on any of the matters raised and questions asked in this consultation document. We are particularly keen to receive responses to key questions. The consultation period is open for three months and will close on 15 March 2007. We will assess the responses, both written and oral, to the consultation and use them to inform our revision of the Involvement Policy for the Housing Association Sector. We expect to publish early in spring 2007.

Responses to this paper should be addressed to:

Involvement Policy Consultation
Housing Corporation
Maple House
149 Tottenham Court Road
London W1T 7BN

E-mail:

richard.warrington@housingcorp.gsx.gov.uk

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Our offices

Maple House
149 Tottenham Court Road
London W1T 7BN

For enquiries, contact us at:

Tel: 0845 230 7000

Fax: 0113 233 7101

E-mail: enquiries@housingcorp.gsx.gov.uk

Internet: www.housingcorp.gov.uk

CENTRAL

Attenborough House
109/119 Charles Street
Leicester LE1 1FQ

31 Waterloo Road
Wolverhampton WV1 4DJ

Westbrook Centre
Block 1 Suite 1
Milton Road
Cambridge CB4 1YG

LONDON

Maple House
149 Tottenham Court Road
London W1T 7BN

NORTH

4th Floor
One Piccadilly Gardens
Manchester M1 1RG

1 Park Lane
Leeds LS3 1EP

St. George's House
Team Valley
Kingsway Trading Estate
Gateshead NE11 0NA

SOUTH EAST

Leon House
High Street
Croydon CR9 1UH

SOUTH WEST

Beaufort House
51 New North Road
Exeter EX4 4EP

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Delivering change through involvement

Consultation paper

Involving residents and communities in decisions that affect their lives makes the business of delivering housing services more effective.

This consultation paper sets out our thinking about how we should revise our involvement policy to ensure that all associations put the views and interests of customers at the heart of what they do.