

SCENE

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Independent Tenant Participation Leadership Forum

By Colm McDaid

The Senior Officers of the leading tenant participation organisations across the UK met in Glasgow recently to discuss best practice and future collaboration between the regions. As the Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO) for Northern Ireland, Supporting Communities has maintained a strong and supportive relationship with our counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales for over 25 years which I feel has strengthened our ability to deliver on our collective mission and to continuously improve our work.



Above left to right: David Lloyd, Deputy CEO, TPAS Cymru;
Jenny Osbourne, CEO, TPAS England;
Lesley Baird, CEO, TPAS Scotland and Colm McDaid

The respective heads of TPAS Cymru, TPAS England, TPAS Scotland and Supporting Communities have been meeting at least twice a year for the past 15 years to share information and update each other on what is happening within each other's organisations. This regular exchange has become a very useful platform to discuss good practice and encourage meaningful tenant participation across the UK.

Our most recent agenda was wide ranging and included conversations around digital inclusion and engagement, Housing Day 2017, involvement in the private rented sector, Welfare Reform and developing tenant participation standards. We also made sure we got the dates of each other's forthcoming annual conferences as we are mindful of the need to support each other where and when we can.

The meeting led on to some exciting ideas for a possible new collaboration that will build on our informal best practice sharing and expand the conversation to include others, particularly social landlords and of course tenants across the 4 regions.

As leaders in our field, we want to help showcase best practice and celebrate what works when involving a range of tenant participation practitioners, social landlords and tenants across the UK. We hope to have more detail on this later in the year with a view to organising a joint event in 2018 - so watch this space!

Empowering
Society

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Thinking Outside the Box: The enduring creative partnership between Supporting Communities and Housing Rights

For the fourth year running, Supporting Communities and Housing Rights joined forces to organise an interactive and informative Conference event for the social housing sector. This year we looked at the tools and best practices that would equip staff and empower tenants to deal with the changes of Welfare Reform.



The Conference, held on 9th May in the Skainos Centre, Belfast included presenters with a range of expertise and experience within the social housing sector across Northern Ireland, England and Scotland, as well as Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants.

As successful as the day was in its own right, the Conference ended up whetting our appetites for more conversations and for trying new kinds of partnerships in order to tackle the issues that we know changes to the benefit system will bring to Northern Ireland this year and in future years.

Throughout the Conference, the theme of partnership kept coming through in a variety of ways. Every speaker noted how no one can do it alone and that exploring new and perhaps untried



connections may yield different results which are so needed in this time of change. This notion was reinforced by Kate McCauley from Housing Rights in her closing remarks when she noted that; “Partnership is key and thinking beyond our traditional partnerships will yield new results for us. We definitely need to think outside the box.”

Supporting Communities values the benefits of effective partnership working and the positive impact it can make. We are keen to continue these conversations locally around Welfare Reform and hope to find new ways of working in partnership to develop new strategies to support those directly affected by the changes. Working with Housing Rights on our annual joint conference is one of the things that challenges us to ‘think outside the box’ and we look forward to building on the themes and ideas that this year’s event have generated. Without giving too much away, there are some great things percolating for next year already!



If you missed the event this year, you can find a Conference summary on our website’s News Section and many of the presentations from the day are available on Housing Rights website for download.

The 'Get Connected' Project

Digital Inclusion is an area of work that continues to offer new and exciting partnership opportunities for Supporting Communities, so we were thrilled earlier this year when BT in Northern Ireland approached us with an idea for BT Staff to give back something positive by volunteering in the local community. As we were already working on a Digital Project with Choice Housing, we invited them to come on board and we think the results so far have been pretty special!



BT Volunteers and project participants meet on the first day.

The 'Get Connected' Project is a pilot programme targeting people living in, or being supported by, several homeless hostels in East Belfast. Over the 12 week course, participants meet regularly at the Skainos Centre for help with digital skills, CV writing, job hunting and signposting to online services and information such as NI Direct. It is also proving to be a really good opportunity to have a chat and socialise.

Supporting Communities is delivering this training with the assistance of a team of BT volunteers, who have been absolutely fantastic at giving additional one-to-one support to anyone who needs extra help with the basics or wants to forge ahead to concentrate on a particular task. We would not be able to deliver this level of personalised support without them and it's been great to have their perspective and advice on job hunting in the private sector. It has been a wonderful opportunity all around to meet and talk to people you otherwise would probably not get to know.

Mairead Meyer, Managing Director of NI Networks at BT, said; "At BT, we have a long-term commitment to help build a culture of tech literacy and to use the power of communications to make a better world. As more essential parts of everyday life take place online, digital skills are now a necessity and without training many people are at risk of being left behind, unable to actively

engage online, find employment or access other support services. We are delighted to be working with Supporting Communities and Choice Housing to deliver invaluable skills training and give real and lasting benefits to those in our community who need additional support."

