

Housing

Management handbook

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# Housing

Improving services through resident involvement

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The Housing Corporation's mission is 'raising the standard for homes and neighbourhoods'.

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First published in June 2004 by the Audit Commission for local authorities and the National Health Service in England & Wales, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Printed in the UK for the Audit Commission by Belmont Press

ISBN 1 86240 498 4

Photographs: Report Digital (cover)

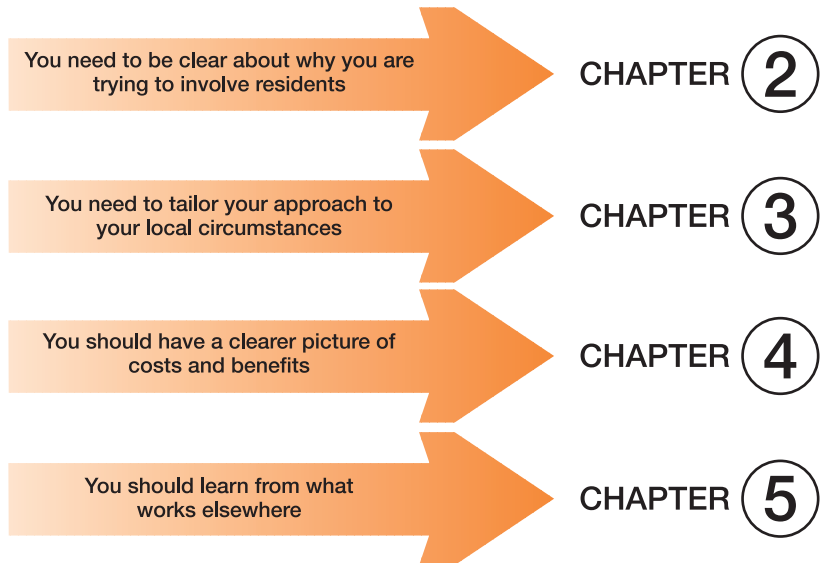
# Preface

- 1 During 2003, the Audit Commission undertook a research study to assess the benefits of resident involvement and to look at its financial implications. The study was conducted under the Audit Commission/Housing Corporation joint research programme<sup>1</sup>. The findings were based on fieldwork with staff and residents at 14 housing associations, learning sets of staff and residents and focus groups with residents. The report, *Housing: Improving Services through Resident Involvement* (**Ref. 1**), contends that housing organisations:

  - should have a clearer idea about why they are involving residents;
  - should offer a menu of opportunities for residents to become involved that recognises that people will want different levels of, and routes to, involvement; and
  - should have a better idea of the costs and benefits relating to resident involvement.
- 2 This management handbook accompanies the national report and provides tools and additional case studies to assist housing organisations in putting these principles into practice. It does not seek to duplicate the existing substantial body of practical advice on resident involvement (**Refs. 2 and 3**). Instead, it brings together the good practice identified during the course of the research to assist housing associations, in partnership with residents, to address some of the strategic issues facing them in building a productive relationship. It is written from the perspective of the landlord and as such is aimed primarily at housing practitioners and senior managers in housing associations, local authorities and 'arm's length management organisations' (ALMOs), but may also be of interest to residents and to policymakers.
- 3 The Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and Involvement Policy sets out minimum standards that housing associations must meet (**Refs. 4 and 5**). But neither the Housing Corporation nor Audit Commission inspectors adopt a prescriptive approach to assessing resident involvement. This handbook therefore does not provide a template for landlords seeking to set up new approaches to resident involvement. Instead it suggests tools and ideas which can be used in reviewing whether current practice is maximising the value of residents' involvement.

<sup>1</sup> Under s 55 and Schedule 3 of the Housing Act 1996, and s 40 of the Audit Commission Act 1998, the Housing Corporation and the Audit Commission may agree programmes of comparative studies designed to allow the Commission to make recommendations for improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of housing associations. Under the legislation, the Housing Corporation meets the cost of these studies.

- 4 The handbook is presented in six chapters. Following a summary of the key findings of the national report (Chapter 1), the next five chapters suggest that:



## Summary of the national report

- 5 The report *Housing: Improving Services through Resident Involvement* (**Ref. 1**) is available on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk). This chapter provides a summary of the key findings and recommendations.

### What is resident involvement?

- 6 The term 'resident involvement' is taken to mean a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from giving residents information about their housing service, to their involvement in the direct management of their homes. Along this continuum is a range of other activities, including consultation exercises, panels, focus groups, the running of tenants'/residents' associations and the involvement of residents in governance arrangements. The study looked across all resident involvement activity (with the exception of resident controlled models).
- 7 The original title for the study was 'tenant participation'. Over the course of the research, we adopted the term 'resident involvement' to ensure consistency with other key stakeholders, particularly the Housing Corporation. The change in terminology reflects current trends, as many housing associations seek to engage the wider community via regeneration or community development activities.

### Key findings

- 8 Resident involvement is now central to Government and local organisations' approach to the delivery of housing services. However, an untouchable quality has developed around the issue, which means that few people are prepared to question whether it is a worthwhile process, or its costs and benefits. This has led to considerable confusion about why social landlords involve residents, and what are the most effective approaches.
- 9 The report argues that residents and landlords should adopt a more questioning and open approach. There needs to be greater honesty about what resident involvement activities are designed to achieve. Housing organisations should be clear about whether they are involving residents to:
- improve services or housing stock;
  - enhance accountability to users; and/or
  - build social capital and community capacity.
- 10 They should communicate their rationale to residents and then monitor and evaluate their efforts against their objectives.

- 11 The **benefits** of resident involvement can be considerable. The research established clear evidence of benefits – ‘to the ‘business’, to residents and to the wider community. Specific gains for housing organisations include an impact on performance, better services and enhanced accountability. For example, housing associations found that involving residents in refurbishing an estate helped to reduce void levels and tenancy turnover. These improvements will also be important to residents too, but involvement can benefit residents in additional ways, such as individual capacity building and improved local community involvement. The latter can have a wide-reaching impact in terms of stabilising communities and helping to ensure their sustainability.
- 12 Resident involvement should be integral to the overall work of housing organisations. Many will therefore find the **costs** difficult to identify. Nevertheless, we found that those housing associations that carried out some tracking of expenditure on resident involvement were themselves in a position to make more informed strategic decisions about their approach. The costs to **residents** should also be recognised. If these are not properly understood and residents’ contributions are taken for granted, their commitment to the involvement process may dwindle.
- 13 The study considered the evidence on costs and benefits of resident involvement and concluded that:
  - involving residents to improve services does work and can provide value for money;
  - there are many good examples of housing associations positively affecting community capacity but these gains are less obvious, tend to longer term and usually involve a range of partner agencies; and
  - involving residents in governance (defined here as housing association boards) is often more challenging, especially if the organisation has not invested in the process, and in those circumstances the benefits might not easily translate into good value for money.
- 14 However, proper accountability is important. If the inclusion of residents in governance structures works well, it can significantly enhance the accountability of housing organisations. If housing associations believe in including resident on boards, they need to invest in and support the process.

## Recommendations

To reflect its conclusions in relation to resident board members, the report recommends that:

- the Housing Corporation and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) should consider whether current advice and support on the recruitment of resident board members in large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) associations and ALMOs is adequate to address the common misperception that they are there in a representational capacity.

More generally, the Housing Corporation should:

- ensure that existing guidance and good practice on the role and purpose of resident board members is effectively communicated to housing associations; and
- monitor and evaluate the effect of this guidance and good practice to ensure that misperceptions of the role of resident board members are corrected.

Landlords should be:

- clear about the purposes of involving residents and should evaluate their efforts against these objectives;
- offering residents a menu of opportunities to get involved;
- looking to demonstrate the benefits of resident involvement by means of service reviews, and be more diligent in making the business case before starting a new activity;
- more upfront about the real cost of involvement. If tenants have a better understanding of the true cost of activities (and the fact that these will impact on rents or the efficiency of the organisation), they will be able to assist the landlord in making more informed choices about which approaches offer maximum value for money;
- prepared to stop supporting resident involvement activities when benefits are unclear;
- clear about the role/purpose of resident board members and, if committed to including residents on the board, be prepared to back this up with support, training and annual appraisals;
- exploring incorporating a greater degree of selection in the recruitment of all board members; and
- focusing on those activities which give the maximum value to both the organisation and to tenants – finding the ‘win-win’ situation.

For its own part, the Commission will:

- when inspecting housing organisations ensure that the focus is on the effectiveness and outcomes of resident involvement, rather than the process itself (except in cases of poor performance); and
  - ensure that the new inspection methodology reflects the study findings.
- 15 This chapter has presented the key conclusions of *Housing: Improving Services through Resident Involvement* (Ref. 1). The next chapter takes as its basis the message that there should be more clarity about the purpose of resident involvement and suggests some practical ways of achieving this.

# 2

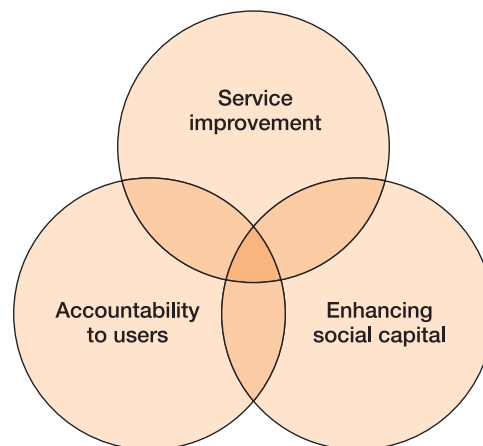
## Why involve residents?

- 16 Landlords sometimes adopt an unquestioning attitude towards resident involvement, which can be detrimental to the organisation, to residents and to the relationship between the two parties. They may see it as an end in itself. Often it can help to go back to fundamentals and challenge the very basis of an activity. Those housing organisations familiar with best value will be used to this process. However, it can be uncomfortable: challenging an activity can feel very threatening and may provoke a defensive response among staff or residents.
- 17 Chapter 1 contended that there were three main reasons why housing associations sought to involve their tenants. This chapter takes this framework as its basis (**Exhibit 1**) and suggests how the following exhibit can be used by housing organisations in:
- discussions among board or management teams about the direction of the organisation and the role of resident involvement;
  - discussions and consultations with other staff about the role of resident involvement;
  - team meetings;
  - training sessions;
  - induction sessions for new staff; and
  - meetings with residents' groups, federations and panels and at residents' conferences.

