Developing and Maintaining a Tenant Participation Strategy

Guidance Notes

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Supporting™
Communities
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Table of Contents

Appendix 1:   Training

Appendix 2:   Best Practice Examples/Initiatives

Appendix 3:   Action Plan Template

Introduction: The Purpose of this Guide

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2015 - 2020. The aim of the Tenant Participation Strategy is to provide a framework for social landlords and other partners to develop tenant participation methods throughout all levels of their organisational structures. This guide is intended to assist social landlords and tenants develop their tenant participation strategies with a view to achieving the objectives contained within this framework.

The guide contains practical help on the core elements for participation along with information, methods and further references and guidance that could be utilised and applied to achieve the desired outcomes. It is hoped that the guidance will encourage the process of learning which tenants and their landlords will use to develop and sustain effective participation practices in future years. Organisations should at every opportunity involve all stakeholders in the different stages of development of their strategy, including tenants.

Currently, within Northern Ireland there are many examples of good practice of tenant participation. Many social landlords already have policies or strategies in place while others are less developed in this field. Where strategies are already in place, this guidance can be used to measure against them; where there is nothing in place this guidance should be used to assist in the development of a tenant participation strategy.

Core Requirements for a Strategy

All strategies should have the following sections contained within it. As a minimum a social landlord's Tenant Participation Strategy should address the following areas:

- Aims and Objectives
- Scope of Participation
- Participation Options
- Delivery Mechanisms
- Resourcing the strategy
- Monitoring and Review
- Section 75 requirements

This document provides guidance on developing the areas outlined above along with examples where appropriate. Social landlords should note that this guidance does not alter any statutory responsibilities.

Aims, Objectives, and General Advice

Your Aims are the broad statements of the desired outcomes or general intentions of what you hope to achieve. They will help retain the focus on what you are hoping to accomplish.

Objectives are the specific list of tasks needed to accomplish your goals. They must be focused and feasible with a view to achieving your desired outcomes.

Some General Advice

Social landlords should involve tenants and, where appropriate, other users in the development of their strategies and in particular the identification of the strategy aims and objectives of tenant participation and the services that they currently provide. By setting aims and objectives landlords have a sense of purpose and direction that provides a framework around which to create and develop their plans. With an overall plan in place, they can set targets and monitor their progress towards reaching them.

➤ Social landlords should understand the needs and aspirations of their tenants and how tenants want to be involved. Social landlords may consider; bespoke surveys, meetings, focus groups, or face-to-face discussions with a percentage of tenants to establish where the focus of the strategy should be. Understanding the needs of their tenants will allow social landlords to develop the appropriate structures and levels of participation. It will also identify training needs.

➤ The Tenant Participation Strategy should clearly outline how it has been developed and who has been involved in its design and production (tenants, other housing professionals, Government Department, etc.). It should also outline the commitment by the landlord in developing the strategy and what resources have been put in place.

➤ Social landlords may already have policies or strategies in place which meet all or some of the expectations required within the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland. Social landlords and their tenants should review current documentation and practices and compare these to the expectations outlined in the Department's Strategy. If the required expectations have been met then social landlords can continue to use these strategies, if not they should provide **evidence** of the reason for their chosen approach and the process of tenant engagement used to secure it within their preferred framework.

Who Should Be Involved?

Tenants

➢ Tenant involvement in the development of your strategy can take a number of different forms. Firstly, tenants should be invited to become involved at a level that they feel comfortable with. Many tenants could find policies and strategies of no interest to them and they may be reluctant to engage directly in debate on documents of this type. However, most tenants know what does and does not work for them locally and they will share that experience, if asked.

➢ Focus groups, tenants' panels, telephone conferences, surveys, community road shows and representative community organisations are just some mechanisms that could be used to inform the thinking and provide information to inform the development of the strategy.

➢ Once developed and in draft form, tenants should be involved in agreeing the final copy and content of the strategy. They should be able to share ownership and be able to clearly recognise where it meets their needs, as far as possible.

➢ Consideration could be given to having the strategy signed off and approved by tenant representatives as well as by the Committee or Board Chairperson, in order to express a joint commitment to the contents.

Staff

All staff should have a role to play and be involved in the development process. Their involvement can have various benefits such as:

➢ Delivering local services and working with tenants directly. By involving them in developing the strategy they can identify target areas of concern, help with developing a series of interventions to address them, implement and then sustain the processes in order to ensure the final product is effective and fit for purpose.

➢ Offering their experiences and ideas including suggesting better and more effective ways of participation that suits the tenant base.

➢ Provide first hand experiences of ideas for cultural change where change may be needed within the association.

➢ Involving staff in the development of the strategy will also ensure the creation of an appetite and ownership from staff from the outset.

Staff job descriptions should outline the participation requirements for each post so that the principles for participation are kept to the forefront of each individual and are fostered and maintained. Housing providers should support their staff with appropriate skills training in order that they can carry out these functions effectively.

Elected Committees/Board Members

➢ Elected Committees or Board Members can bring a life-time of experience to the table and this should be utilised and nurtured and used to blend in with other less experienced members who can benefit from this expertise.

➢ The value and benefits of tenant participation should be recognised and acknowledged at Executive level within the relevant association. This will necessitate involving Committee and/or Board members in the development of the strategy, thus ensuring that its aims and objectives are consistent with corporate goals.

➢ There should be a joint approach from all parties with the common goal being to develop a strategy which is 'fit for purpose' and where tenant participation is an integral part of the organisations purpose and service delivery.

Other Local Organisations

➢ Irrespective of whether a Social landlord is reviewing or developing a tenant participation strategy, it is an opportunity to contact other organisations who may be expert in this field or whose organisations may be representative of a client base of tenants who have strong views on the subject. They could offer suggestions that may be beneficial to the development of a strategy (e.g. voluntary sector bodies or community organisations, housing professionals, best practice examples).

➢ Listening to the views and needs of support organisations (e.g. those working with young people, older people, victims of domestic violence, lone parents, members of black or minority ethnic or refugee groups, etc.) will lend to an all-inclusive approach that takes account of any accessibility or other issues that are particularly pertinent to these groups.

➢ Although a social landlord may already target these groups within their own tenant base, by canvassing the views from a wider catchment area they could contribute to the production and delivery of a more all-inclusive and comprehensive participation strategy that considers views and issues from a wider target audience.

Section 75 Equality of Opportunity

➢ Your strategy should clearly stipulate the legal position regarding equality of opportunity within the tenant participation activities that the association provides. It should reflect how the association values the views and looks to meet the needs of all tenants equally.

➢ It should recognise that some tenants find it more difficult than others to participate and should commit the association to making specific efforts to help overcome these barriers where they exist.

➢ The strategy should demonstrate how these efforts can lead to mainstreaming of equality issues within policy development and should undergo Section 75 screening throughout the whole development and sign off process in order to ensure it meets all regulations.

