

# SCENE

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A publication providing updates, news and information from Supporting Communities

## Helm Housing Refreshes their Tenant Engagement Structure

Article written by Shelia Taylor, Housing Manager, Helm Housing

Helm Housing is committed to making a sustainable, positive impact on the communities where they operate. In line with our vision, we strive 'to build neighbourhoods and create thriving and empowered communities.' To deliver on these commitments we felt we needed to strengthen how we engage with our tenants and firmly put tenants at the heart of what we do and the way that we do it. The main goal was to maximise opportunities for tenant engagement by building relationships with our customers and by increasing their participation in all aspects of our service delivery. We also sought to develop a diverse, inclusive and flexible involvement structure that gives tenants a real voice and empowers them to make a difference.

From the beginning of this process we believed that we needed to avoid the perception that we were simply going through the motions in engaging with tenants and at the end of the process, in familiar "Blue Peter" tradition, simply pull out one that we had prepared before. We recognised that we needed independent expertise to not only



Tenant Representatives at Helm Housing Tenant Engagement Workshops

review our existing structures but also consult widely with individual tenants and groups of tenants and in ways that they wanted.

In addition we wanted to evaluate best practice throughout the sector across the UK while also being mindful of the requirements of the new Tenants Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The only organisation that ticks all these boxes is **Supporting Communities** and we were delighted that they were available to work with us and our tenants to deliver a strategy with tenants; by tenants and for tenants.

That was over a year ago and since then we have a new agreed structure that is now being rolled out. The key features of the Strategy include the;



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- **Area Panels** - to reflect the geographical spread – This is a new tier replacing the previous Tenants Forum. The concept of an Area Panel is to provide greater opportunity for involvement focusing on local needs and taking into account wider community issues within localities. These panels incorporate General Needs and Sheltered accommodation.
- **Tenant Executive Committee** - operates as a consultative forum with a real challenge function, including requiring all policies and procedures that affect tenants being approved at this level before proceeding to Board level.
- **Tenant member(s)** - elected to sit alongside Board members on Helm's Housing Services Committee; the committee with responsibility for operational areas that have the greatest impact for tenants. This puts tenant engagement right at the 'heart' of the decision making process of the organisation.
- Alongside the selected **'tenant voice'** and other nominated Board members, there should be an enhanced tenant presence at this important strategic level.
- Promote and actively encourage tenant participation in decision-making in the services of the association.
- Enhanced liaison between all departments within Helm to ensure all documents issued to tenants are user-friendly and accessible.
- Receive reports on performance against all Key Performance Indicators.
- Nomination to Helm Housing Board open to all tenants through open application/interview selection process (as per other Board membership). In this way appointments are fair and equitable.

Involvement Officer as a dedicated resource to ensure that we deliver!

Over the coming months we shall be implementing a programme of joined training with staff and tenant representatives. We are creating various scrutiny panels and have tenants who wish to be part of these, particularly looking at our grounds maintenance works and other matters of response/planned maintenance.

We believe that we have set the foundations for meaningful engagement and we are delighted with the professional service we have received and continue to receive from Supporting Communities. Their expertise and awareness of best practice elsewhere has allowed us to develop and deliver a first class Tenant Engagement Strategy. The **Supporting Communities** team demonstrated their expertise in tenant participation and guided our new strategy to ensure it reflects our commitment to our tenants/customers and maximises opportunities for engagement and involvement in all aspects of our service delivery.

Since adopting the strategy, we have developed a new Menu of Involvement capturing all the things that tenants highlighted which has now been shared with each individual tenant asking them to identify the ways they would wish to be involved. Hundreds of tenants responded and we have held a number of workshops targeted at those, for example, who are interested in sitting on the Board or Housing Services Committee, being members of Area Panels, or members of scrutiny groups. Since then, we have held our first meeting of each of the three Area Panels; election process to Tenants Executive has commenced; one tenant has already been co-opted onto the Housing Services Committee; Board interviews have taken place and the first Estate Walkabouts have been held. Oh, and we have appointed a new Community



## Delivering on Tenant Participation Conference

Over 90 delegates filled the conference hall in East Belfast's Skainos Centre to attend the joint Housing Rights and Supporting Communities conference on Tenant Participation on Monday 11 April 2016.