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### Exhibit 1

#### A framework for resident involvement



Source: Audit Commission

## Possible discussion areas

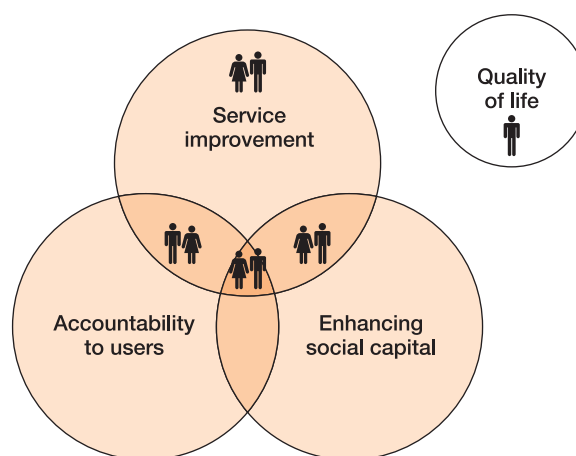
- 18 A useful starting point can be to ask staff and residents to identify where the organisation is currently located on the framework. They can use stickers or 'post its' to indicate or 'vote' for a position (**Exhibit 2, overleaf**). This can then be used as a basis for discussion on:
- where are we now?
    - housing organisation as a whole
    - different departments
  - is this where we want to be/should be?
  - does the current set of activities achieve our objectives?
  - are there important motivations missing?
  - how much consensus is there around this?
  - how can we get to where we want to be?
  - what specific outcomes are we seeking from our resident involvement activities? and
  - how do we communicate this agreed purpose to the rest of the organisation/residents?
- 19 The framework suggested in Exhibit 1 may not fully capture all the factors that motivate landlords to involve their residents. If it does not accurately reflect landlords' current or possible future motivations, staff may wish to consider constructing their own model.
- 20 It is also important to understand why **residents** become involved in the first place. In such discussions, a slightly adapted discussion may be appropriate, centred on:
- personal motivations for getting involved in the first place;
  - why do residents stay involved;
  - what might affect their willingness to be involved in the future;
  - what are the **personal** costs and benefits of involvement for residents? and
  - do their objectives align with that of the organisation (and vice versa)?

## Exhibit 2

### Putting the tools to work: Audit Commission learning sets

Three ‘learning sets’ helped this Audit Commission study and allowed the study team to test out early findings. A learning set is a group of interested people who come together with a facilitator to explore issues in complex areas and solve particular problems. The idea is that all those in the group learn from each other and develop their thinking in a mutually supportive way. The sets primarily comprised staff and tenants from housing associations but also included practitioners from local authorities and ALMOs. Each set had between 9 and 14 members. The format for the sessions varied but generally involved a) commenting on papers and early findings, b) feeding in individual experiences of, and perspectives on, resident involvement and c) an element of ‘action learning’ to allow members to learn from one another’s experiences. At one session participants were asked ‘why do you – either as a tenant or as an employee of a landlord – get involved in tenant participation?’

Participants at one of the sets ‘voted’ as follows:



The discussion provided a useful backdrop to the study and highlighted the fact that different landlords undertake resident involvement for different reasons. This reflects the spectrum of organisational ethos: in the above example, a couple of housing associations adopted a ‘consumerist’ approach: they were interested in resident involvement primarily as a means of improving services and were not particularly motivated by the wider accountability/social capital agendas.

The exercise also highlighted that:

- *motivations often change over time.* The reasons why people – especially tenants – had originally become involved may no longer be relevant: several of the learning set members stayed involved for reasons that were different from their original motivation; and
- *there may be a need to add to or adjust the framework* – one member felt that his organisation was driven by trying to improve the quality of life of local residents and was not comfortable in having that motivation subsumed by the main framework.

- 21 Experience in the learning sets and focus groups conducted for this research showed that reasons for engaging can be positive or negative (**Case study 1 and Exhibit 3**) and it can be a useful exercise to tease these out. Landlords will need to tailor their approaches to resident involvement to take on board why active residents become involved.

### Case study 1

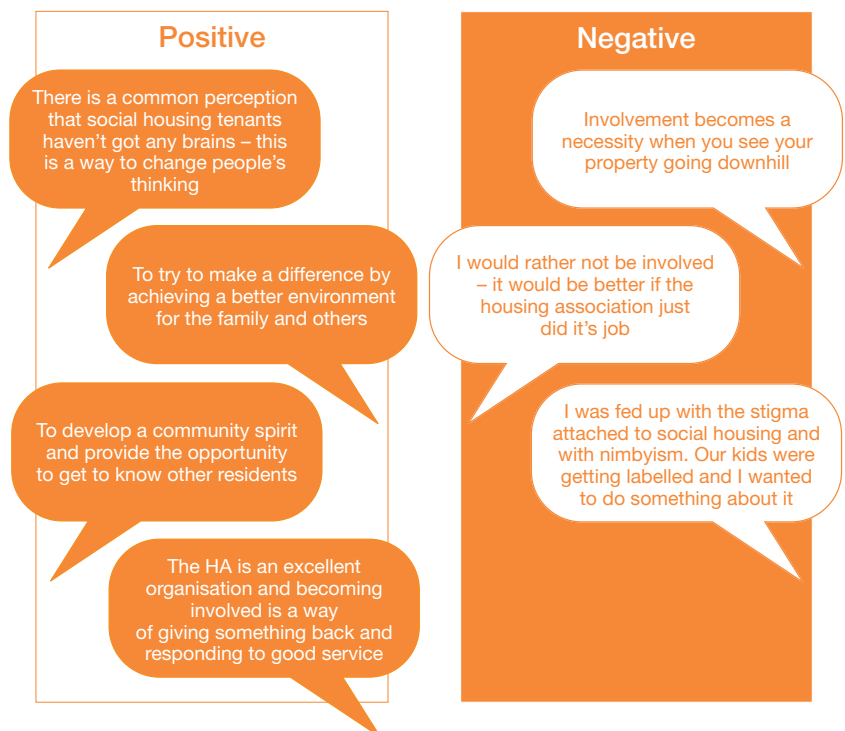
#### Putting the tools to work: structured discussions with focus groups of residents

For this research, focus groups were conducted with ‘active’ residents at eight of the fieldwork associations. A facilitated, structured discussion was held with each group and the first issue to be explored was why residents were willing to spend time getting involved with their landlord. The majority of responses fell into two camps: some residents were motivated by the desire to ‘put something back’, to contribute to their local community or area in some way. Others were motivated more by ‘push’ factors: their involvement stemmed from what they saw as a need to challenge their landlord about poor performance and they felt they needed to ‘push’ for improvement. Other reasons for engaging included a belief in the power of an organised collective movement. Some residents felt that by joining with others they were more capable of effecting change than by trying to engage with their landlord on an individual basis.

Source: Audit Commission

### Exhibit 3

#### Reasons for engaging can be positive or negative



Source: Audit Commission

## Format, outcomes and timing

- 22 Landlords will need to take a view on whether it is better to hold separate discussions with staff and residents or whether mixed groups are more appropriate. There are advantages and disadvantages attached to both approaches. Sometimes people will be more open if they are in a group with their peers, but there can be benefits to mixing up residents and staff. It can help to break down barriers and challenge attitudes and can promote cohesiveness of the group.
- 23 The discussion around the framework and where an organisation sits will be as important as the final assessment or outcome (**Case study 2**). The process itself should allow:
- clarification of different viewpoints;
  - better understanding of these different perspectives;
  - honest discussion about why the organisation and why residents are interested in involvement;
  - agreement about direction and way forward;
  - identification of areas of disagreement;
  - reaching consensus about how to tackle these; and
  - the development of a greater sense of purpose in relation to resident involvement.
- 24 Organisations should use this and other tools to reassess their approach on a periodic basis, say after six months. This will allow tracking of progress and will demonstrate to staff and residents that the organisation is committed to getting the process right. Holding a single, one-off session may serve to raise expectations and runs the danger of not generating any real improvements.
- 25 As with all exercises that require fundamental questioning of well-established organisational functions or structures, there is a risk associated with these discussions. They require honesty about what sort of organisation the staff and residents think the landlord should be. Such discussions may be difficult if groups hold differing views. Senior staff and board members need to be prepared to act on the outcomes of discussions to make the process worthwhile and show commitment from the top. The following section looks at what factors influence local approaches to resident involvement.

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## Case study 2

### Putting the tools to work: Rochdale Boroughwide Housing

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing is a recently created ALMO – an arm's length management organisation. One of its first tasks was to review the funding agreement it had in place with the tenants' federation, Rochdale Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (RoFTRA). As part of this process, the ALMO reviewed the respective roles and responsibilities of Rochdale Borough Housing and RoFTRA relating to tenant participation, using the Audit Commission framework as a basis for discussion.

Discussions established that:

- the ALMO is primarily motivated by the 'service improvement' and 'accountability' agendas; whereas
- RoFTRA naturally gravitates to the 'accountability' motivation but is increasingly moving towards the third motivation: improving community capacity and building social capital.