General Advice

➢ A strategy should be developed and regularly reviewed so that consideration can be given to the need for it to be updated in line with industry best practice in tenant participation. A strategy should commit the association to adopt best practice in all its participation activities and provide support for tenants and staff alike to access training and other resources to maintain desired standards. The strategy should be accessible to all tenants and produced in as many formats as possible.

➢ A strategy should reference other relevant policies and strategies within the association. Social Housing Providers should identify how their tenant participation strategy impacts on other areas of their business and consider how this can contribute to the development of other policies and strategies. This would prove a useful mechanism for identifying changes that may be required to other policies if inter-dependencies are identified at the outset and allow for more effective and efficient internal planning within the organisation.

Scope of Participation

How far opportunities for participation extend depends on several different factors, those being either formal or informal. It is crucial that the Social Housing Provider is willing to accomodate those ideas from tenants, in whatever forum they feel comfortable with, in the planning and contributing to decision making on issues that effect them.

Core Element- Corporate recognition

➢ Tenant participation should be viewed not just as a Housing Management function but should be afforded corporate recognition within the organisation in order to recognise the importance of its purpose.

➢ There is an increasing awareness that using tenant's views to shape services contributes to achieving organisational business objectives and delivers better, more responsive services. Social Housing Providers should give 'due recognition' to this within their corporate plan.

Core Element- Identifying the target audience

Through internal records and possibly at the development stage of the participation strategy, social landlords should be able to identify their target audience and be mindful of particular needs within their catchment area and beyond.

➢ Everyone should have equality of opportunity under Section 75 statutory legislation. Resources should be utilised accordingly in order to promote meaningful activity and to ensure all sectors are represented, not just social tenants.

➢ Participation activities are aimed primarily at social tenants but there are sometimes circumstances when neighbouring private tenants or owner occupiers, and other stakeholders, need to be given opportunities to express their views. Through this process services could be targeted if a particular weakness is identified.

Core Element- Communicating the message

➢ There are various forms of communication that may be utilised in order to reach tenants. What works for one section of the community may not work for another.

➢ Social landlords should establish a database of how tenants wish to be contacted and where possible how they wish to participate, bearing in mind that this is their right to choose. Although there will be occasions when it is necessary to adopt an inclusive approach to maximise opportunities for inclusion and feedback by all tenants, by utilising the database social landlords

can focus their resources in a more effective and efficient manner, thus preventing wastage and saving on costs.

Core Element- All-inclusive participation

➤ Everyone should have equality of opportunity under Section 75 statutory legislation. Resources should be utilised accordingly in order to promote meaningful activity and to ensure all sectors are represented.

➤ In a case where adjustments are required in order to facilitate one particular section of the community (people with language or literacy difficulties, mobility, support needs, hard to reach groups) the social landlord should make provision to accommodate this. This could be through commissioning the help of translation services, providing an alternative format for written material, or providing disability access to meeting venues.

Core Element- Reviewing the effectiveness of the strategy

➤ The subject of monitoring and reviewing is covered in further depth later in this guidance. However, as a general rule all policies and strategies within the business should be scrutinised and reviewed on a regular basis, including the Tenant Participation Strategy.

➤ Timelines should be developed and regularly maintained to allow provision for the review through which the aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the strategy are examined, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the resources devoted to tenant participation can be challenged.

➤ Reviews should be fully inclusive and involve all the key stakeholders who were involved in the original development, and also any stakeholders who have come on board since.

➤ Outcomes of any reviews should be published and advertised widely through newsletters, e-mail contact lists, websites, annual reports or other such events which may occur after the review has been concluded. This presents opportunities for openness and accountability where everything is transparent and subject to scrutiny.

Participation Options

There are many mechanisms to facilitate participation, both formal and informal, and these should be offered as an option as different methods can be appropriate for different circumstances. For example, a tenant could call into the front office to pay their rent and make a subtle suggestion which could have a significant impact on the business yet the same person may not wish to become involved in a formal capacity. In this case, for example, the provider could make a suggestion box available in their public facing office.

Social Landlords should be mindful of this and their tenants' needs when developing participation mechanisms. Participation options should allow, where appropriate, for progression through the various levels of participation but most importantly at a level where the tenant feels **comfortable** i.e. tenants progressing from giving their views at their own door step to a Housing Officer, or completing an online survey, to becoming tenant inspectors or tenant board members.

Core Element- Accessing and knowing the information that is available

➤ Making information available to tenants in a clearly defined and timely manner demonstrates honesty and openness and provides opportunities for accountability, something that tenants are keen to see.

➤ Information made available can help minimise any misunderstanding between social landlords and their tenants, and help the recipient to possibly understand for example the financial or other constraints that social landlords may be operating under. Not all tenants want to receive the information that is available to them but they should know what information there is and how they can access it.

➤ The strategy should outline the kinds of information that can be made available. Details on how tenants can access information should be contained in tenants' handbooks, newsletters, websites, displayed in places they are likely to visit such as a community library, the associations' public facing offices and health or recreation centres, or distributed through community or voluntary organisations. This list is not exhaustive.

Core Element- How should the information be shared?

➤ There are various forms of communication that may be utilised in order to reach tenants. What works for one section of the community may not work for another.

➤ A range of media should be used such as hard copy, e-mail, websites, social media, newsletters, Tenant's Handbook, flyers, audio-tape or CD. Others may

just prefer a face to face message. It is imperative that tenants are asked their views on how information should be shared.

➢ Provision should be made for making information available in different formats such as in large print or Braille, and in relevant languages which are appropriate to the tenant base the landlord serves.

➢ All information should be accurate and up to date and compliant with all relevant guidance, namely Section 75 legislation. It should be produced in clear language that is easily understood and clearly laid out.

Core Element - What kind of information should be made available?

➢ Tenants should be provided with information about relevant strategies and policies specific to them. These could contain information relevant to how they can influence decisions about their homes and communities or how they can access training, support or advice both internally and externally.

➢ Other information could relate to key tenant representation bodies or local voluntary and community organisations, or signposting information for local services and how they can be accessed.

➢ The landlord should also share information about initiatives or major works programmes that they are made aware of by other agencies such as Roads Service or utility operators that are being planned for their area.

➢ In the area of finance, if tenants are furnished with the details they may be more susceptible to difficult or unpopular decisions and the reasons behind them, accordingly they could help to contribute to effective decision making.

➢ Subject to sensitivity, service delivery priorities and changes within the organisation should also be shared, particularly if they are or will have a direct impact on the tenant. Again an opportunity could exist here for them to contribute to the decision making and possibly offer alternative proposals.

Core Element - How can tenants share their views?

Complaints process

➢ As a minimum requirement tenants should be able to raise issues around service failures and social landlords should have an effective formal complaints process in place to address these matters.