Michael McDonnell, Group Chief Executive of Choice Housing commented; "We know that some of our service users can feel overwhelmed by digital technologies and it is important that they build the confidence and skills to overcome that challenge. Technology should be about making life easier and giving people the means to better connect with services and advice online. We are thrilled that BT has stepped forward with the funding to enable Supporting Communities to deliver the training to make a real difference to our tenants' lives."

At the launch of the project, David Craig, a Hosford House resident, told us; "I am delighted to have this opportunity. It is a chance for me to try something new and to take on a new challenge and hopefully, through the programme, I will be able to meet new people. I am really looking forward to getting started!"



Michael McDonnell (Choice Housing), Mairead Meyer (BT) and Colm McDaid (Supporting Communities) at the project launch

Halfway through the programme we are already seeing increased digital confidence among those taking part, which we anticipate will improve the participants employability, social mobility and ability to engage in a technology led world, and David is emailing and surfing the web like a pro!

Empowering Communities: We needed a partner so we made one!

On 25th April 2017, Supporting Communities launched a social enterprise - a new company called 'Empowering Communities'. We established the company in order to support and diversify the work of Supporting Communities and to help us deliver on the requirements of our newly appointed role as the Independent Tenant Organisation for Northern Ireland.

Empowering Communities aims to be 'the lead organisation in improving the quality of Tenant Participation practice by developing and delivering innovative and practical solutions on tenant participation through high quality training, support and consultancy services.'

“One size doesn't fit all – we deliver bespoke services to make tenant participation work for you.”

The new Director of the company, Laura O'Dowd is excited to get the business up and running. "This unique partnership between Supporting Communities and Empowering Communities ensures that all social housing providers and most importantly their tenants, have the opportunity to access services, support, training and the tools that they need to develop and deliver meaningful tenant participation."

Sheenagh McNally, the Housing Association Development Officer for Empowering Communities, has been working with Housing Associations for over 10 years. She stresses that "one size doesn't fit all. We deliver bespoke services to make tenant participation work for any social housing provider."

Check out Empowering Communities' website www.empoweringcommunities.ltd for more information, networking opportunities and membership deals.



Laura O'Dowd, Director, Empowering Communities; Joe Simpson, Colm McDaid and Steve Pollard, Trustees of Empowering Communities with Sheenagh McNally, Housing Association Development Officer at the launch of Empowering Communities.



(l-r) Sheenagh McNally, Empowering Communities with Eileen Patterson, Director of Communities, Radius and Grainne Mullin, Area Manager, Radius who were first to sign up as members to Empowering Communities with Laura O'Dowd, Director, Empowering Communities

You can contact Sheenagh McNally to discuss developing a tailored programme of work for your organisation on 028 3834 2792 or email sheenagh@empoweringcommunities.ltd.

Job Opportunities with Empowering Communities: Come work with Us!

Project Associates

We are creating a register of self-employed people to become Empowering Communities Associates. They will work with us on a project basis to deliver training or work on community development and research projects.

See our website for details and get in touch!

Mystery Shoppers

We are also hiring paid mystery shoppers to work across Northern Ireland.

The purpose of Mystery Shopping is to examine how organisational policies and



Join us!

-  No experience necessary!
-  Paid position!
-  Training provided!

 **Empowering™
Communities**
Enterprise Ltd

 www.empoweringcommunities.ltd

Self-Employed Associates Wanted!

We are creating a register of self-employed people to be Empowering Communities Associates who will work on a project by project basis with us.

We are looking for people with experience and skills in:

-  **Training**
-  **Community Development**
-  **Project Management**
-  **Research**



Interested? Get in touch! Details online.

 www.empoweringcommunities.ltd



procedures are translated into actual customer service provision. In other words, it focuses on the customers' experience of social housing.

No prior experience is needed, we will provide all the training you need to fulfil this role.

We are looking for enthusiastic, honest and reliable individuals who live in a Housing Executive or Housing Association home or estate.

This role could be instrumental in improving services for all tenants. If you are interested, get in touch and find out more.

The Independent Tenant Organisation: A new relationship for the Department of Communities and Social Housing Providers in Northern Ireland

In March 2017, Supporting Communities was appointed as the Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO) for Northern Ireland by the Department for Communities.

In this new role as ITO, Supporting Communities have been tasked by the Department to work with all social housing providers in Northern Ireland to ensure that they fulfil the requirements outlined within the Tenant Participation Strategy for NI (2015-2020).