This discussion was perceived to be useful in teasing out these differences and in promoting a better understanding of the respective positions and attitudes of the two bodies towards tenant participation. A plan was agreed to streamline the approach to tenant participation and to avoid any duplication of effort. The ALMO board also found the discussion to be a useful training exercise, particularly for those new board members who were less familiar with the housing field.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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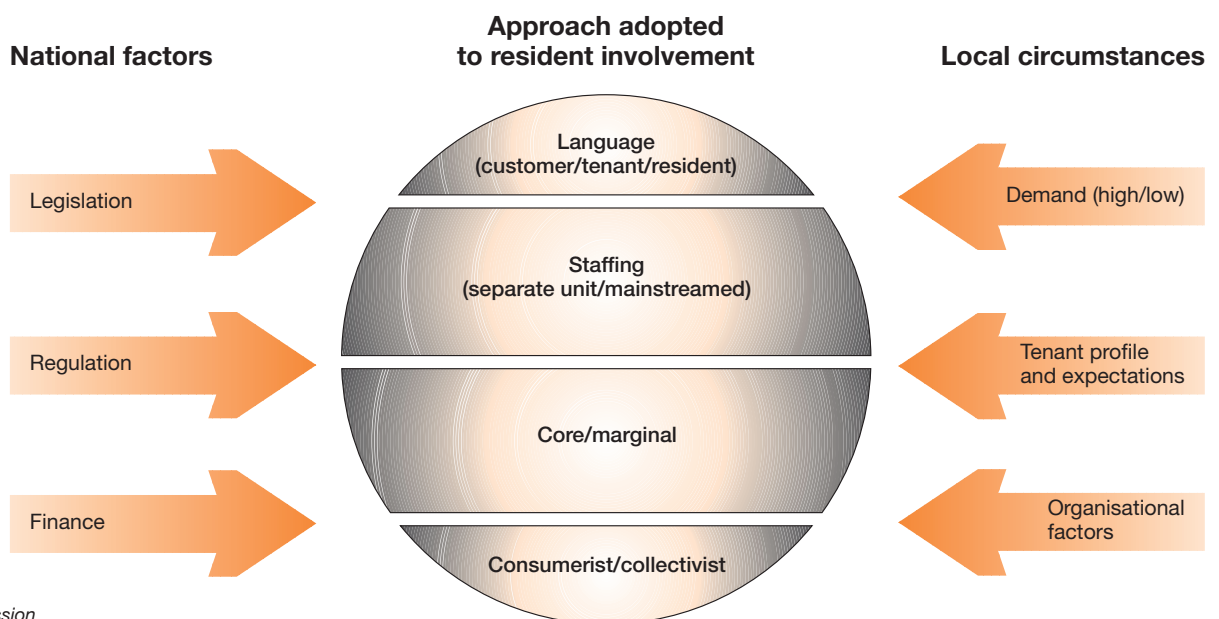
# 3

## What shapes local approaches to resident involvement?

26 The previous section considered the possible reasons landlords might seek to engage with their residents and encouraged staff to hold discussions around this framework. But there is no 'right' approach. A range of national and local factors will determine the ultimate shape of resident involvement for a landlord (**Exhibit 4**). This section suggests how landlords might consider analysing these factors and adapting their resident involvement activities accordingly. In short, landlords will need to think about their local context in designing approaches to resident involvement.

### Exhibit 4

#### A range of national and local factors determine approaches to resident involvement



Source: Audit Commission

- 27 The national factors are relatively fixed: for example, housing associations will need to respond to the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance and its Involvement Policy, to the expectations of inspectors and to the availability of finance. However, the local factors will vary and housing organisations should:
- have a full understanding of these;
  - plan the most appropriate way of engaging their residents to reflect local circumstances; and
  - periodically review their approach to ensure that it remains appropriate to the changing local context.
- 28 There is a range of local factors landlords will need to consider, for example:
- What is your tenant profile?:
    - age;
    - ethnic/cultural mix;
    - working/unemployed; and
    - skills mix.
  - Are you providing housing for particular groups?:
    - key workers;
    - market rented; and
    - supported housing/special needs.
  - Tenant expectations and history of engagement – is there a culture of involvement?
  - Actions of other agencies:
    - do partner agencies expect a high level of engagement with the local community?
    - do they get it? and
    - does the landlord's approach complement the actions of others or are local people subject to consultation fatigue?
- 29 There are different ways of responding to these local contextual factors and it makes sense to tailor approaches to reflect any particular characteristics, for example:
- In areas with a high proportion of **black and minority ethnic (BME) residents**, landlords should ensure that their approaches to engagement are culturally appropriate and make use of the correct channels of communication (**Case study 3, overleaf, and see paras 60-62**);

- For **younger tenants**, use of the internet and a more ‘consumerist’ approach may work. Bromford Housing Association has a tenant profile that is younger than average: it therefore adopts a business-like, customer focused approach to resident involvement that is more in line with its tenants’ expectations **(Case study 4)**.
- For **older residents**, wrapping opportunities for involvement around social activities is often successful. For example, Impact Housing Association has a tenant profile that is older than average. A tenant board member told us: ‘as our profile is skewed towards older tenants we find a social focus works well in terms of getting people involved’. Similarly, at another housing association with an older tenant profile, resident involvement is based on a range of informal activities such as coffee mornings and summer day trips, all aimed at building communication and trust. At Manchester Methodist Housing Association, their approach is influenced by the high proportion of single parent families and the association responds by holding fun days as a means of getting their and others’ feedback.

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### Case study 3

#### Understanding your residents and their preferences for communicating shapes local approaches to involvement

Nashayman is a BME housing association with over just over 530 properties, based in Halifax, Yorkshire. It found that attempting to obtain feedback from BME tenants by letter had not been successful for a range of reasons, including low rates of literacy in the area. The association responded to this by deciding to use face to face contact as the main means of communication with residents. For example, once the first tenant participation officer had been appointed, she made a point of paying a door to door visit to every tenant. This was seen as ‘very fruitful’ as it got people interested and informed them about why the association was trying to involve residents. It also provided a valuable source of feedback on Nashaymans’ services.

Nashayman feels face to face contact is the best way of engaging with its residents but concedes that it is only able to do this because it is a small association. It has also developed other culturally appropriate ways to involve residents:

- arranging female only meetings with a female co-ordinator;
- ensuring meetings are not arranged during prayer times, in particular during Friday prayers for Muslim tenants; and
- avoiding other religious days, such as Eid and Diwali.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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## Case study 4

### Bromford Housing Association tailors its approach to resident involvement to reflect the particular characteristics of its tenant profile

At Bromford Housing Association 70 per cent of ‘customers’ are under 40 years old. In addition:

- the stock is substantially family housing;
- households are predominantly young families; and
- the majority of tenants have been with Bromford for less than five years.

This profile is much younger than most local authorities and has shaped the approach to resident involvement because:

- tenants’ expectations are different: ‘our tenants are more used to being treated as consumers’; and
- there is not a large cohort of retired people with more time to spare.

In response to this, the housing association:

- has fewer traditional tenant groups and instead offers a menu of opportunities to get involved such as post and e-mail alongside project membership of business improvement groups;
- asks customers for feedback on the moving in experience, as well as conducting regular checks on the quality of other service experiences such as complaints and anti-social behaviour handling, major repairs programmes and quality of new build homes;
- incentivises housing officers to recruit customers to its sounding board as well as introducing ‘recommend a friend’ benefits for existing members; and
- introduced show homes on estates, using existing tenants’ skills to furnish them.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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- 30 Of course, most housing associations will have a very diverse set of residents and it is unrealistic to expect them to want to engage in a uniform way. For instance, not everyone will be interested in attending regular meetings of a residents’ association or in getting involved in other formal structures. Landlords will therefore need to provide a range of ways to engage. It is also important to bear in mind that some residents will be willing and able to commit more time than others and it is therefore also good practice to offer different levels of involvement to accommodate this. The most effective way of ensuring that a cross section of residents is reached is for landlords to offer a ‘menu’ of opportunities for residents to become involved. This was one of the key recommendations of the national report. A menu-based approach allows organisations to take on board the fact that, increasingly, residents prefer individual forms of engagement rather than collective structures. An extended version of the case study from the national report is replicated here and some key steps are suggested for landlords considering introducing a menu-based system and database.

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## Case study 5

### Landlords should offer a ‘menu’ of routes for residents to become involved

Northern Counties Housing Association has developed a system to ensure that its residents can engage at the level with which they feel comfortable. Any resident can complete a ‘key player card’, stating which areas they are most interested in (for example, housing management or repairs and maintenance) and what involvement methods they are interested in, from a choice of 23. The full range of options is replicated at Appendix 1. These methods range from a willingness to be contacted by questionnaire every three months about a particular aspect of Northern Counties’ services to applying to become involved as a board member. In between are opportunities to become a mystery shopper, to edit the newsletter or to work shadow a member of staff. Tenants can tick as many options as they would like, and once they have sent their card they are recognised as ‘Key Players’.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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- 31 There are five key steps to go through in setting up a ‘menu’ approach to resident involvement:
- survey your residents about the ways, levels, etc they want to be involved (Appendix 1);
  - compile a database that records this information;
  - keep the database up to date;
  - use the database to:
    - design overall approaches to resident involvement (ie where to target effort based on the sort of engagement the majority of tenants may want);
    - design targeted approaches if the views of a particular group are sought;
    - target those residents who have indicated an interest in a particular subject area (for example, to assemble a focus group on repairs and maintenance); and
  - evaluate the approach to establish whether the system needs to be changed.
- 32 This chapter has suggested a number of local factors that will need to be taken into account in reviewing approaches to resident involvement. Factors such as tenant profile will not be constant, and landlords will need to track and periodically review whether their approach to resident involvement is appropriate. Such an exercise may serve to reinforce existing approaches and practices or it might highlight where changes need to be made. The chapter has also reiterated that the ‘menu’ approach can be an effective way of reaching a wide range of residents. The next chapter looks at how organisations can better track of the costs and outcomes of resident involvement.

# 4

## How to capture the financial implications and outcomes of resident involvement

- 33 Since few housing organisations critically review their approaches to resident involvement, there is a low awareness of the outcomes and financial implications of this activity. The national report argued that housing organisations should carry out more systematic tracking of both costs and outcomes and highlighted the benefits of this:
- better, more informed, strategic decision-making about the future of resident involvement;
  - greater accountability to residents in terms of what is being spent on resident involvement; and
  - an ability to determine and demonstrate the value, and assess value for money, of individual and overall resident involvement activities.
- 34 A few housing organisations have started to track costs and benefits as part of best value or other service reviews (**Case study 6**). Here we propose some outline methodologies for those organisations considering introducing such monitoring.

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### Case study 6

#### Some housing associations have started to monitor and track spending on resident involvement

*Devon and Cornwall Housing Association* is conducting an activity based costing exercise for its general needs housing stock to assess how frontline staff are spending their time. Housing officers' time was recorded for one month in 2003 and the same exercise will be repeated some time later to provide two snapshots. The exercise was used to establish how much it costs to deliver tenant participation and also to determine whether the service provides value for money.