➢ Tenants should be given information about how to lodge a complaint (including verbal complaints wherever possible), information on who to speak to, including the ombudsman if appropriate, and what is involved.

➢ The organisation should have a system for recording, reviewing and acting upon tenants' complaints. Internal processes should be developed and should clearly stipulate how the complaints process works within the organisation and what rights of redress the tenant has at their disposal.

➢ All complaints should be acknowledged and dealt with in an effective and efficient manner and periodical summaries in newsletters or on the website/annual report stating what complaints have been received and what has been done about them should be published. This will instil confidence in tenants' that their views are taken seriously.

Consultations and Surveys

➢ Consultations and surveys are other mechanisms for tenants to share their views. Many who do not wish to be actively involved through Tenants' Associations or specific committees are willing to share their views about the organisation and this opportunity should be capitalised upon by the social landlord.

➢ Surveys can be conducted in the comfort of their own home where tenants are at ease and under no pressure. Their views should be canvassed on any new proposals (new schemes, planned maintenance) policies or significant changes to existing ones.

➢ Tenants should be asked for their opinions about their landlord's performance and about the standard of services provided. This ensures that changes or initiatives are planned with the interests of service users or other tenants in mind, and does not simply reflect the organisation's own needs. With resource constraints opportunities to secure tenants' views on services could be done as part of landlords' day-to-day activities e.g. scheme walkabouts or caller traffic to the public counter.

Other Methods

Other methods for gathering tenant views can vary. Some examples for gathering information, both collectively and individually, are listed below:

- Face to face contact (drop in surgeries, public counter, scheme walkabouts etc).

- Feedback request through organisation's newsletters, annual reports.

- Formal groups (e.g. tenants' panel, task and finish groups, focus groups, training events, community events).

- Text messaging/facebook/twitter.

- E-mail/websites.

Landlords should be mindful that for various reasons in a group setting not all attendees are willing to let their voice be heard. Further to this, not all tenants wish to become involved at this level, subsequently important views and suggestions could be missed.

Becoming involved in a formal capacity

There are distinct similarities in how tenants can share their views and suggestions with their landlords, be it independently or collectively or in a formal or informal capacity.

The important thing is that whatever mechanism is used it is critical that the voice of the tenant is heard and is given due recognition. Some tenants are keen to get involved in a formal capacity where they can meet collectively and discuss matters relating to their tenancies, services, on how their landlords are performing, or in the future direction of the association.

Tenants who wish to participate at this level should be encouraged, supported, and made welcome. Opportunities should be offered to tenants both at local and executive levels and their input should be fully taken into account when decisions are being made relating to the business.

There are various mechanisms for doing this, some of which are outlined below:

Tenant Participation Compacts

➢ Tenant Participation Compacts are common within England, Scotland and Wales. They were set up primarily as agreements between council landlords and tenants and aimed to set out how tenants could become involved in decisions affecting their homes and communities.

➢ Their aim is to help councils and tenants to develop a shared vision for their area, planning what they want to see changed or improved, and agreeing how it will be done. They help tenants to decide how they wish to be involved in influencing and shaping the decisions taken by their council on housing issues in a way that meets their needs and priorities. There are already examples canvassed of compact agreements within Northern Ireland.

Active Tenants/Representatives

➢ Where an estate is not large enough to be represented by a tenants group or for varying reasons, no group exists an Active Tenant can be appointed.

➢ The Active Tenant will be elected by tenants, will be the point of contact for tenants in a specific area and will act on behalf of tenants.

Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs)

➢ These have long been the standard mechanism for tenant participation and are broadly the representative voice of the local tenant normally organised to suit their own needs and locality.

➢ They are a valuable resource for information about local circumstances, as well as being helpful in getting information distributed (community events, estate/area agreements).

➢ There is a view that in some cases TRAs are difficult to establish and maintain and that they are not fully representative for various reasons. Not to be apportioning blame on the TRA, this could be because of the times or places they meet, the personalities involved or historical, social or cultural divisions within the area.

➢ The landlord should make every effort to assist with setting up such associations and help to nurture and maintain them for the good of the organisation. Further advice on resourcing TRAs is outlined later in this document.

➢ Where an association is formally constituted, the landlord should ensure that they are registered with the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI).

Tenant Forums

➢ A Tenant Forum can be a combination of representatives from tenant associations and Active Tenants. Landlords should consider the best approach for developing these forums e.g. Central and/or Regional Forums.

➢ At Tenant Forum meetings, a terms of reference should be developed in partnership with the representatives and the landlord and its key focus should be on housing related services.

Working Groups

➢ Tenants who are well informed and who have an understanding of the issues in question can have a significant impact and make a real contribution to working groups. These could range from focus groups, newsletter and editorial groups, tenant scrutiny, interagency or policy review groups.

➢ Working groups help to ensure that decisions are rooted in service users' needs and reflect the reality on the ground. However if tenants are to participate effectively in such bodies they must be afforded equal status with their peers, be it staff, elected members, board members, or others within the working group.

> In some cases tenant members may need training and support to ensure they fully understand the issues. If there are others within the working group who also need to be skilled up this could be done collectively, irrespective of whether or not they are staff, board members, or tenants.

> Review groups could also benefit from exchange visits to other organisations to compare and learn from them and to share both good and bad practices.

Committees (e.g. Planning, Finance, Audit, New Build)

> Provision should be made for tenants to participate within the organisations working committees. This could be in the planning of any new build schemes, decisions relating to company finances, audit committees or planned maintenance committees.

> The common denominator, irrespective of the type of committee, is that the tenant should be given a voice and be allowed to have input so that their needs or perspectives are taken into account. The emphasis is on participation and not consultation, therefore tenants can feel a sense of ownership.

The Board and its Committees

> In cases where the constitution or terms and conditions for membership makes it difficult for tenants to participate at the highest level and where this is the case, the organisation should consider what can be changed or if it is legal to do so. Ensuring that there is a tenant presence at these levels sends out the message about how serious the organisation is about listening to tenants' views.

> Tenants can have a significant impact and make a real contribution to the board and the executive committees. They can bring a fresh impetus and a new perspective to proceedings and can help to ensure that decisions are balanced in favour of all.

> If tenants are to participate effectively in such bodies they must be afforded equal status with their peers, be it staff, elected members, board members, or others within the committee. In some cases tenant members may need training and support to ensure they fully understand the issues and this should be facilitated and provided by the organisation.

NB: Of the social landlords canvassed within Northern Ireland there were no restrictions within their terms and conditions for tenant membership on their boards or committees. If tenants meet the desired criteria then they are able to either join or be elected without any restrictions and have full participation rights.