In the wake of the Department for Social Development's publication of the 'Tenant Participation Strategy and Action Plan', in January 2016, this conference was convened to focus on unpicking its three key themes - leading, supporting and delivering real and effective tenant participation.

It was a packed agenda featuring speakers from NIFHA, DSD, Housing Executive, Equality Commission, Choice and Apex, as well as representatives from across the UK who shared their experiences.

Some key themes emerged from the day, most notably the notion that not only is tenant participation 'the right thing to do', it is also the fiscally responsible thing to do for your business.

**Nic Bliss** from the Confederation of Co-operative Housing presented research that showed the substantial savings that can be made from implementing tenant participation. In his discussion, Nic emphasised the business benefits that arise directly from tenant participation including increased tenant satisfaction, improved housing services, cost savings and other less obvious outcomes but including better communication and more motivated and inspired staff.

**Jo Robinson** further built the social and business case for tenant involvement with evidence from her

organisation, AmicusHorizon. In her presentation, Jo made reference to research undertaken by the University of Westminster; the report and conclusions are available on their website. Jo also highlighted the Resident Engagement Toolkit developed by AmicusHorizon. Our own **Laura O'Dowd** spoke about our role in Leading, Supporting, and Developing Tenant Participation. Supporting



Laura O'Dowd addresses the Tenant Participation Conference

Communities has been at the forefront of this kind of work for over 35 years in Northern Ireland, helping not only the Housing Executive but also Housing Associations across Northern Ireland to implement meaningful tenant participation practices.

Another emerging theme of the day was the practicalities involved in delivering effective tenant participation programmes. **Tracey Kerr** from East Lothian Housing Association showcased the new website they have developed to enable their tenants to manage their housing relationship online with everything from rent payments to looking for a home or a mutual exchange available completely online.

**Glenn Adcock**, from Aberdeenshire Housing Partnership gave an inspiring speech showing how tenant participation is not a new concept at all, in fact, he remembers some of the best examples of tenant

involvement from the early days of his career in the 70's. He explained that establishing good tenant participation is not easy. It takes a long time and a lot of effort but is ultimately definitely worth it!

The conference also viewed a video presentation from the **Northern Ireland Youth Forum** on the complex challenges facing many young people and the distinct support needs they have in sustaining tenancies and homes.

Finally, conference attendees received key note addresses from **Colm McQuillan** and **Jennie Donald** who respectively provided an insight into how the Housing Executive and the voluntary housing movement in Northern Ireland are committed to tenant participation and to engaging tenants and customers and shared examples of best practice. This included reference to the important role of the Housing Community Network and how social landlords are held and are helping to deliver Community Cohesion and Shared Housing.



Colm McDaid (Chief Executive) with Janet Hunter (Director of Housing Rights)

## Programme Engagement - Stock Condition Survey Findings NI Housing Executive/ Department for Communities Response

In the course of the last 6 months, **Supporting Communities** has responded to consultations on a number of issues within our expertise and experience including the Rural Housing Strategy and the Review of the Private Rented Sector.

We have also continued our engagement with the Social Housing Reform Programme Team and facilitated consultation with the Central Housing Forum and the Housing Community Network in the lead into the publication of the Tenant Participation Strategy by the Social Development Minister in the previous Assembly mandate.

Throughout April 2016, the Housing Executive and the Department for Communities SHRP Team, with the assistance of **Supporting Communities**, facilitated a number of successful engagement sessions regarding the outcomes, recommendations and actions of the recent Housing Executive stock condition survey with the Housing Executive's Scrutiny Panel members.