*South Warwickshire Housing Association* asked one of its standing service review groups (SRGs) to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its current approach to resident involvement. The SRG comprised staff and tenants and was assisted by working groups looking at expenses, the tenant representative handbook and the code of conduct for tenant representatives. The review looked at what resident involvement was costing the association and used a benchmarking study to compare this with 49 other housing associations.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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## Tracking your organisational costs

- 35 Costs fall into a number of categories, the largest of which is salaries. The national report highlighted the different staffing models that could be adopted to support resident involvement. In summary these are:
- a specialist team of ‘tenant participation’, ‘resident involvement’ or ‘community development’ staff, with other colleagues being expected to include an element of resident involvement in their jobs;
  - a senior resident involvement ‘champion’ whose job is not so much to ‘do’ resident involvement but to support and advise other staff in doing so; and
  - no specialist staff but every department taking a responsibility for resident involvement.
- 36 Because of this variation in approach, it is difficult to compare costs between organisations. But it is possible for organisations to carry out better tracking of their own costs. **Exhibit 5** proposes a starting point for monitoring organisational costs. Individual landlords will be best placed to decide whether different or additional categories are relevant for them. They should track their costs over time and, ideally, report back to residents and, where appropriate, housing association boards. The results should be used to understand where resources are currently being concentrated, and reviewed alongside information on outcomes (see next section). Although comparisons with other organisations will be difficult due to variations in staffing models, landlords should be able to use this information to benchmark with appropriate comparators. The Heart of England report, upon which the cost table is based, is a useful starting point (**Ref. 6**). The results from fieldwork sites for some of these categories are shown as a way of illustration at Appendix 2.
- 37 The national report also considered the cost to **residents**. In line with many organisations that rely to a significant extent on the contributions of volunteers, some housing associations used techniques to place a monetary value on the time active residents invested with the association. For example, the William Sutton Trust worked with tenant groups throughout the organisation to work out the impact and outcomes of tenant involvement time (**Ref. 7**). While housing associations need to recognise that tenants’ time is valuable, the benefits of trying to cost this out might not justify the time required to do so. The ODPM’s evaluation of tenant management organisations found that it was difficult, and possibly inappropriate, to put a price on the substantial unpaid time invested by tenants in resident involvement (**Ref. 8**).

## Exhibit 5

### Monitoring organisational costs

Cost element	What it covers	Estimated costs	
		2003/04	2002/03
Salaries (include on-costs)	Which staff are identified as working full time or part time on resident involvement? What proportion of their salary can be allocated to resident involvement activities?		
Funding for tenants' groups	How many groups exist? Are they formal or informal? How are they constituted? What does the funding cover?		
Tenant training	Is this delivered internally/externally? Who is targeted? Record levels of attendance for each event		
Tenant courses			
Expenses for active tenants			
Expenses for resident involvement staff			
Other (eg resource centres)			
Conferences/events	Record levels of attendance for each event and cost per attendee		
Newsletters	Circulation Cost per resident Is it produced internally/externally? How often is it issued? How is it delivered (and what is the cost)? Any evaluation/survey findings		
Other literature	eg Are tenants' handbooks classed as resident involvement?		
Tenant controlled budgets	What sort of activities do these fund? What are the criteria?		
Specific measures for hard to reach tenants	eg Employing specialist community workers, such as translators		
Other activities	eg Mystery shopping surveys		
Numbers of stock: Numbers of tenants: Numbers of tenancies:			

## Monitoring the outcomes

- 38 Landlords also need to improve their understanding of the benefits of resident involvement. Those organisations which have started to do so have found that it is more meaningful to collect this information from the bottom up, based on an assessment of the outcomes from individual activities – for instance, what are the benefits of including residents in a service review group, or what are the benefits of a tenants’ conference – rather than trying to do so for the whole range of resident involvement activity.
- 39 Impact Housing Association has developed a system to monitor the resident involvement taking place across the housing association, based on forms to track individual projects or activities (**Case study 7**). It also uses the system to track costs. Exhibit 7 shows a worked example and a blank form is enclosed at Appendix 3.

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### Case study 7

#### Resident involvement monitoring at Impact Housing Association

##### Background

Impact Housing Association conducted a Resident Involvement Best Value Review in 2003 which highlighted that policy implementation was very strong in some areas of the organisation with some very high levels of participation, and relatively under-developed in others. Staff said that they would benefit from additional support and guidance to ensure that participation continued to be a fundamental part of the way they worked. A number of steps were taken to address this, including the introduction of a **monitoring framework** to:

- monitor progress on resident involvement;
- expand good practice to all areas of the association;
- ensure that all residents are offered good resident involvement opportunities regardless of where or how they live; and
- record how residents influence the delivery of services with a view to driving up service quality.

##### The system

Each member of staff is expected to complete a resident involvement monitoring form whenever they undertake any form of involvement with residents, either formal or informal. They can also ‘evidence’ events through photos and other mediums to allow for creativity. A copy of the form is retained in the team’s resident involvement record and one is also held centrally by the resident involvement co-ordinator. She audits the forms twice a year and compiles a report for senior managers and the area committees which outlines the number of opportunities offered and highlights good practice and the outcomes achieved. This will allow the organisation to make better informed decisions about what future resident involvement activities to plan.

**Has it made an impact?**

The system was introduced in October 2003 and it is still too early to gauge its effectiveness fully. However, the housing association is seeing a number of emerging benefits. The system provides:


- a tool for sharing good practice;
- a tool to ensure that resident involvement continues to be part of every staff member's role;
- a way of highlighting – for staff and tenants – the link between involving residents and achieving outcomes.

The system enables the association to 'evidence' its resident involvement outcomes and will help it to comply with the new requirements under the Housing Corporation's Involvement Policy. The association is planning to involve residents in 'participatory evaluation' of involvement opportunities, which will give residents, as well as staff, the opportunity to compare the costs and outcomes of specific activities.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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### Exhibit 6 Resident involvement monitoring form: worked example

 <b>Resident involvement monitoring form</b>	
<b>Names of those involved</b>	Young people who are residents of Kendal Supported Housing Project and Project Worker
<b>Type of involvement</b>	Meeting to discuss new supported housing flats for young people. To discuss plans for the building and choose colours.
<b>Resources involved:</b>	Venue costs: n/a Travel costs: n/a Staff time: 1.5 hrs (5pm – 6:30pm) Cost of refreshments: n/a
<b>Feedback</b>	Who will inform residents of what has been achieved as a result of their involvement and how The project worker will bring the Property Services team’s responses, questions and comments to the next house meeting. Additionally, there will be an article in the Supported Housing Newsletter.
<b>Outcomes</b>	State the outcome from this involvement eg improvement in resident/staff relationship, numbers attending a meeting, decisions made, potential service improvement or number of responses to consultation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comments on the plans recorded.</li> <li>• Colour schemes for the new flats chosen by residents.</li> <li>• Fixtures and fittings chosen by the residents</li> <li>• One of best housing meetings the group has held with seven tenants attending, out of a possible eight.</li> <li>• Residents sharing responsibility for the choices made and accepting ‘ownership’ of those decisions.</li> <li>• Young people’s viewpoints taken into consideration when developing properties for young people.</li> </ul>
<b>Action plan</b>	Identify what has happened or is planned as a result of this involvement (state if no further action is required). To share residents’ comments with the Property Services Team, with the aim of improving the second phase of the project, benefiting from young people’s experience of living in the first phase of the flats.
<b>Date:</b> .....	
<b>Date received:</b> .....	
<b>Signed:</b> ..... (Officer involved) <b>Signed:</b> ..... (Resident involvement co-ordinator)	

*Source: Impact Housing Association*

- 40 An alternative option for structuring a monitoring system is to produce a ‘balance sheet’, detailing the costs and benefits and including a judgement on the value for money of an individual activity. This was the approach adopted on fieldwork for this study. **Exhibit 7** shows a worked example, based on the involvement of residents in the structuring of a partnering contract at a housing association. It is also worth highlighting the barriers involved with individual initiatives and thinking about what actions are required to address them.

### Exhibit 7

#### Resident involvement balance sheet: worked example

Costs	Benefits	Value for money judgement?	Barriers
<p><b>To the housing association:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>childcare and transport expenses (varied, up to a maximum of £80 per session)</li> <li>incentives to residents (£20 per session)</li> </ul> <p><b>To residents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>time (‘I’m 65 and disabled but find it hard to say no’)</li> <li>stress</li> </ul>	<p><b>To the housing association:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tenants are now very well informed – ‘experts’</li> <li>able to include a meaningful evaluation of contractors’ performance on resident involvement</li> <li>it made the whole process customer focused</li> </ul> <p><b>To residents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>an opportunity to influence the service</li> <li>an educational experience</li> <li>monetary incentives</li> <li>personal satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>‘It’s money well spent – it’s peanuts compared with the contract’</li> <li>The tenants were involved with a much wider group of contractors and staff and their inclusion represented a minimal cost to the housing association. Their inclusion improved the process, bought good will with those tenants, sold the partnering concept to the wider tenant body and resulted in capacity building for individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representative structures were in limbo at the time they were trying to get tenants involved</li> <li>Tenants were impatient to get to decisions about services (rather than just the process)</li> <li>Lack of knowledge among tenants initially</li> <li>The concept is difficult to grasp</li> <li>Some staff attitudes towards the inclusion of residents in the process were not supportive</li> </ul>

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

- 41 A good monitoring framework can help in a number of ways. It can provide evidence for better decision-making by enabling organisations to:
  - ascertain what works;
  - focus resources where they will have the greatest impact;
  - make difficult decisions, in consultation with residents, to discontinue those activities/structures which are no longer serving a purpose; and
  - feed into annual reviews of resident involvement or ‘impact assessments’.<sup>1</sup>
- 42 It can also be useful in helping to change cultures and behaviours by:
  - Focusing staff minds on what they are trying to achieve; and
  - Making it clear that accountability for time and resources is important. Often the process of monitoring is as valuable as the output.

<sup>1</sup> From April 2005, housing associations will be required by the Housing Corporation to produce an involvement statement in partnership with their residents. This should be reviewed every year using ‘impact assessments’ which will collect evidence on how, and the degree to which, services have improved. The new policy also states that the Corporation will enforce penalties for those associations perceived not to be complying (Ref 5).