General

Ideas and opinions from tenants are valuable and should be utilised in a positive manner to form part of the decision making process. A way of embedding participation in the organisation's culture and thinking could be to include a standard section in each report or policy document, which addresses the question of whether tenants have been involved in the process.

Participation options - case study example:

Toronto Community Housing - www.torontohousing.ca

Toronto Community Housing is a social housing provider in Canada. Tenant rights are high on their agenda and every effort is made to look after their interests and provide a 'wrap around' service to cater for their needs. The tenant handbook provides information about the rights and obligations of tenants along with information to help them make their home a better place to live. Some of the services for tenants highlighted on their website include:

- Tenant/client call centre – the centre is contactable by telephone or e-mail 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Customer care advisors can help with emergencies, tenancy queries and can translate into 168 languages.

- Easy Trac – an electronic system used to track service requests so enquiries cannot get lost in the system.

- 'The Front Door' - the Toronto Community Housing's tenant newsletter.

- A comprehensive selection of online forms covering every aspect of tenant related issues including policies and processes.

- Video – there is an online video guide providing information about their tenancy lease.

- There is a comprehensive section on tenant participation including information on how to get involved through tenant councils. This section also caters for individual tenant groups, namely seniors, children and youth and highlights a community garden initiative.

- A section of the website is dedicated to their work with local partnerships to promote and create educational, career, employment, entrepreneurial and other opportunities for tenants.

Delivery Options

Delivery options can be considered as a set of processes and procedures which ensure that policy objectives become concrete actions on the ground. Every effort should be made to ensure that the most efficient and effective delivery process is introduced and regularly reviewed so that adjustments may be made if required. Ultimately each mechanism in place should ensure targets are being met and value for money achieved.

Core Element - *Operations*

Staff roles

➢ The social landlord should clearly establish what staff resources are needed to support and deliver the tenant participation strategy and plan accordingly.

➢ Some organisations may 'buy in' specialist services, (for example, the appointed Independent Tenant Organisation could support landlords). For those who do not, they should define tenant participation within the job description of their staff, highlighting the fact that it is a central function and clearly stipulate who within the structure has responsibility for its promotion and maintenance.

➢ Consideration should be given to all staff receiving training, even those who do not have direct responsibility within their job description, to ensure that they understand the aims of tenant participation, have the skills and knowledge required to deliver those aims, and know how they can work to achieve them.

➢ Provision should be made within the budget to help ensure that this training happens. The landlord should also ensure that they are able to support an organisational culture of tenant participation in their stated values and corporate priorities.

Maintaining and developing records

➢ The majority of social landlords may already have a database of information at their disposal relating to their tenants. This should be used as a starting point to enable them to develop the information they already have to establish for example the tenants preferred method of communication. If a social landlord does not have a database consideration should be given to developing such a resource at the earliest opportunity.

➢ This database can be used to identify 'hard to reach' groups within their tenant base whose feedback could be vital to understanding their particular needs and the difficulties they face.

- The database could also include information on support agencies, partnership bodies, or voluntary and community organisations operating in areas where the landlord has stock, so that this information is readily accessible and can be used to signpost tenants to support services. These agencies and support groups could also be utilised for feedback purposes or for sounding out ideas or working in collaboration to facilitate community events.

- The database should be developed for the benefit of the association and there should be no limit on what the landlord could expect to achieve from this resource. At all times throughout the development process and also once established the database should be maintained and records kept under secure conditions. Once established the information can be used in various ways within the organisation such as compiling reports, analysing and establishing specific trends, or providing snapshots of the tenant base. The options are open ended.

Resources

Social landlords should plan their budget to take into account the tenant participation services that they need to develop and maintain. This should be clearly presented by way of a spreadsheet with clear budget headings that outline expenditure.

Obtaining grant aid from other sources should be explored with a view to supporting the formation of tenant groups or for specific costs relating to equipment or premises if appropriate. Consideration could be given to joint applications with other organisations in order to secure funding for specific projects relating to tenant participation (community fun days being one example).

A list of possible budget headings include:

- Training (tenant/staff/board members)
- Independent support, consultancy, advice
- Travel and subsistence to events
- Financial support to tenant activity, (e.g. grants to tenants' groups, admin support costs)
- IT and other equipment/staff costs

Training

- All those involved in developing tenant participation services within the organisation should have access to good quality training in order to carry out their duties effectively and efficiently.

- Training Needs Analysis (TNA) should be completed with individual delegates and arrangements agreed to provide appropriate assistance, be it internally through other staff, commissioning industry experts to deliver courses, or sending delegates on courses provided by an outside provider.

➢ If no 'in house' expertise is readily available social landlords could consider utilising the expertise of those delegates who have been suitably skilled up to share their knowledge with others or to develop training material for internal use, thus providing an opportunity to save on expenditure and future resources.

➢ Training for participation activities is not restrictive and there are a variety of topics to choose from. A mix of skills training and knowledge training is likely to be needed in any given year.

Some examples of skills topics are:

- Good Governance
- How to organise committees and run effective meetings
- Roles and responsibilities
- Scrutiny Training
- Producing newsletters and exploring other means of communication
- Information Technology and how to maximise its capability

Examples of knowledge topics could be:

- Section 75 equality legislation - understanding equality, diversity, and social exclusion
- How your social landlord delivers its services
- How tenants can influence decision making within the organisation.

See **Appendix 1** for more information on training.
See **Appendix 2** for Best Practice Examples

Publicity

➢ The social landlord should proactively promote their tenant participation services, particularly if they have a high turnover of tenancies. There is no point in investing time, effort and resources into developing a strategy that is not publicised or promoted.

➢ Make use of the documentation that is at your disposal and make it work for you. Use it to raise your profile, talk about your best practice, of any awards you may have received in the area of tenant participation or beyond, and use it to your advantage to promote your services and encourage others to join in your journey. The best publicity for a strategy is success.

➢ Utilise all methods of communication at your disposal. Get copies of your strategy into the public domain, into libraries, shopping centres, through press releases, into schools if possible and via community organisations that can spread the word for you.

Implementation/Action Plan

➢ Social landlords should consider developing an Action Plan to address any issues within the strategy that will not be implemented at the time of development and drafting. The purpose of the Action Plan will be to ensure everyone is clear about what actions are still to be completed and it should be designed in a way that it can be reviewed at any given period.

➢ Outstanding issues that are recorded in the Action Plan should be defined in a way that makes them easily identified and regular diary dates should be set in order to monitor progress in meeting their delivery target. The Action Plan should have a clear framework which should incorporate actions to help delivery of specific objectives.

➢ The Action Plan should be aimed at making steady progress in delivering the strategy, rather than trying to do everything at once. The actions should have the endorsement of those involved in the development of, not only the strategy, but the plan itself so that consensus can be reached on timelines for implementation.