Consultation event held in Craigavon

The sessions, which were attended by approximately 60 Area panel members across the Housing Executives three Regions (Belfast, North and South), provided the opportunity to discuss the findings and requirements from the Savills Stock condition survey.

The overriding issue from the sessions was that the survey highlighted Housing Executive stock requires an investment of £6.7 billion over 30 years for the provision and update of:

- Various elements and components (e.g. Kitchens, bathrooms, doors etc.)
- Response Maintenance
- Cyclical Maintenance
- Tower Blocks
- Asbestos
- Fire Risk Work
- Aids and Adaptations
- Environmental Improvements



Ballymena Consultation Event

The sessions allowed for interactive engagement and Area Scrutiny Panel Members challenged the Housing Executive and Department for Communities on areas such as New Build Programme, property design, how the Housing Executive were going to save money, as well as concerns regarding the allocations system.

## A Manifesto for the Programme for Government

Prior to the recent Assembly elections, **Supporting Communities** produced a number of challenges and aspirations for the Programme for Government. In our manifesto, we asked that political parties commit to involving tenants and their representatives in any decisions which have an impact on housing policy and practice in the province. We also sought party support for the establishment of an independent regulatory framework to ensure the effective measurement and scrutiny of the social housing sector in Northern Ireland.

We looked for a commitment from each of the new government departments to creating sustainable communities which enshrines working together to ensure the best outcomes for social housing tenants.

## Tenant Participation

We affirmed our commitment that the new Department for Communities should place a requirement on all social landlords to develop formal tenant participation strategies and to offer advice and guidance to landlords on standards for participation and involvement against which they will be measured.

We supported the Department's calls for:

- Regulatory Standards for Tenant Participation
- Defining the role and contribution made by social landlords
- An independent body to support tenant participation

## Public Landlord Function

We believed that the public landlord function currently provided by the Housing Executive should be protected and supported in the Programme for Government. A number of key actions were identified;

- Investment in the housing stock to bring all properties up to "Lifetime Homes" standard
- The integrity of the public housing stock should be sustained and its quantity increased, where required
- Public housing should be recognised as a tenure of choice with a valuable contribution to the housing market

## Private Rented Sector

As the private rented sector continues to play an enhanced role in meeting urgent need and becomes the only tenure available to many households we believe that the sector should be appropriately regulated, with minimum standards in housing management agreed as a matter of course.

## Digital Inclusion

A commitment to the elimination of the Digital Divide in terms of both access and skills – a problem that disproportionately affects people living in social housing.



## Chartered Institute of Housing Awards

Supporting Communities had a very successful evening at the Chartered Institute of Housing NI & RoI Awards held on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

Our very own Laura O'Dowd won the very prestigious CIH Professional of the Year Award and goes on to represent CIH NI at the UK Awards in Manchester at the end of June.

It is a great honour to receive this award and it is wonderful that the judging panel recognised all the work that Laura does, not only in her role at Supporting Communities, but for the housing world in Northern Ireland and beyond.

Another well deserving winner was Highfield Residents' Association and West Belfast Scrutiny Panel representative Cecil Lemon. Cecil was nominated in the Housing Hero category and Supporting Communities is delighted to be associated with his great achievement.



**Laura delighted to have won this Award**



Cecil Lemon with Murray Watt, Supporting Communities Liaison Officer for West Belfast

Cecil has given so much of his life to representing his community; he follows in the footsteps of past winners of this award, all of whom have been nominated by Supporting Communities including Michael Kelly and Bernie Burns.

Supporting Communities was also shortlisted in two other categories (Working Together and More Than Bricks and Mortar) so it was a very proud night for us indeed!

## Housing Associations Embrace Tenant Participation Training

Supporting Communities is delighted to have recently delivered Tenant Participation training to staff from Rural Housing Association and NB Housing, Belfast. The training for both organisations took place in May and the participants represented all sectors within each company from Chief Executive, maintenance, receptionists, housing management, administration and finance.