- 43 In order to make such a process useful, managers will, however, need to avoid a few potential pitfalls:
- do not let it turn into a bureaucratic, paper-based exercise: make sure it is fit for purpose;
  - adapt these suggested models to fit your own circumstances;
  - don't collect information for the sake of it, use it to make improvements or stop collecting the information you don't need; and
  - use the system wisely – don't assume that you need to completely abandon approaches that don't appear to be working. It may simply be a question of changing things rather than ditching them.
- 44 The next chapter reviews some of the key factors which determine whether a landlord's approach to resident involvement is effective.

# 5

## Bringing it all together

45 The research showed that ‘good’ resident involvement is never about one thing. There is not a single key factor which will lead organisations to the ultimate solution. Instead, a set of key principles emerge time and time again as being important in ensuring approaches to resident involvement are successful. This chapter reviews organisational factors such as leadership, recruitment, ‘mainstreaming’ and culture; it also looks at the approaches adopted in reaching all sections of the community and in supporting board members on housing association boards.

## Leadership

46 Change is only possible with effective leadership. In housing associations, the support of the chief executive and the board is critical in ensuring that resident involvement becomes a key part of the way the organisation operates. For instance, the chief executive at Devon and Cornwall Housing Association has a personal belief in community development and she actively promotes this among her staff. The housing association’s ethos is to be ‘more than a landlord’ and the chief executive comments: *We are totally committed to community development – our belief is that people with less of a stake in society need assistance.* A top level commitment to resident involvement is also apparent at Impact Housing Association, where the chief executive told us: *our participative style comes from our roots: it’s a vein running through the organisation; it has never been a question to involve tenants – it’s a given.*

47 A clear steer from the top is important, but staff throughout the organisation need to understand and promote the message in a consistent way. One way of achieving this is through the use and promotion of appropriate language, which can be a powerful means of reinforcing messages. The main thing to look out for is use of inappropriate language. It is fairly obvious the detrimental effect that, for instance, being dismissive or patronising towards residents or their views can have. Once the staff/resident relationship has been damaged by this, it is very difficult to regain trust. The use of careless language can occur at all levels, from frontline staff to board members, and can be a significant block to progress. It can serve to undermine otherwise good work and sound policies.

48 Some organisations have been successful in promoting the use of consistent language. For instance, at the more ‘consumerist’ housing associations, chief executives encourage staff to view residents as ‘customers’ and to ensure that a ‘customer focus’ is present in all that staff do. Using the correct language can help to develop the ‘right’ mindset. For example, the customer services manager at Peddars Way Housing Association, a member of Flagship Housing Group, was clear of her role: *I think of myself as a supplier of a service and tenants as customers.* Similarly, at the associations cited above – Devon & Cornwall and Impact Housing Associations –

the organisational ethos is detectable throughout the organisations and the message about being more than a landlord is clear when you speak to staff, both resident involvement officers and others.

49 But this issue does not only relate to in-house staff. Housing organisations also need to ensure that their partners and contractors understand the organisation’s approach to resident involvement and are signed up to using appropriate language which supports this. Senior staff need to give a strong message to residents that if the language/behaviour of contractors is deemed to be unacceptable, action will be taken. This is particularly important with respect to race and diversity issues.

50 However, a commitment to resident involvement is not just about using the right language, senior staff also have to ‘walk the talk’. They have important roles to play, both externally and internally:

- *External visibility is important* – those housing associations which were successfully engaging residents made sure that senior staff members attended key external meetings or events. There are two clear benefits: it demonstrates that the organisation is committed to resident involvement – residents need to see that senior staff are taking them seriously and this means turning up at events. But it can also serve as an important ‘reality check’ for senior staff to remind them of the real issues facing residents and can be useful in training staff or changing attitudes:
- *Internal support is also key*. Staff responsible for resident involvement can feel very isolated and are often unsure of whether they are representing the housing association or the residents. Some of the chief executive officers we spoke to therefore saw their role as being about supporting and boosting morale among resident involvement staff and about recognising the difficulties of engaging. One chief executive told us, ‘my role is keeping the tenant participation officers motivated – I have an important mentoring/coaching role to play’.

51 ‘Good’ or ‘strong’ leadership is too often cited as a solution to problems in service delivery. It can be difficult to know what this means and what to focus on. **Exhibit 8** summarises the preceding points.

*We are aware that lack of senior management contact with tenants may be an issue. To address this, each senior manager has adopted an estate and provides a reality check by working with the housing officer to give them a better understanding of issues on the ground. We also encourage our senior staff to attend ‘Experience It’ days such as estate makeovers, which give them a chance to interface with customers. It’s good for tenants to see the finance director weeding gardens or painting fences! Staff get more mileage out of this than, for example, from reading satisfaction surveys.*

**Director of Operations,  
Bromford Housing Group**

## Exhibit 8

### Promoting resident involvement through good leadership

- ✓ Communicate a clear, consistent message about resident involvement from the top.
- ✓ Use appropriate language to reinforce the organisational ethos and approach to resident involvement.
- ✓ Use language that staff members, residents, contractors and partners can understand and relate to.
- ✓ Communicate the reasons for involving residents – what are the different activities (whether they are focus groups, mystery shopping or support for residents associations) designed to achieve?
- ✓ Be clear that a customer or resident focus is an important element of everyone's job.
- ✓ Be visible, both internally and externally.
- ✓ 'Protect' resident involvement staff when required.

Source: Audit Commission

*You can teach people technical skills, but can't teach attitude.*

**Resident involvement manager,  
housing association**

## Recruitment

- 52 Recruiting the right people is another often cited ingredient in the effective delivery of services. However, it is even more important in the resident involvement sphere where people skills, influencing and credibility are essential. Since the job is often about making sure that housing officers, in particular, are signed up to the involvement agenda, resident involvement staff must have credibility and good influencing skills. Attitude can also be very important – at Devon and Cornwall Housing Association, one housing officer told us: *the housing association recruits people who believe that it is more than a landlord – we have a key role in improving people's quality of life in partnership with other agencies*. Deliberately seeking new recruits with particular attitudes or beliefs is clearly another way of ensuring that the appropriate ethos is well embedded in an organisation. Those associations that recruit the right people and then reinforce the messages through strong leadership and effective systems are making good progress.
- 53 The national report found that housing associations were increasingly thinking 'outside the box' when recruiting people and that often attitude and personality were more important than a strong track record in resident involvement. Some landlords recruited people with housing officer experience as this gave them more 'clout' with frontline staff, others found that employing people with resident involvement experience was important as they knew what worked. A further group of landlords were happy to recruit people with no housing experience because the individuals concerned either had the right attitude or came from a private sector customer services background, which gave them appropriate skills and outlook. Landlords should think carefully about what skills are required in resident involvement and draw

**Ask yourself:**

**Do our job descriptions for resident involvement staff deliver the skills we need?**

up an appropriate job description: for example if a significant part of the job is influencing other staff members, the job description and recruitment process will need to reflect this. Also it is important that resident involvement staff are seen as approachable: if there is a significant proportion of BME residents, for example, it makes sense to draw some frontline resident involvement staff from these communities.

- 54 Increasingly, housing organisations are employing **residents** to assist them in involvement activities. Some are offering direct employment: for example Enterprise 5 has set up a ‘tenants’ friend’ programme (**Case study 8**), and Impact Housing Association has, under the modern apprenticeships scheme, employed local people as community development workers on its Salterbeck estate. Other organisations are involving residents in a more ad hoc way, to assist in training, for example. One housing association asked a tenant board member to lead a training slot at a conference aimed at encouraging other residents to become involved. The board member found that: *tenants listen better to tenants: as a result the training was more likely to hit the mark*. This is a useful model and those associations which have used residents in training staff, contractors and other residents have reaped benefits. Residents at East Northamptonshire Housing Association, for example, both designed and then carry out a (mandatory) customer care course for their maintenance contractors. This is repeated three or four times a year to train up new staff and has resulted in improved satisfaction with the work of the contractors and a change in culture on their part. Contractors seemed more prepared to listen and take on board the messages because they were delivered by the residents.

**Ask yourself:**

**Can we involve residents:**

- ▶ **As trainers for staff or contractors?**
- ▶ **In helping to run and host residents’ conferences?**
- ▶ **As staff members?**

**Case study 8****Enterprise 5 ‘Tenants’ friends’ scheme<sup>1</sup>**

Enterprise 5 Housing Association set up a ‘tenants’ friends’ scheme whereby two positions were created to support the *tenant and community development officer* and were ringfenced to applications from Enterprise 5 tenants. Twenty six applications were received, and after a two-stage interview process, two tenants were appointed. Both had been tenants of the association for between five and ten years, and neither had had any previous experience of resident involvement. The post involves working three days per week for Enterprise 5, where the role is to support tenants in setting up residents’ associations; carrying out estate based work the housing officers do not have the capacity to complete (for example, door to door surveys); and providing administrative support for the monitoring groups which tenants sit on. The tenants’ friends are also responsible for promoting particular themes within the housing association (for example, youth representation, equalities, regeneration). For the remaining days, the friends attend Northumbria University where they are studying for an HNC in Sustainable Communities and take one day’s study leave. The contract is for two years.

The costs to the housing association include the salaries, course fees and training for the friends. The project is funded through a *Housing Corporation Community Training and Enabling grant*, with contributions from another housing association and Enterprise 5. The housing association has identified a range of internal and external

<sup>1</sup> This is a scheme run by Enterprise 5 Housing Association and should not be confused with Independent Tenants Advisers who are also often known as ‘tenants’ friends’

benefits including:

- It resolves a capacity issue – the ‘friends’ are able to spend more time on estates than the housing officers and the housing association points to benefits such as less graffiti and damage and a better atmosphere as a result of having a greater presence.
- Tenants respond better to the tenants’ friends than to other staff, and are therefore more willing to become involved.
- It helps to bridge the gap between tenants and staff and challenges the negative attitudes some staff hold towards tenants.
- It introduces a user perspective to the whole organisation: the friends have lent a ‘fresh perspective and challenge to some of the association’s policies and procedures’. This has been achieved both informally through their involvement in day to day work and via more formal channels such as including them as ‘critical friends’ at best value reviews.