➢ The Action Plan should be monitored on a quarterly basis until such times as all actions have been fully implemented. A suggested format for an Action Plan could be devising a table which includes a facility for recording the aims and objectives which are outstanding along with controls for ensuring their delivery.

An example of an Action Plan is outlined in **Appendix 3**

Delivery options – example of good practice:

Aberdeen City Council - www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

Employ two 'Tenant Participation Officers' (TPOs) who are responsible for developing, promoting and supporting tenant participation within the city. The team aim to:

- Listen to the concerns and views of tenants.

- Provide information and training for tenants to get more involved.

- Provide different methods for them to get involved in a way that suits the individual.

- Support tenants who wish to explore the possibility of setting up a new group.

- Give practical guidance and support - help with producing minutes, preparing agendas, producing posters and leaflets etc.

- Provide grant funding to recognised Tenants & Residents Groups

- Increase and develop tenant participation by marketing opportunities

Some of the work of the tenant participation scheme involves council/tenant open days, a multi-storey group for both tenants and owners to afford them a specific voice, a sheltered housing network, and committee and a communication and leaflet group.

Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy

It is important that you monitor and review how you are progressing against your plans. Like common management activities this can be easily overlooked. Failure to undertake this basic requirement and you will lose control of your aims and objectives and fail to achieve your desired outcomes, thus impacting on your business.

The majority of social landlords will already have regular review dates of their policies and procedures built into their governance controls. As outlined in the previous section progress in fully implementing the strategy should be monitored on a quarterly basis until such times as all outstanding issues within the action plan have been fully implemented. Once fully implemented and as a minimum on an annual basis thereafter the strategy should be reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose and is delivering the desired outcomes. If however an organisation wishes to review their strategy on a more regular basis that is their prerogative.

Core Element - *Focus of review*

General

➢ A review should look mainly for evidence of how the suggestions and opinions of tenants have impacted on services or policies, or for solutions to problems that they have identified at local level.

➢ The review should look for clear evidence of specific achievements or desired outcomes. The mere fact that a meeting or event has happened does not demonstrate that it delivered a useful outcome. This approach can help instil a culture within the organisation for the need to identify outcomes and should influence all those involved in future decision making in relation to thinking about what they actually deliver.

➢ Consideration should also be given to identifying if the desired outcomes have delivered the best possible results for the money and resources invested. Internal controls, be they Key Performance Indicators, Business Plans, Risk Registers, or whatever method the association chooses to adopt to monitor their performance, should also be utilised to measure outcomes and successes.

➢ Records of such assessments should be retained for future audit or regulatory inspections.

Tenant Participation

A review should focus on specific areas of tenant participation and seek to identify how their input has impacted on the business. Some areas social landlords could consider would be to look for evidence of how productive tenant participation is, how responsive the organisation is to tenants' views or how effectively the association staff support tenant participation. Tenants should be made aware of the review and their views and suggestions canvassed through the desired mechanisms.

Some ideas for gathering this information could be:

- Invite all tenants to come together for an event to review the strategy, discuss what has been achieved in the year, and what the impact has been to them as individuals as well as their homes, what impact has it made to the organisation and seek their ideas for devising actions for the following year.

- Ask Tenants Associations, Tenants Panels or other groups to canvass their membership and then invite a representative body to consider the results of these discussions and feed them up to the association.

- Conduct a survey which could be used to secure feedback from tenants regarding what has happened over the past year, or what they would like to see happen in the next.

Process of reviewing the Tenant Participation Strategy

A fundamental and detailed review of the strategy should be conducted at least every 3 - 5 years. This should be undertaken by a body which includes tenants, a range of staff, representatives from the Board and elected Committee members.

The review should seek and take into account a wide range of tenants' views in advance of commencing this exercise, including those 'hard to reach' groups and people with supported needs. They should review the effectiveness of the:

- Organisation's success at involving tenants

- If and how they would like it to change or improve services

- If and how the participation services have improved their tenancies

- What impact involvement has made

The review should also try to secure the views of other stakeholders who may have useful insights into the success of what the organisation is trying to achieve, for instance:

- Other service providers to tenants (community and voluntary sector bodies)

- Specialist support agencies

- Other social housing landlords (best practice ideas)

The review should examine the results of any preceding reviews and the findings and recommendations should be reported to the Board or Committee for its endorsement. A report should be approved by the relevant committee or Board of the organisation, and a copy retained on file for future reference.

Value for Money

➢ Value for Money (VFM) is a term used to assess whether or not an organisation has achieved the maximum benefit from the goods and services it both acquires and provides, within the resources available to it. VFM can often be described in the terms of the three 'E's as outlined below:

- Economy – ensuring careful use of resources to save expertise, time and effort.
- Efficiency – delivering the same level of service with less resources.
- Effectiveness – getting a better return for the same level of investment.

➢ Obtaining VFM for services either procured or delivered by an organisation must be ingrained within the culture and mind-set of a business where it can be appropriately measured on an ongoing basis.

➢ Generally speaking good practice should be adopted which is appropriate and 'fit for purpose' to individual circumstances in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Adopting generic policies or frameworks from other organisations or institutions could mean incurring unnecessary expense and wasting time and energy introducing measures that are not required.

➢ High level indicators for developing VFM controls are outlined below. These should be read in accordance with guidance previously outlined and may be used as a starting point for organisations to further develop their own frameworks.

- *Aims and objectives* - should be clearly developed in order to achieve desired outcomes. This will provide clarity and maximise the chance of achieving the desired goal without incurring unnecessary expenditure and effort caused by deviation from the original target.

- *Planning* - suitable monitoring arrangements should be put in place to track progress. This will reduce the risk of failure and make sure the outcomes are achieved on time and on budget (Action Plan refers).

- *Risk assessments* – All activities should have risks attached, poorly developed or badly worded risks can represent poor value for money and cause slippage and waste of resources.

- *Openness and transparency* – there is a responsibility for organisations to show that they operate honestly, fairly and without bias. These key principles ensure processes are clear and transparent, meet all regulatory requirements, and involve all stakeholders. They can be used as a measurement or for inspection purposes by relative authorities and can clearly demonstrate how targets have been achieved.

An example of some indicators that could be used to assess whether or not an organisation has achieved their desired target are outlined below:

- Benchmarking a specific activity against the same or similar activities in a sister organisation.

- Using measurements such as Key Performance Indicators to monitor and evaluate activities.

- Learning from others (audit reports, inspections, best practice elsewhere, industry standards)

Legal and Regulatory Requirements on Participation

Both the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations are governed by legislation contained, *in the main*, within a number of Housing orders as outlined below:

- 1981 Housing Order
- 1983 Housing Order
- 1988 Housing Order
- 1992 Housing Order
- Housing Support Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2002
- 2003 Housing Order
- 2010 Housing (Amendment) Act Northern Ireland
- 2011 Housing (Amendment) Act
- Local Government Act (NI) 1972
- Section 126 of the Social Security Administration (NI) Act 1992
- Home Energy Conservation Act 1995

The Tenants Guarantee - Housing Associations are required to consult and involve tenants in accordance with the 'Tenants Guarantee' issued in 1992 which is the statement of the principles which housing associations in NI should practice and the minimum standards which they should achieve.