The training was tailored to the specific needs of each



Staff from Rural Housing Association discussing the approaches to Tenant Participation with our trainer Stephanie Kenny-Quinn

organisation with Rural Housing Association staff completing a two day OCN Level 2 accreditation in Tenant Participation and Community Development. Twelve members of staff immersed themselves in the training which sought to raise awareness of the role that every employee has in promoting and encouraging participation at all levels. In addition, and with guidance from Supporting Communities, staff looked at the potential to update their Tenant Participation Strategy and Menu of Involvement in line with the Department's new Tenant Participation Strategy NI 2015-2020. One member of staff commented:

*"This training was interesting, informative, interactive and the tutors were very engaging."*

NB Housing chose a different route to look at Tenant Participation, a one day bespoke training session which was developed and delivered to twelve staff from a variety of disciplines within the company. The staff focused on their strategy, their menu of involvement and how to attract new Community Champions.

Caroline Keenan Jackson, Director of Housing and Corporate Services, noted:

*"Supporting Communities have provided the team at*

*'Many thanks to Stephanie Kenny-Quinn and Sheenagh McNally from Supporting Communities who provided Tenant Participation Training to all our staff at the beginning of May 2016. Within our Tenant Participation Strategy, training is an important aspect thus we made it compulsory for all our staff to attend. The successful implementation of our strategy recognises that both tenants and staff must be equipped with the knowledge, information, skills and confidence to be able to be proactive in tenant participation work and to feel that they as staff can offer appropriate support to our tenants. We found the training sessions received from Supporting Communities ticked all the boxes and has helped staff understand the practices of Tenant Participation and Community Development whilst enabling them to have a greater grasp on how they can become more effective in practicing tenant participation in their every day roles. Our two trainers, Stephanie and Sheenagh created an excellent and informative programme that suited our needs perfectly'.*

Martina Cranny,  
Housing & Operations Manager  
Rural Housing Association

*NB Housing with an invaluable training event in Tenant Participation. The session focused on the development of the Tenant Participation Strategy, methods to further involve NB Housing tenants in how services are delivered by examining different approaches of engagement such as mystery shoppers, armchair surveys and champion panels. The session also focused on the importance of community development and how it can positively impact our tenants. NB Housing values tenant input and looks forward to implementing our Tenant Participation Strategy and the full range of opportunities for engagement. The training highlighted new approaches and we look forward to working with Supporting Communities in the future as the strategy rolls out.”*

Sheenagh McNally, Housing Association Development Officer with Supporting Communities, acknowledged the commitment shown by both Housing Associations stating:

*“It is so refreshing to work with two Housing Associations with very different remits (one urban, one rural) who have placed Tenant Participation firmly at the core of their business. This was most clearly demonstrated by the attendance of all departments from all levels at the training. Supporting Communities has for many*

*years stated that Tenant Participation is not purely a Housing Management function, it is a role that must be performed by every single member of staff regardless of pay grade. It was a pleasure to meet the staff from Rural Housing Association and NB Housing who displayed a real drive and enthusiasm for Tenant Participation and engagement.”*

Tenant Participation training and many other courses are available for your Housing Association, if you would like more information on our training courses or indeed our Menu of Services specifically for Housing Associations contact:

**Sheenagh McNally,**



**Housing Association Development Officer**  
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**Tel: 028 3834 2792**

## Measuring our Impact

*Does the work we do achieve our overall goals? Are we actually contributing to the change we want to see in society? How do we know?*

Until recently, conventional wisdom held that it was sufficient for organisations to focus on outputs for their work, for example, how many people attended a training course or how much funding was gained. We know that this only tells part of the story.

Supporting Communities wants to get the heart of the matter - to measure and understand the Impact that our work has for the communities, individuals and organisations with whom we work. The aim is to better understand what difference that training course actually made for the people involved. We want to measure the real impact that funding for a particular activity had on the lives of the people within that community.