The most significant benefits have undoubtedly accrued to the tenants’ friends themselves. They are highly enthusiastic about the scheme and see the qualification and experience as providing a valuable basis for future career development, either within the housing sector or elsewhere. It significantly enhances their chances of securing good, permanent employment.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

## Mainstreaming and cultural change

- 55 Housing associations with effective approaches to resident involvement have often mainstreamed a user focus throughout their organisation, so that it is apparent in all that they do and in everyone’s jobs. While this makes it more difficult to tease out the costs and benefits relating to resident involvement, it can be a very effective way to deliver services. Landlords need to consider two key issues in moving towards mainstreaming resident involvement: organisational structure and culture.

### Organisational structure

- 56 Chapter 3 highlighted some of the different staffing models that can be adopted to support resident involvement. A key dilemma for landlords seeking to ‘mainstream’ resident involvement is whether the process is helped or hindered by establishing a dedicated team. Experience of mainstreaming in other sectors (for instance equalities or environmental sustainability) suggests that a cyclical pattern often develops whereby it is initially appropriate to set up a specialist team to champion an issue and act as a point of expertise. After a few years this team may become obsolete once the organisation has started to take the particular issue on board. It may at that point be appropriate to disband the team and support the issue in other ways. However, this needs to be periodically reviewed as experience suggests that enthusiasm may sooner or later wane, calling into question the need to re-establish a dedicated team in order to ensure the issue does not drop from the agenda.

*The most significant blockages have been cultural more than anything else*  
**Tenant participation manager**

*Some staff are more comfortable with buildings than tenants!*

**Learning set member**

## Organisational culture

- 57 Even if organisations get the structure right, one of the most significant barriers to mainstreaming resident involvement is culture: the established practices and attitudes that exist in any organisation. A particular obstacle can be the often difficult relationship between resident involvement staff and housing officers or other frontline staff. There are several reasons for this. First, housing officers are often working to tight deadlines and challenging performance objectives. Their prime concern may be, for example, reducing rent arrears. They may see requests to become involved with resident involvement activities as a distraction from their core job. Second, related to this, the resident involvement staff may find it difficult to establish credibility if they do not have experience of frontline housing management. This can make it difficult to influence people's attitudes and work. Third, tension can sometimes be created by the perception among residents of housing officers as enforcers and resident involvement staff as friends. Sometimes this distinction is valuable as housing officers may find it is helpful to 'keep their distance'. But, again, it can isolate resident involvement staff in the organisation as they may be seen as being 'on the tenants' side'.
- 58 These factors are responsible in some housing organisations for resident involvement continuing to be a side-lined function. However, instead of seeing these differences as problems, organisations should be aiming to create a healthy tension between the roles that allows for proper challenge and scrutiny but where all staff are working to the same end.
- 59 'Shock tactics' can be used to change attitudes and cultures. For example, at Bromford Housing Association, managers are very keen to learn from customers' feedback and complaints. They feel that staff often do not respond well to, nor change their behaviour as a consequence of, reading staff satisfaction surveys or analyses of complaints. Instead, managers sought to use richer, more qualitative feedback which would affect staff behaviour and attitudes towards customers. They have found that they can achieve this by videoing staff/customer interviews or recording telephone calls and using these in training, as examples of what to do, or what not to do. It has been much more instructive for staff to see the reality of the impact of their behaviour – both positive and negative – on an individual customer.
- 60 In summary, cultural change can be difficult and can take time. Those organisations which had effectively embedded resident involvement had:
- made sure that the boundaries between resident involvement and other staff were clearly understood. There is a range of options, but a successful model is to have only one or two relatively senior staff members responsible for resident involvement and to make sure that their role as enablers/capacity builders for other staff, is clearly understood across the organisation (**Case study 9**);
  - incorporated a clear user focus into the corporate plan, departmental objectives and individuals' (dedicated and other staff) job plans and targets;
  - ensured that it was part of staff appraisals;

### Ask yourself:

**Does our organisation's culture and structures support the mainstreaming of resident involvement?**

- included the subject as a periodic item on the agenda of team meetings across the organisation;
- included resident involvement as a key part of induction and ongoing training; and
- worked hard with other departments to get staff on board.

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### Case study 9

#### Some housing associations have worked hard to ensure that ‘resident involvement’ becomes a mainstream activity

At Thames Valley Housing Association, there are two key roles for resident involvement:

- working alongside the organisation on policy development; and
- having sounding board for strategy changes.

The association has worked hard over the last couple of years to embed resident involvement in its operations: the chief executive says: *before you could say it was a bolt on: now the focus is on getting the concept mainstreamed through the organisation.* This is being achieved through a combination of measurement, mainstreaming and working with frontline teams.

##### Measurement.

The association is seeking to ‘lock’ resident involvement into staff behaviours by including it in individuals’ targets and objectives. As such, effective resident involvement is an integral part of the performance appraisal system and everyone knows that resident involvement skills are a key competence for frontline housing staff.

##### A staffing model which supports mainstreaming

Tim Brooks is the resident involvement manager. His role is to co-ordinate and champion resident involvement throughout the organisation. He has control over a small budget of £52,000. The association deliberately located the position in the chief executive’s department to stress the fact that the role and its function are ‘corporate’. The chief executive comments that ‘it was important that the resident involvement lead had autonomy and the authority of ‘speaking with the chief exec’s voice’ on issues’. This mirrors the approach of some local authorities where staff working on key issues such as regeneration or equalities sit within the chief executive’s department.

Even so, shifts in culture take time and Tim feels that: *It has taken about two years to get the message through, at first it was not clear for others in the organisation what my role was. Some thought that because there was a ‘resident involvement’ person that I would come and ‘sort out’ any resident involvement work that needed to be done.*

##### Working hard with frontline teams

As with most housing associations, some departments at Thames Valley were more resistant than others. There continues to be a fundamental tension between whether resident involvement is seen as a core or peripheral activity: in practice some managers still see resident involvement as ‘taking time away from core business’. Tim comments: *it’s often a struggle to encourage people to take the work on when there are other important priorities such as antisocial behaviour and rent arrears.*

Again, however, attitude and personality are often the key determinants as to whether teams will take the concept on board. Thames Valley is trying to ‘hire people that fit the culture ie with a natural customer focus rather than training people after the event’. Ian Scott, the operations team leader, says: *We recruit people who are comfortable with providing a service to our customers and handling modern technology, then we develop their housing skills. If we are really lucky we get both but it is not essential. It’s all about attitude.*

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

## How to reach all sections of the community

- 61 It will be more difficult to engage with some groups of residents than with others and this will have a bearing on the costs and benefits of resident involvement. Some common issues faced all the fieldwork sites. For instance, those residents who were involved tended to be older and all landlords seemed to struggle with engaging young people. However, other issues were more location-specific. One housing association was finding it difficult making its stock attractive to the local Asian community, due to a range of factors, not least the fact that owner-occupation is the traditional tenure within that community. Other landlords found that they had no problem attracting tenants from black and minority ethnic communities but that a disproportionately low number got involved with running of the association.
- 62 Different landlords had widely varying experiences of which groups were ‘hard to engage’. Peddars Way Housing Association in East Anglia was looking at the best way to reach the local Portuguese and travelling communities. Impact Housing Association was trying different methods to engage its supported housing residents. And other associations were finding that the most difficult to engage residents were those in full-time employment, not a group normally labelled ‘hard to reach’. Still others found it difficult to secure the interest of leaseholders.
- 63 Those associations that were prepared to ‘put their own house in order’ by ensuring that their own staff and systems were supporting workplace diversity and adopting a tailored and, where appropriate, creative, approach to reach specific groups were the most successful (**Case studies 10 and 11**).

*We create social opportunities that we hope will appeal to those traditionally classed as difficult to reach. From that initial contact we hope and encourage residents to engage more fully in other areas of the association.*

**Resident involvement manager,  
housing association**

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## Case study 10

### Landlords need to put their own house in order first

- **Race awareness training for staff and active tenants.** One landlord was training the members of its consultative panel in ‘acceptable behaviours’ to ensure that racist or other attitudes were not tolerated. Another held a series of diversity days for its staff focussing on one culture at a time and was using theatre as a ‘powerful way of getting our message across’
- **Recruitment as a tool.** One housing association had recruited a housing officer from the local Asian community, under a positive action programme. This was proving to be a useful way of spreading among the Asian community by word of mouth the benefits of social housing in an area where their preferred tenure was private sector. Another housing association was keen to attract more staff with appropriate language skills and was considering offering additional financial incentives to applicants with Urdu. The operations director there said: ‘We are looking at incentivising multi-lingual applicants by a golden handshake’. The same housing association had already put in place an equalities and diversity officer to work with staff and tenants.
- **Use of performance management tools.** A couple of associations were using targets in different ways. Peabody Trust had set each of its housing officers the target of finding ten BME residents to join the customer panel. Another landlord had organisational targets to increase the proportion of lettings to BME communities. Managers were also using management information to ensure that they had a clear picture of the ethnic profile of their tenant body to enable them to monitor progress against this target.

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## Case study 11

### Landlords need to adopt a creative and tailored approach to ensure that they reach all sections of the community

- **Use existing events or networks where possible.** Many associations ‘piggyback’ on groups or events to access residents’ views, for example, Chinese New Year celebrations or a Bangladeshi women’s gardening club.
- It may be worth arranging **events targeted at specific groups.** Devon and Cornwall and other housing associations set up dedicated young persons’ conferences to ensure that they engaged with this group. Some housing associations are setting up leaseholder forums as they appreciate that leaseholders and tenants maybe interested in different issues and that approaches to involvement activities need to be adjusted accordingly.
- **Know your audience and use appropriate channels of communication:**
  - Manchester Methodist Housing Association uses Radio Ramadan to recruit for residents groups.
  - Nashayman, a BME housing association in Halifax, does not as a matter of course translate leaflets into community languages because of the low literacy

rates among its tenant body. Instead, it ensures that staff with appropriate language skills are available to deal with customer enquiries at all times.