The Guarantee sets out two specific standards in relation to tenant participation, 'consultation and tenant involvement', and 'information to tenants'. These standards relate mainly to consulting affected tenants about changes to policies or maintenance services. They require landlords to inform tenants about their arrangements for consultation and participation, amongst other matters relating to their tenancy.

Coupled with this the Regulatory Framework in conjunction with the Housing Association Guide (HAG) regulates Registered Housing Associations. Presently the Department for Communities (DfC) is required to "exercise supervision and control over Registered Housing Associations" (Article 4 (1) (c) of the Housing (NI) Order 1992) and has a key role in promoting "best value" in the delivery of social housing in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is not subject to this regulatory framework. Instead, the Departments Chief Accounting Officer and the Northern Ireland Audit Office gain their assurances through the Board of Management of the Housing Executive, to whom delivery of these strategy expectations will also apply.

Within the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland there is a regulatory standard in relation to tenant participation, as outlined below, and that standard is subject to inspection. Through this the Department will gain an assurance that the expectations are being met through the regulatory framework.

Regulatory Standard	Regulatory Guidance
Tenant Participation Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with: • Associations must adopt a strategic approach to tenant participation in the development and review of housing and related services, or in response to service failure; • Associations must have due regard to the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland; and • Association must ensure that tenants and other users are made aware of and are clear about the participation activities and strategic approach to tenant participation.	This guidance describes what landlords should achieve by meeting their duties on tenant participation. It covers how social landlords gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants; how they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help tenants and other customers to become more capable of involvement: • By regularly seeking the views of tenants, being responsive to and considering those views; • By offering tenants a menu of participation activities so that they can participate as individuals, within formal or informal group structures or as specialist posts; • By providing opportunities for tenants to scrutinise the services they receive and the decisions that impact them; • By providing the appropriate training and support to tenants and staff to encourage, promote and provide the skills required to make participation an integral part of the organisation; and • By developing relationships and engagement opportunities for tenants and others within the community or those whose role has an impact on tenants e.g. other government departments or housing providers.

Regulation & Inspection

Social Landlords - Housing Associations

➤ Registered Housing Associations (HAs) are directly accountable to their board but must work within their rules and the requirements of the DfC published Housing Association Guide (HAG). The Department is responsible for grant funding, monitoring, regulation and issue of guidance and policy directives to HAs and have a statutory duty to consult with its representatives.

➤ DfC has a monitoring and oversight role rather than the governance role required for a Non Departmental Public Body (as with NIHE). The oversight responsibilities are exercised via two key processes:

• The Inspection Process – HAs are subject to a rolling programme of inspections which covers the five main activities of Finance, Property Management, Property Development, Housing Management and Governance. The inspection reports containing the findings and recommendations are published on the DfC website; and

• Ongoing monitoring – HAs must provide regular information required by the Department. This includes monthly minutes of board meetings, internal audit reports, accounts etc. They must also complete an Annual Regulatory Return which provides the Department with details on housing management, maintenance and other statistical information. Key areas include rental income, voids, evictions, maintenance and supporting people activities.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

➤ A Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) constituted in legislation and sponsored by DfC. In practice NDPBs operate with some independence and are not under day-to-day ministerial control. However Ministers are ultimately accountable to the Assembly for their NDPBs efficiency and effectiveness.

➤ The NIHE and the Department operate within the guidance developed by Department of Finance (DoF) 'Managing Public Money'. The Permanent Secretary is appointed as the Department's Accounting Officer (AO) and NIHE Chief Executive is the AO for that organisation.

Management Statement/Financial Memorandum

➢ In accordance with Department of Finance (DoF) guidance a Management Statement/Financial Memorandum (MSFM) has been   established which sets down the broad policies and related procedures of the NIHE, which are agreed by DfC and for which the Permanent Secretary, as DAO, is responsible and is answerable to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

➢ The actions and decisions taken by NIHE in accordance with this MSFM are the responsibility of the NIHE's Board. DfC's approval of the NIHE's budgets and the payment by DfC of Housing Grant to the NIHE is conditional upon the NIHE's compliance with the terms of this document.

Stewardship Statement

➢ The NIHE provide a quarterly Stewardship Statement on the internal controls of the organisation and their risk registers which they review monthly.

➢ Minister, Permanent Secretary and the Director of Housing Division attend a range of monthly and bi-annual meetings with the Chairman of the NIHE board and the Chief Executive

➢ A range of monthly performance and review meetings with the Department's Assistant Directors and Business Managers are also ongoing. These focus on all aspects of NIHE business to ensure compliance to standards, progress against objectives, and to raise issues.

Best Practice in Tenant Participation – Reference Material

- *Making Tenant Empowerment Work* - Tenant Participation Advisory Service Cymru/Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, 2004

- *Basic Guide to Tenant Participation in Supported Accommodation* - Tenants Information Service, 2004

- *Good Practice Guidance* – Consultation with Equalities Groups; Scottish Executive, 2002

- *Code of Practice for Tenant Participation in Rural Areas* - Scottish Executive, 2001

- *Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Tenant Involvement Register* http://www.nihe.gov.uk/tenant_involvement_registration_form.pdf

- *Inclusive Strategies for Race and Gender in Urban Regeneration* - Joseph Rowntree Foundation Findings.

- *Guide to Successful Tenant Participation* - Scottish Executive & Communities Scotland 2005

- *Developing Good Practice in Tenant Participation* - NFTMO www.nftmo.com/.../**Tenant**%20**Participation**/Dev%20gp%20in%20TP.pdf

- *Improving Services through Tenant Involvement* - Audit commission, 2004

- *Audit Commission Tenant Involvement* http://archive.audit-commission.gov.uk/auditcommission/SiteCollectionDocuments/Downloads/20100325tenantinvolvement-assessinglandlordsprogress.pdf

- *Supporting Communities* - www.supportingcommunities.org

- Empowering Communities: www.empoweringcommunities.ltd

- *Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA)* – www.nifha.org

- *Northern Ireland Housing Executive* - www.nihe.gov.uk

Section 75 Groups – Making Provision for all

- ## General Advice

Social landlords should be sensitive and mindful to the needs of those people who may have difficulty participating in their activities. These difficulties could be caused for example by people with problems such as hearing impairment, mobility issues, or language barriers. It is critical that everyone is given equality of opportunity to have their say in matters affecting their tenancies and the general running and future direction of the business of their landlord.