**Empowering  
Society**

*In short, what were the real benefits? How did lives change? What is the story of that change?*

During the past 6 months, Supporting Communities employed the services of Gauge NI who worked with us to produce an independent assessment of the services we provided to member groups experienced by a wide range of our stakeholders covering the period from 1st April 2014 to the 31st March 2015. Using a model called Social Return on Investment (SROI), which uses monetary values to represent social costs and benefits, we were able to calculate the social value that our stakeholders experience through changes in their lives that can be directly attributed to Supporting Communities interventions.

Gauge NI has produced an independent report using a clear logic model to identify Supporting Communities main inputs, outputs, and outcomes as they relate to the identified stakeholders. The research shows the considerable impact that community led housing services can have on the health, confidence, pride and general wellbeing of the range of stakeholders and local communities we work with. It has revealed significant positive effects including improved physical and social environments, wellbeing of community members, and more stable Communities.

The full report is available on our website and further explains the methodology of the approach we have used. We have also produced an infographic 'impact card' which gives a snapshot overview of the results.



### Key Findings:

- For every £1 invested in our services, approximately £8 of social and economic value was returned.

This figure represents the real benefits received by our stakeholders including community groups, local communities, individual group members, digital trainees, Housing Executive and Inter-Agency partners.

- The services provided during the 2014/15 year will have generated a social value of approximately £119 million over the next 5 years.
- The value for stakeholders, such as the Housing Executive, DSD and other statutory agencies, lies in our vast network of community groups and our links and relationships all across Northern Ireland.
- Working with Supporting Communities to deliver training or engage in consultations with communities

"The social value for statutory agencies lies in Supporting Communities vast network of community and residents groups.

Working with us to engage local people is an efficient and cost-effective option."



- Housing Executive
- Interagencies
- Member Groups
- Local Communities
- Individuals
- Digital Trainees

is an efficient and cost-effective option for statutory agencies.

But the most statistically significant findings related to our impact on local communities themselves, which resulted in:

- Improved physical environment (41.5% of total outcome value).
- Improved sense of belonging to the community (26.75% of total outcome value).
- Improved social environment (18.72% of total outcome value).

It is important to note that this particular study focused primarily on the work we do on behalf of the Housing Executive. We will expand this in the future to measure the impact of the wider range of our work, including our work with Housing Associations and other agencies such as the Department of Finance through their Digital Transformation Team.

Colm McDaid, Chief Executive of Supporting Communities commented; *“Although impact measurement can be an arduous task, it is a vital one that allows us to see where we are having the most impact and what activities result in real changes for the people we want to help.”* He added; *“This exercise allows us to be accountable as a charity and to fully determine and report on the impact and benefit our services provide to our stakeholders and the public.”*

Supporting Communities is keen to support the community groups that we work with to begin to examine and measure their own impact. We aim to raise awareness by helping Community Groups to apply Impact Measurement and SROI principles to their own actions so as to reflect on the difference they are making within their own Communities.

## Stakeholder Outcomes

### Housing Executive & Interagency Partners

- ↑ Improved levels of community engagement "Supporting Communities act as a mediator, an independent broker."
- ↑ Improved tenant stability "They help identify the key priorities in an area."
- ↓ Reduction in the number of voids
- ↓ Reduction in antisocial behaviour

### Member Groups & Individuals

- ↑ Increased knowledge, skills, and confidence "Working with Supporting Communities has made an immense difference to our group."
- ↑ Increased communication and engagement with HE & others They provide guidance, support, knowledge and expertise."
- ↑ Increased volunteering and employment opportunities

### Local Communities

- ↑ Improved physical & social environment "With Supporting Communities' help, we have been able to make lots of improvements to our estate."
- ↑ Improved sense of well-being, belonging, safety & security. "People say they love living here now!"
- ↑ More stable housing; people are moving less often

## Supporting Communities Funding Services



Supporting Communities Funding Service provides Community Groups with the most up to date and relevant sources of funding available. Our Funding Service includes a number of unique and tailored funding packages and provides guidance on the overall fundraising process.