- Devon and Cornwall Housing Association runs a ‘community road show’ where a caravan visits estates inviting residents to meet with housing and other community partners such as police, youth service and the benefits agency. This is of particular benefit to the more dispersed communities in rural areas.
- **Make use of new technology:** Some housing associations have set up readers’ panels/virtual panels for those residents, many of whom are in full-time employment, who are happy to read and comment on documents, but do not wish to be involved in face-to-face meetings

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

## Involving residents on the boards of housing associations

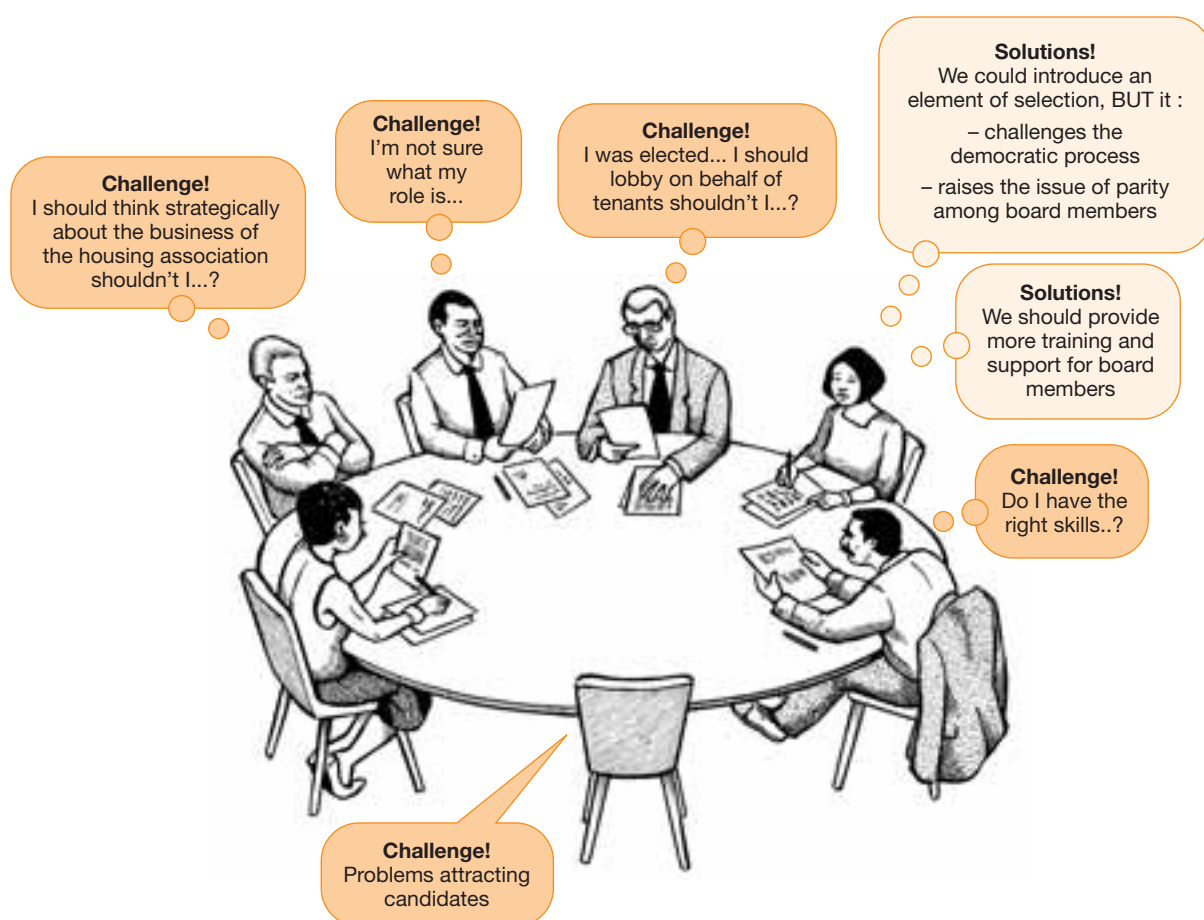
- 64 The national report highlighted uncertainty about the value of including residents on the boards of housing associations. This stemmed from a range of issues, the most important being the lack of clarity about the role residents play on boards (**Exhibit 9**). The report argued that there were three potential solutions:
- to establish greater clarity about the role of resident board members;
  - to support the board effectively through training and other routes; and
  - to consider introducing an element of selection.
- 65 This section discusses each course of action in turn and highlights some of those associations that are making it work.

### What is the role of resident board members?

- 66 Housing associations need to be clear about the role and purpose of resident board members. They need to ask themselves the following questions:
- What is the association looking for in including residents on the board?
  - Is the role of resident board members to:
    - augment strategic decision making – ie as another board member; and/or
    - lend a user perspective generally; and/or
    - raise consciousness about a particular issue/perspective to ensure that the operation of the association is subject to a ‘diversity of challenge’.

## Exhibit 9

### The inclusion of residents on housing boards presents challenges and dilemmas for housing associations



Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

67 In addition to being clear, internally and externally, about the role they expect resident board members to play, housing organisations also need to be aware of the confusion that abounds in the sector about whether residents sit on the board in an individual capacity or whether they are there to represent other residents. The guidance states unequivocally that residents do not sit on a board to represent other residents. Instead, they are there to lend a user perspective generally. Two key pieces of guidance make this clear: the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and the National Housing Federation's report, *Board effectiveness in transfer organisations*, which also applies to non-transfer associations on this point. The key paragraphs from each are highlighted in **Exhibit 10, overleaf**. Housing associations should:

- make themselves familiar with the guidance;

- ensure that board members are aware of the guidance and are clear about their roles as members. This can be achieved through, for example, training, appraisals;
- communicate the guidance to residents where appropriate/timely (for example, through newsletters when including articles or adverts for resident board members);
- include the guidance in job descriptions for new board members; and
- if 'selecting' board members, test candidates' understanding of the role in assessments/interviews.

### Exhibit 10

#### The guidance states unequivocally that housing association board members sit on the board in an individual capacity

Housing Corporation Regulatory Code, Section 2: (Properly governed) point 2.1c of the guidance column states:

*Individual governing body members act in a personal capacity and not as nominees/representatives of any other body, unless the constitution so provides.*

The NHF document, Board effectiveness for transfer organisations (September 2002) states that board members should:

*Recognise that their responsibility is to the organisation alone and not to the body that might have nominated them to the board. (p38)*

It elaborates that:

*They (the association) need to ensure that members are treated first and last as members of the registered social landlord's board and not as residents' representatives, local authority nominees or independents. The legal and moral responsibilities of board members to the registered social landlord should transcend – and be seen to transcend – any other commitments they have. (p30)*

There is further exploration, and an example, of how tenant board members can be helped to resist the pressure to act as a representative of their fellow tenants (p30). The report also suggests questions for chairs and chief executives to ask themselves including: *Have we succeeded/are we succeeding in ensuring that board members see themselves as having a responsibility first and last to the registered social landlord and not to the residents who elected them or to the local authority that nominated them?* (p32)

## What tools are available for supporting housing association boards?

- 68 Some housing associations are finding the inclusion of residents on boards to be invaluable (**Case study 12**). Those that are tend to be prepared to invest in the process by providing proper training and support for the board. There is a great deal of advice and a range of tools available for developing and supporting boards (**Appendix 4**). Landlords may wish to consider setting up some of the following:
- **Annual appraisals of the board** – to check performance of the board as a group and to highlight any development needs – often carried out by an external facilitator.
  - **Annual skills audit of the board** – to check that the board provides an appropriate spread of experience and skills.
  - **Individual appraisals, including a separate one for the chair** – to check on whether individual board members are fulfilling their role effectively.
  - Production of a **job description** and **induction pack** for new or prospective board members.
  - **Mentoring** of new board members (for example, by other more experienced members).
  - Production of board and individual **action plans** – to address development needs identified in the appraisals.

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### Case study 12

#### Tenants can play a key role on housing association boards

At Shepherds Bush Housing Association, the board of 15 currently includes five tenant board members, and the chair of the board is also a tenant. The inclusion of tenants is anything but tokenistic and their influence is clear. The board is perceived by staff and tenants to be effective and the inclusion of tenants on the board provides ‘an independent audit of the organisation’. As the chief executive comments: ‘the tenants are hugely influential on recruitment and retention issues including retaining the chief executive and setting salaries for all senior staff’.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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- 69 Examples of some of these tools are provided at Appendix 5. Training needs to be carefully constructed to ensure that particular board members do not feel singled out for special treatment. The following approach is suggested.
- Individual appraisals and action plans will identify the training and development needs of individual board members. Training to address these can be provided on an individual basis.
  - The board appraisal and/or skills audit will highlight the shortcomings of the board as an entity. To address these, collective training may be appropriate: this can provide a valuable important opportunity for the board to gel.

**Case study 13, overleaf** gives an example of how these tools can be put into practice to good effect.

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### Case study 13

#### Providing support for housing association board members

Following supervision, Gallions Housing Association has worked hard to improve the operation of its board. Of a board of 12, four are residents including the chair. The board is well supported by a number of processes. It had a strategy weekend to look at the business plan which allowed the group to gel. Appraisals and skills audits are used to measure and improve performance (Appendix 5). Each year, individual members fill out a questionnaire looking at the effectiveness of the board as a whole, and an individual questionnaire to look at personal effectiveness. An 'Appraisal Review Panel' meets to analyse the results and agree what action is required. Individual members are also encouraged to develop their own development plan based on their self assessment. The processes do not distinguish between residents and other board members – all members are included in the appraisal process.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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#### Selecting board members

70 The national report discussed in some detail the potential benefits and pitfalls of introducing an element of selection into the recruitment of resident board members. The research showed that those housing associations which had done so had more effective and better functioning boards. In fact, most of the housing associations we spoke to saw merit in including an element of selection in the recruitment of board members (**Case study 14**). An extended case study of the approach adopted by Southern Housing Group (**Case study 15**) demonstrates how this can be put into practice. Even if an association opts for selection only, this does not mean cutting residents out of the equation. Most of the housing associations we spoke to involved residents in the selection process in one of a number of ways:

- as 'peer reviewers' at the sifting stage once application forms had been received;
- to provide structured discussion as part of an initial 'self assessment' to help prospective candidates decide whether they are interested and whether they are suitable;
- as part of the selection panel;
- as an observer at assessment centres; and/or
- by asking prospective candidates to assess each other – ie to 'vote' in the most suitable candidate following a group assessment exercise.

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## Case study 14

### Most housing associations see merit in including an element of selection in the recruitment of board members

*Peabody Trust:* ‘The board puts tenants through the same selection process as any other board members, which means being interviewed.’