In doing so, Supporting Communities will:

- Lobby for, promote, develop, provide and maintain tenant services within the social housing sector
- Provide guidance on setting up and maintaining tenant panels and groups at a grass-roots level
- Provide advice on developing tenant participation strategies and activities
- Encourage and develop effective tenant involvement in governance and board membership

Additionally, through its partnership with the Department for Communities and social housing providers, Supporting Communities will:

- Create a Housing Policy Panel, which will be representative of Social Housing tenants. This panel will be involved in the development and scrutiny of departmental policies
- Appoint a Tenant Advocate, who will monitor the delivery of the Tenant Participation Strategy for NI (2015-2020)
- Monitor progress on the implementation of the Tenant Participation Strategy for NI (2015-2020)



- Develop guidance and provide training for both tenants and landlords in relation to tenant participation

This new role feels like a natural progression for Supporting Communities, an organisation that has been championing tenant participation in Northern Ireland since its inception.

“Supporting Communities, in its various guises, has been championing tenant participation in Northern Ireland for over 37 years, advising, supporting, enabling and ultimately empowering tenants and communities in all four corners of the province.

We look forward to developing our role as ITO and helping all social landlords to achieve effective tenant participation within their respective organisations.”

- Colm McDaid, Chief Executive,
Supporting Communities

Developing Social Enterprise in Northern Ireland: A Team Effort!

Supporting Communities have always believed that partnership working is at the core of community development and the capacity building process. Social Enterprise can be described as the last step in the capacity building process whereby charities are developed to the point where they recognise the need to avoid mission drift and develop income streams through business to cultivate their own sustainability.

As such, Supporting Communities endeavours to deliver services to our member organisations in partnership with them and others. We recognise that many agencies can contribute to community learning and development and should work together to make the most of the resources available and to be as effective as possible.

Over the past two years, Supporting Communities has identified ways to contribute to the overall Social Enterprise development infrastructure in Northern Ireland and has set about developing links with other support mechanisms, sharing with them our role and how this could contribute to



Paul Carland from Housing Executive's Social Investments Team and Stephen Marks from Supporting Communities with some of the Social Enterprise course graduates.

their services. As a result, we have developed a suite of qualifications aimed at grass roots development including the OCN NI accredited Level 2 'Understanding Social Enterprise' and the Level 3 'Developing Social Enterprise'.

Since the inception of the Housing Executive's Social Investment Team, we have developed an effective partnership in order to promote the financial investments to over 1,300 contacts, providing advice, signposting and training to groups and individuals on Social Enterprise.

The OCN NI Level 2 and 3 courses were developed as part of a training continuum in line with the Housing Executive's Social Enterprise Strategy, with the purpose of encouraging learners to develop their own business ideas and to move on to higher education in partnership with Ulster University's School of Social Enterprise. To date, three graduates from our courses have gone on to attend Ulster University with two currently completing the Advanced Diploma in Social Enterprise.

We have also worked in close partnership with Social Enterprise Hubs by advising individuals, groups and graduates to visit the hubs for further support and, where possible, we have provided space on all courses for the local Social Enterprise Hub managers to attend and provide more information to learners on the support they could receive if they decided to develop their own Social Enterprise. Learners have also been signposted to other support organisations such as UnLtd and Social Enterprise NI with whom we enjoy excellent working relationships.

For further information on our Social Enterprise work or to find out about training in your area, please contact Stephen Marks, Training and Social Enterprise Officer on 028 2564 5676 or by email at stephen@supportingcommunities.org.

The Community Involvement Strategy: Delivering Action in Partnership

by **Conor Flanagan,**
Operational Services Manager

Cultivating partnerships is key for the third sector, not only for long term sustainability, but also for making best use of limited resources to achieve a better outcome for the communities that we serve. From Supporting Communities point of view, one of our most valued partnerships is with the Housing Executive - a strong relationship dating back several decades.

The 'jewel in the crown' of this alliance has been the joint development of the Housing Community Network (HCN), which has enabled representatives from community groups across Northern Ireland to come together over issues that affect the people they represent. Over the years, the scope of the HCN has widened to encompass multiple forums and platforms that genuinely allow everyone in our society a chance to have their voice heard on housing and related matters.

Forums range from Local Housing meetings, Inter-Agencies, District HCNs and Scrutiny Panels, not to mention the Rural Residents Forum, Disability Forum, Strategic Cohesion Forum, the NI Youth Forum and the Leaseholder Panel. At Supporting Communities, we are extremely proud and privileged to play an instrumental role in facilitating and supporting this network at every level in partnership with the Housing Executive.



Conor Flanagan discusses the strategy at the Omagh Consultation event

Looking forward, we welcome the Housing Executive's new draft Community Involvement Strategy setting out how residents and local community associations can get involved in developing Housing Executive services whilst improving their quality of life. Supporting Communities staff have worked closely with our colleagues in the Housing Executive in organising a series of consultation events throughout NI to give everyone a chance to help shape the draft document - an opportunity that the community embraced with over 200 tenants/residents turning up to 5 consultation events across the region.