In order for social landlords to be able to respond to the needs of either individuals or collective groups they must be able to identify who they are. They also need to be able to identify the barriers that their particular conditions may bring to participation. Once this has been established contact should be made and agreement reached as to what provisions need to be made in order to enable all-inclusive participation. Providing mechanisms for securing service user views on their preferred method of being informed or of participating more actively is crucial to this process.

Fundamental to this is ensuring that everyone knows that their social landlord cares about their needs and wants to help them overcome any obstacles which would impact on them participating. Information leaflets and other literature should encourage tenants to let the organisation know if they have particular needs and how they would like them to be met. Other ways of doing this would be identifying any difficulties at tenancy sign up which can then be retained on file and tenants then encouraged to advise the landlord of any change of circumstances which may affect their ability to participate.

Issues associated with engagement with tenants with supported needs can be very wide-ranging. Social landlords should utilise services at their disposal to assist them with their work in this field. This could be through assistance from specialist/floating support agencies such as Disability Action, Cedar Foundation, SENSE etc. Other assistance could be available through networking with the voluntary and community sector, via Inter-agency partnership meetings, or simply sharing best practice with others. This list is not exhaustive.

Examples of provisions that could be provided, for illustration purposes only;

- ➢ **Visual impairments** – social landlords should be conscious of the difficulties faced by people with visual impairments and should make every provision to facilitate their needs. Provision should be made to make information available through various means which could include Braille, audio, tactile, electronic and signage.

- ➢ **Hearing difficulties** - social landlords should where possible, either install or make available through the provision of a suitable venue, hearing loops in order to assist those with hearing difficulties who wish to engage either individually or in a group environment. This could be in a tenant forum, face to face meetings with staff in the office, or making direct telephone calls to report a fault or make a complaint. They should also ensure that those chairing or facilitating meetings are aware of those people present who have hearing difficulties.

- ➢ **Mobility problems** - social landlords should ensure wherever possible that venues are wheelchair-accessible. For tenants meetings in local areas this is not always an option. In such cases, when publicising a meeting, those with mobility problems should be encouraged to let the organisation know of their wish to attend and the organisation should seek to assist them in doing so – either with transport or with assistance into the venue. Other ways of participating could also be explored, perhaps through a proxy, video/ teleconferencing/E-mail/social media etc.

- ➢ **Language or literacy difficulties** – where it is feasible to do so provision should be made for all literature to be made available in different languages. If a request is cost prohibitive to facilitate, signposting services should be available to the applicant where they can be referred to someone who can assist them with translation. This service should also be made available to those people with literacy difficulties, either internally within the organisation, or externally through bought in services.

Above all, tenants should be offered alternatives. For example, they may be given opportunities to have material explained to them face to face, using interpreters or by ensuring that people of the same language working in the community are aware of relevant materials and have it explained to them as appropriate.

References

1. Disability Discrimination Act 1995 - Act is published on the legislation.gov.uk website, click on the following link for access:
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/contents

2. Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 (legislation.gov.uk website) - published on the legislation.gov.uk website, click on the following link for access: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2006/312/contents/made

3. DHSSPS - Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy Action Plan , click on the following link for access:
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/disability_strategy_and_action_plan_-_2012-2015.pdf

Value for Money

- **House Mark** – House Mark are a leading provider of integrated data and analysis, insightful knowledge transfer, high quality consultancy support and cost effective procurement services to the social housing sector. At its core is a promise to deliver business intelligence that helps an organisation to make better informed business decisions. They are committed to making your business more efficient, more responsive, more effective and more intelligent by maximising performance and value for money.
http://www.housemarkbusinessintelligence.co.uk/

- Value for money toolkit
www.cipfastats.net/vfmtoolkit/about

- Example of a Value for Money template to follow
www.devon.gov.uk/value_for_money_framework.pdf

Utilising Resources

Research has shown that there are very good examples of tenant participation services already in place in Northern Ireland. However what the research also demonstrated was that there was lack of consistency across the board so accordingly there is an imbalance that needs to be addressed. With this in mind the resource that one social landlord may need to invest in their services may vary to what another landlord needs to do, accordingly the resources required for the development and support of tenant participation cannot be specified in this strategy, only the provider will know what they need to invest.

Factors such as the size and nature of the organisation, the location of stock, what participation mechanisms already exist, demographics and history, may all have some influence on individual budgets. Social landlords and their tenants should discuss and agree what level of resources is appropriate in order to implement their Strategy. This discussion should take place in full awareness of the evidence that does exist for service improvement and cost effectiveness arising from good participation.

When deciding on the allocation of resources some factors that could be considered are:

- **Training** - Budgets should be calculated to include sums to purchase or provide training for tenants, both in-house and at external training events. Generally the training budget should be sufficient to enable each active tenant to access one or two events per year. The size of the budget may depend on whether staff and/or members receive the same training as tenants – in which case the budgets for staff and member training could also contribute to the costs of this provision. Consideration should also be given to training up a member of staff to the requisite standard to deliver in house training in generic fields, thus having this resource at hand at any time instead of having to revert to an outside consultant for guidance or clarity on specific issues.

- **Funding for Tenants and Residents' Associations (TRAs)** – Consideration should be given to providing funds or payment in kind to enable the establishment and maintenance of TRAs so that they may operate effectively. Again subject to the individual provider some ways of supporting the TRA could be:

  - Provide funding or facilities for hiring meeting places.
  - Helping them to produce and distribute newsletters or other information to their members.
  - Provide admin support
  - Help them to organise events such as fun days or social gatherings.

- **Information sharing** - Social landlords should continually engage with their tenants so that consensus can be reached between all parties on how decisions around resource allocation are decided. Some factors that may need to be discussed and decided upon could include:

  - The level of resources being allocated
  - How these can be accessed
  - How resources have been used previously and whether there have been any lessons learned
  - Where the organisation is able to measure the benefits of the previous investment – use this information to target weaker areas that were less productive
  - Discuss outlets for independent funding, support or advice and seek ways to work in partnership with others to secure these resources

- **Involvement in Budget Allocations** - Where possible tenants should be involved in the discussions around the annual budget, specifically in relation to tenant participation and how it is allocated. This opportunity brings with it a sense of involvement for the tenant, helps develop self-confidence and provides a sense of ownership, thus helping to develop the relationship between tenant and landlord. In tandem with this, effective mechanisms for monitoring expenditure regarding support for tenant participation services should be put in place and regularly reviewed. Expenditure reports should be provided for the perusal of both landlord and tenant and should be subject to regular assessments. Matters to look out for would include, if the investment is providing value for money and if there has been continuous improvement made within the organisation.