**One to One Support** – In the last year Supporting Communities have provided over 100 community organisations with one to one funding support. This tailored package has included information on Good Governance, Models of Good Practice, and sourcing funding opportunities and funding streams. This service has helped those groups secure over **£1 million** in generated funding and brought essential community based services to their community.

*"Supporting Communities funding service has been invaluable to our organisation. It has provided our group with guidance and assistance to source potential funding revenues."*

*Greysteel Community Association  
Office Administrator Support*

**Funding Strategy/Action Plan** – Our Funding Officer can provide Community organisations with support to develop a funding plan.

**Funding Factsheets** – Supporting Communities have a range of specialist factsheets providing information

on accessing Business, Council, Trust and Lottery Support.

**Supporting Communities Funding Bulletin** provides details of charitable trusts, foundations and statutory sources of funding programmes.

Supporting Communities provides tailored **Funding Workshops/Surgeries** across the province. Community groups are provided with; one to one specialist funding information, support and guidance with the application process and information on

potential sources of funding.

**Expert Funding Training** - Supporting Communities have a number of funding **training courses** to address the needs of groups and individuals so that they can plan their fundraising strategy and achieve success from funders,

**Funding Enquiry Service** - Enables groups to access information on a variety of funding sources for specific costs or projects. In the last year, **100 groups** have availed of this service.

**Supporting Communities Impact Magazine**, shares good practice and illustrates the impact made by Supporting Communities staff in helping community organisation bring projects to fruition.

**For further information regarding any of Supporting Communities Funding Services contact our Funding Officer**

**Roisin Hamilton**  
Email: [roisin@supportingcommunities.org](mailto:roisin@supportingcommunities.org)  
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Roisin Hamilton (left) facilitating a Funding Workshop

## Bigger and Brighter future for Lettershandoney

Lettershandoney and District Development Group recently welcomed the Housing Executive's Chief Executive Clark Bailie to their community in May. The visit was planned as part of the launch of a scheme which would see new windows installed to 40 households in the Lettershandoney area.

On the day, Mr Bailie had the opportunity to see first hand the level of community engagement that occurs in the area. Most importantly he visited the Rural Kitchen Initiative where funding was secured through the Housing Executive's Social Housing Enterprise Strategy. This funding enabled a micro catering hub for the older and most vulnerable members of the community. This service provides weekly luncheon club catering for over 30 residents.

These are exciting times for the Lettershandoney



community. The Development Group has seen a lot of changes during the course of the past year and most recently the group has moved into their new premises.

In 2014, the group negotiated terms for the first Council owned and community managed facility in rural Derry, an initiative which defines a new way of working between local council and rural communities. This was a clear statement of intention by both parties ahead of the Derry & Strabane Council merger that rural issues/communities would have an equal consideration on the delivery of council obligations.

The group offer a broad range of community based activities including youth initiatives, educational and recreational courses as well as health programmes. These programmes are all inclusive and are aimed at breaking social isolation. Some of these programmes, such as 'Falls Prevention', 'Resilience Programme' and 'Keep Warm, Keep Well' are specifically aimed at reducing risk and raising awareness among older people around physical and mental health.

Another project, 'The Break Out Project' (BIG Lottery funded), is more geared towards younger people (11 - 25 years) and offers youth support services across six diverse rural communities. The 'Breakout Project' is about



engaging those hardest to reach to offer positive interventions through recreational activities and educational programmes up to OCN level. It also does crisis interventions as an immediate response to young people in need of support as well as signposting to more qualified services when required.

Lettershandoney can boast about being one of the first rural communities to embrace the support offered by the Housing Executive in the Derry area, and which has sat on the various collaborative boards at local, Foyle and indeed Cohesion Unit level over the years.

*Sean Carlin highlighted, "Our community was delighted to host a visit from Clark. He had a natural connection with the people he met, was in touch with the issues affecting them and certainly made people feel that the Housing Executive cared about the experiences they had being a valued tenant."*



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