Our partnership with the Housing Executive and the communities, who drive the process forward, will continue to grow and strengthen as we work together to deliver this exciting and engaging strategy over the next 5 years.

Estate Inspections for Community Change: Carnagat Case Study

by **Orla McCann**

Carnagat Area Community Association embarked on their Estate Inspection process in June 2014 in order to help identify problems within their estate and establish an Inter-Agency Forum to tackle those issues in a co-ordinated manner.

Since then, they have held an Estate Inspection once a year, with Inter-Agency meetings following to discuss and chart progress in terms of statutory agencies and their responsibilities to resolve the issues.



Community Involvement

Carnagat Area Community Association covers a large area of social housing along the Camlough Road in Newry and had, in the past, been receiving a lot of complaints from residents on issues such as; street lighting, traffic calming, street cleansing and the need for environmental improvements. The Association contacted the Housing Executive who, in turn, referred them to Supporting Communities for assistance in facilitating the Estate Inspection and Inter-Agency process. *(Continued over)*

Supporting Communities liaised with the Association to ascertain the general issues and the agencies that should be involved in the process. These agencies were contacted and invited by Supporting Communities, on behalf of the Association, to attend the Estate Inspection.

The Association prepared by producing flyers for local residents about the upcoming inspections and collating the issues raised by the community in advance so that the inspections run smoothly. Representatives from the Association were then able to highlight particular problems in the different estates, photograph and record them onto Supporting Communities Estate Inspection Toolkit and send copies to all parties concerned to take action.

Results so Far

Carnagat has seen quite a bit of structural improvement as a result of the Estate Inspection and Inter-Agency process. From 2014, the area has received:

- A traffic calming scheme with ramps and road markings
- Improved street cleaning
- Redesigned street lighting in one of the estates

- Solutions to issues such as water-run off onto roads and paths.

A further outcome of the Estate Inspection process has been further investment in the community. For example, anti-social behaviour had been a recurrent theme in both Estate Inspections and Inter-Agency meetings so the Council's PCSP, along with the local Housing Executive office and Good Relations Department, have taken the lead to develop an action plan to address the anti-social behaviour problems.

Funding has been made available through both organisations to run a 'Where is Your Child Tonight?' campaign as well as brokering in the skills and support of agencies such as the Education Authority to resource youth workers in the area.

Using the platform of regular Estate Inspections and the Inter-Agency meetings, the Association is now able to lobby government agencies on local issues. As a result, planned improvement schemes have been brought forward and a major Environmental Improvement Scheme was developed and launched in December 2016. Residents from Carnagat will see improvements made to the estates through enhanced pedestrian access, replacement of street lighting, altering road layouts and construction of new roads to help facilitate increased parking in the area. In addition, works such as new railings, fencing and retrofitting of windows will be carried out to the tune of £1.2 million pounds!

Both the Association and residents from Carnagat have and will continue to see the benefit of these improvements to their community. Supporting Communities will continue to facilitate Estate Inspections and Inter-Agencies in the area to ensure issues are dealt with and action is taken to improve the quality of life for all residents of Carnagat.



Members of the Carnagat Area Community Association, Newry



Milltown Super Adults – 10 Years and counting!

Milltown Super Adults Club (Mid Ulster) recently celebrated their 10th anniversary with the launch of a commemorative book in Gardeners Hall, Dungannon. The group was originally formed to combat the isolation felt by many senior citizens in the area through the provision of a range of activities and trips.

Supporting Communities has provided support and guidance to the group since its inception in 2007 with training, funding support and administrative support helping the Super Adults bring about great change for older people in the area through activities like bus trips, classes and the development of Gardeners Hall in the heart of the Milltown area, Dungannon.

To celebrate their 10th year, the group organised a dinner for members and invited guests, a 3-day trip to Dublin for members, and a launch event for their commemorative book.

William Cardwell, Chairman of the Super Adults, is quoted in the book saying, “We have had great support from Supporting Communities staff over the years and we know they do a great job all over NI. It’s a big thank you to them for getting us the funding and helping in every way. We couldn’t have done this without their help.”

Martin Quinn from Supporting Communities added; “The Super Adults are an inspirational group and an excellent example of local people taking the initiative and making things happen in their area. The committee has worked closely with Supporting Communities to ensure that the group is run effectively and ultimately that the members are provided with regular events and activities to come together.”

Over the years, the group has also engaged in several forums and meetings to ensure that the views and opinions of older people are heard and continue to be heard.



Martin Quinn addresses the Super Adults at a meeting.



The Club recently held their Annual General Meeting and remain as committed as ever to support and respond to the needs of older people in Milltown.

**Congratulations on the book
and all your
accomplishments,
‘Super’ indeed!**

Supporting Communities - a reflection on the past 6 months





What is the Role of the Independent Tenant Organisation for Northern Ireland?