APPENDIX 1: TRAINING

Training

- **General** - All parties, tenants, staff, and Board or Committee members, will need training in order to fulfil their roles and responsibilities to provide and develop tenant participation services. This may be more than just providing practical hands on courses and may involve a period of time whereby a cultural change within the organisation needs to be promoted and nurtured in order to bring participation services to the forefront and to maintain their profile. This will need clear commitment from the top of the organisation and there should be a clear statement of commitment to provide all parties with the tools and skills to play their part in delivering the change.

  In the case of tenants there may be a necessity to invest more resources into their training as they may require further knowledge and skills that staff or board members may already have (presentation skills, assertiveness training, communication courses). Exchange visits with other organisations could also be considered so that tenants, and others if required, benefit from learning how people in other places have tackled the problems they are now trying to address.

- **Learning needs analysis and learning styles** – Having identified the training needs of individuals through the training plan, and in advance of the actual event, those listed to attend should have individual learning needs analysis carried out. This will help establish what current skills they have, what their concerns are, if they have specific learning styles etc. Different people have different learning styles and this may need to be factored into the planning of the event. For example, some prefer traditional classroom style approaches, while others learn better through practical hands-on experience such as work shadowing or role playing. A training programme should be devised which, as far as possible, provides for a variety of learning styles. Failing that it may be necessary to split the attendees into different groups and hold separate sessions although this may not be cost effective. Liaison with the trainer in this case would be crucial.

- **Publicise the training** – There may well be attendees already lined up for the training events but take the opportunity to further publicise the fact that an event is being held and that there is still room for further delegates. This provides a further opportunity to generate interest from the tenant base and may result in further tenants putting their names forward to become involved. The agreed training programme should be widely advertised through all outlets available to the social landlord, be that through newsletters, by e-mail or text, or any other material sent out to tenants. Notifications could also be shared with voluntary and community organisations within the catchment area.

- **Joint training events** - Training which is shared with staff, tenants or Board members helps to ensure all parties have the same information and that the participants see each others as equals. It also provides an opportunity for interaction that a boardroom setting may not allow for.

  Coupled with acquiring knowledge and skills themselves from a specific event staff and board/elected members can contribute by being able to discuss areas of work that are central to the training and explain how it is organised and implemented. Their presence can help to build relationships between them and the tenants and reinforce the fact that everyone has a role to play in tenant participation.

- **Delivering training externally or in-house** – In-house training can allow for a more comfortable environment but there may be a danger of complacency from attendees and this should be guarded against. It also usually means that more people can be trained for the same cost and there is more control over the content. External events on the other hand can be valuable for tenants, staff and others to get away from the day-to-day environment, meet people from other organisations and learn from them as well as from the trainers. Training events do not necessarily have to always involve a classroom environment however, and there are various ways of acquiring new skills and knowledge.

  Some examples could be:

  - Open University courses
  - E-learning
  - Peer-based methods (desk training, job shadowing);
  - Best Practice visits
  - Large professional conferences, conventions, and retreats

- **Getting the training environment correct** - People cannot learn well in a poor environment. Every effort should be made to ensure facilities are up to standard and are accessible to all. Effective training can be dependent on creating a conducive atmosphere and providing facilities such as those outlined below can improve the chances of delivering an effective course:

  - Natural daylight
  - Easily controlled room temperature
  - Comfortable chairs
  - Enough space for people to move around
  - Breakout areas for group discussion
  - Equipment that works (e.g. flipchart, overhead projector, data projector and screen)
  - Stationery and handouts
  - Comfort/refreshment/meal breaks at appropriate junctures
  - Feedback forms

- **Reinforcing the training** - Training is most effective when put into practice soon after the event. Opportunities should be created for attendees to put their recently acquired skills into practice as soon as possible after the training event. This could be by means of convening a board or committee meeting to practice newly acquired skills or by setting a group to work on a specific project which is time bound and has to deliver an end product within a given timeframe, thus instilling upon the group the importance of aims and objective setting along with planning to achieve their goals. Other means could be by devising an action plan that allows attendees to show what they have learned over a period of time.

  Training can be validated by issuing certificates to participants, stating what training they have attended. This brings with it a feeling of pride and achievement and should be promoted. Alternatively some organisations may make the issue of a certificate dependent on some evidence that the participant has made use of the training in a practical way, for example, by writing an article about it in their newsletter, or reporting what they have learnt to a meeting of their Tenants Association.

- **Exchange visits** - Visits for tenants, staff and committee members to other organisations can be a valuable method of training. A well prepared trip can bring benefits to both visitors and hosts. It can help to show that problems are not unique to one organisation, and may show that there is more than one way to tackle them. The journey itself is an opportunity for conversation that ranges far beyond the constraints of the committee agenda, and helps participants to see each other in a more rounded way. Advance planning may lend to a more productive outcome. An idea could be to exchange a set of questions in advance to help ensure that each party has information to hand that the other is interested in, and that the time is spent discussing this information rather than merely gathering it.

APPENDIX 2: BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES/INITIATIVES

Best Practice Examples/ – Participation Initiatives

Information	Consultation	Involvement	Partnership	Empowerment
Policy Changes	Planned Schemes	Planned Schemes - Design - Identifying priorities - On site liaison	Inter-Agency Meetings	Tenants on Boards
Welfare Reform updates	Provide opportunities to consult on policy changes.	Housing Forum Meetings	Tenant Engagement structures (formalised), Area Panels, Regional Forums, Housing Community Network, Active Tenants Community Champions	Participatory Budgeting
Gas Servicing Letters	Environmental Improvement works	Business plan development	Monitor and reviewing Performance	Tenant Mystery Shoppers
Information Leaflets	Focus Groups	Provide feedback on Grounds Maintenance by completing record sheet.	Monitor and reviewing strategies e.g. Tenant Participation Strategy	
Annual Newsletters	Community Events	Editorial Teams	Joint working groups	
Website		Tenant Satisfaction Surveys Community Surveys Planned work pre and post surveys Annual HCN Conference Literature & Policy Review Group Gardening Panel Readers Panel	Scrutiny Panel Estate Inspections Service Improvement Groups	

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APPENDIX 3: EXAMPLE ACTION PLAN

Action Plan Template

Aim	Objective	Current Baseline	Action	Ownership	Timing for delivery	Intended outcome	Achieved	Failed
By the end of the financial year 2015/2016 to provide tenants with a range of ways to get involved in developing and delivering Housing services.	By end of the financial year 2015/2016 review the 'Register of Interest' database to measure any increase in tenant participation activity.		On a quarterly basis review the database to identify any uptake in participation opportunities	Housing Management team	31st March 2016	Increased involvement in services.	To be determined	
	By end of the financial year 2015/2016 report on any increased attendances at various tenant fora where tenants have been able to participate.		Monitor attendances at various tenant fora such as tenant advisory panel meetings, tenant/resident association meetings, annual general meetings, sub - committees'.	Housing Management team	31st March 2016	Increased involvement in services.	To be determined	