*South Warwickshire Housing Association:* ‘We believe that including a selection process for tenant board members will bring them in line with how independents and councillors come to the board.’

*Burnley & Padiham Community Housing:* ‘We are thinking of creating a mini assessment centre, where tenants will be asked their views on the organisation’s key documents to ascertain whether they would be willing and able to provide proper scrutiny’.

*Devon & Cornwall Housing Association:* ‘We interview all potential board members – they are interviewed by a panel including the chair, two board members, one of whom is a tenant, the HR director and the company secretary. The panel is looking for a minimum level of skills and for evidence that they can think strategically.’

*Impact Housing Association:* ‘as governance has got more complex, Impact has had to advertise for tenants with specific skills.’

*Source:* Audit Commission fieldwork

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## Case study 15

### A few housing associations have gone down a pure selection route

Southern Housing Group has opted to select rather than elect residents into its governance structures. Previously the organisation operated a system based on elections, using the Electoral Reform Society. However, it was unhappy with the way the system was working: there was a shortage of people standing, elections tended to be unopposed and some candidates stood on ‘single issue’ tickets. It decided to change the process.

The group now has up to four places reserved on each regional committee for tenant representatives and each regional committee nominates a tenant to join the main board. There are separate arrangements for home-owners. The opportunity to apply to join the regional committee is advertised on notice-boards and newsletters, and via resident groups. All interested residents are asked to complete a short application form. This application is judged against a ‘person specification’ with the following criteria:

- ability to operate as part of a team on the committee;
- ability to accept their role as a partner in the committee’s work;
- ability to articulate a resident perspective in relation to the wide range of information presented to the committee;
- ability to effectively represent Southern Housing Group externally;

- ability to make informed judgements on both written and verbal information presented at the committee;
- awareness of the political context of our work; and
- ability to understand budgets and finance information.

Each regional committee nominates an interview panel that will interview those residents whose initial application meets the published criteria. The panel is made up of three people, one of whom will be an existing resident committee member. The interview process is conducted following strict equal opportunity guidelines and its decision is final. An appeal to the regional committee may be made by the applicant if the interview process itself is perceived to be at fault.

*Source: Audit Commission*

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## Finally, be creative

- 71 The above principles are important in helping landlords to ensure that their efforts to involve residents bear fruit. Our research also highlighted examples of those organisations that are doing something innovative, some of which are outlined below.
- 72 One of the issues facing landlords working in areas of low demand is how to stem the flow of residents moving out of the area. Resident involvement can play a key role in helping to stabilise these communities and put them back on a more sustainable footing. Honest approaches often work best and Impact Housing Association found that asking very upfront and positive questions gives them lots of information about necessary improvements. The association asked residents on its Salterbeck estate, very simply: ‘what would make you stay?’. This straightforward approach allowed it to produce an action plan which addressed the very specific issues that were causing people to move away. Manchester Methodist Housing Association was faced with very similar challenges in the Northmoor area of south Manchester, which was starting to show signs of abandonment. The association worked with partners to access external funding to involve residents in the creation of a sustainable community **(Case study 16)**.

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## Case study 16

### Northmoor HomeZones

Manchester Methodist Housing Association and Manchester City Council decided in 2000 to seek to establish a 'home zone' in the Northmoor area of south Manchester. This was part of a national pilot for home zones, which aimed to foster a sense of identity for selected neighbourhoods by creating safe areas for children to play, forcing cars to travel at very low speeds and giving pedestrians and cyclists priority. Northmoor was deemed to be a worthy candidate as the neighbourhood was starting to show signs of decline and the association was concerned that it might start to suffer from abandonment.

Once funding was secured, a range of works was carried out. In addition to traffic calming and landscaping, the housing association also undertook selective demolition to break up the monotony of the terraced housing and provide larger houses so that when families grew they did not have to leave the area. This had been identified as one of the reasons for the rising turnover of residents. Street lighting was improved to deter crime and safer routes to school were developed. Two phases of the scheme have been completed.

Community involvement has been at the heart of the project and an innovative approach to involving residents was adopted in the initial design process. A full size mock up of the design for the home zone was laid out in one street as part of a fun day and residents were encouraged to:

- try out different parking arrangements;
- comment on designs for landscaping, including details such as colours, materials and planting schemes; and
- get involved in selecting the contractors who carried out the works.

Questionnaires and regular residents' meetings were also used to ensure that the design of the home zone took account of residents' views. Residents were encouraged to 'think big' and asked to design their 'dream street'.

The housing association and city council also employed, with the assistance of Housing Corporation Innovation and Good Practice funding, an ethnic community link worker specifically to ensure that BME households, which made up over 30 per cent of the local population, were involved with the regeneration of the area. The officer helped set up an Asian women's group, established a core group of residents who were willing to attend focus groups and other events and facilitated the establishment of a local, predominantly BME, football team. A community artist was appointed to involve residents in the design of public art.

*Source: Audit Commission Fieldwork*

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- 73 Many housing associations use external funding sources to support their work on resident involvement. This can enable housing associations to innovate and pilot new approaches. We found that the most common sources accessed were the Housing Corporation’s Innovation and Good Practice and Community Training and Enabling grants, European Social Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Community Empowerment Fund and local community chests. Where associations were involved in broader community development activities they found that there was a wider range of potential funding sources open to them. Some associations were dedicating resources to finding out what was available and putting together funding bids. A successful funding bid has allowed Devon and Cornwall Housing Association to put external funding to imaginative uses to tackle local problems and issues (**Case study 17**).

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### Case study 17

#### Some housing associations are making use of external finance to fund innovative activities

Devon and Cornwall Housing Association received feedback from residents that anti-social behaviour was a significant problem on several estates. The association wanted to tackle the root of the problem, rather than simply trying to alleviate the symptoms. It felt that there was a direct correlation between the levels of anti-social behaviour and a lack of play facilities for children. Many of the existing play areas were poorly designed, in the wrong locations and subject to vandalism. The association developed a play strategy for children aged three to thirteen, which is part of its community development strategy which aims to create and sustain successful local communities.

The association was successful in securing funding from Barnado’s to employ a play development worker, as part of a two-year project called *The Power of Play*. The remit of the play development worker is to work in areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour and a lack of facilities. Her role is an enabling one, working with local community groups to help them improve existing play facilities and develop new play opportunities. She signposts residents to relevant agencies and funding sources.

One early success was an event jointly organised with the Department of Transport, called *Playing it Safe*. It was aimed at improving children’s awareness of traffic hazards and risks on estates and play exercises were designed to try to encourage children to take responsibility for their own behaviour and to promote respect for other people and their property. The event was also a useful source of feedback from children about what they would like to see in the way of improved play facilities. This feedback was collected via a ‘Big Brother’ style video tent. It is hoped that through play schemes such as these and the development of improved facilities, Devon and Cornwall Housing Association estates will become more sustainable.

To receive a CD ROM that captures the resulting from the *Playing it Safe* project please contact Malcolm Tester, DCHA Communications Manager (malcolm.testler@dcha.co.uk)

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

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# 6

## Summary

74 Engaging residents in the running of housing organisations can be a challenging but valuable process. Those landlords that are doing well are bearing fruit in terms of benefits to ‘the business’, for their residents and for the wider community. This management handbook has suggested tools and good practice to assist landlords in putting some of the principles into practice.

75 In order to engage with residents effectively, housing organisations need to address the key question:

### **What are we trying to achieve?**

Landlords also need to ask themselves:

### **Is our approach to resident involvement appropriate to our local circumstances?**

They need to keep the latter under review in order to check whether current practices remain effective. As well as providing tailored approaches to resident involvement that take on board local characteristics, landlords need to:

### **Offer a menu of opportunities reflecting the fact that residents will want to engage in different ways and at different levels.**

Once these basic principles are in place, landlords should look at setting up monitoring systems to answer the following questions:

### **Are we aware what levels of investment we are making in resident involvement?**






### **What sort of outcomes is this producing?**

### **On balance, is it providing value for money?**

Finally, they should seek to learn from what works elsewhere. Some organisations are more successful than others and the common factors that can lead to success are as follows:

- ✓ Leaders support the process and communicate a clear and consistent message about involving residents.
- ✓ The right people are recruited for specialist and frontline roles.
- ✓ A user focus is mainstreamed throughout the organisation and a culture is promoted that supports resident involvement.
- ✓ Approaches to involvement are designed to reach all sections of the community.
- ✓ If residents are included on housing association boards, they are properly supported and clear of their role.
- ✓ They learn from what works elsewhere.

# Appendix 1: Northern Counties Housing Association 'Be a key player' leaflet

<p>100 CLUB</p>	<p><b>1 • Northern Counties 100 Club</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Giving us "snapshot" information on what residents think of our services.  <b>Key features:</b> Questionnaire is sent out to all members every 3 months.</p>	<p><b>7 • Residents' Open Day and Local Information Days</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Residents to meet other residents, learn more about the business and speak to staff, including senior management.  <b>Key features:</b> Held for residents and leaseholders. Open Day is once a year for all regions. Local Information Days are for residents in one region.</p>
	<p><b>2 • Scheme Planning</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Helping us to plan how to spend the money available for the place where you live over the next twelve months  <b>Key features:</b> An opportunity for you to give feedback on services and performance and to influence future planning of your homes/estates. Can be face to face meeting with staff, by letter or questionnaire, or by telephone. Scheme Agreements are then issued to all resident, and reviewed on an annual basis.</p>	<p><b>8 • Regional Committees</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Residents who want to get involved in decision-making at a local level. Good way for residents to learn more about the business.  <b>Key features:</b> Meet every three months to review and monitor regional performance and spending. Members also get involved with Scheme Planning and Local Information Days.</p>
	<p><b>3 • Residents' Council</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Providing an opportunity for residents to contribute to, influence and be consulted on policy, standards and service delivery across Northern Counties.  <b>Key features:</b> Meetings with senior management take place every three months. Open to all residents. Minutes of meetings are reported to Board to ensure residents views feed into setting our business priorities.</p>	<p><b>9 • Information Flyers</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Finding out what's new at Northern Counties or what's happening in your area.  <b>Key features:</b> For example: could give details about new involvement opportunities and invite you to get in touch with us.</p>
	<p><b>4 • Mystery Shoppers</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Helping us to measure our performance against the customer service standards we promise to deliver in our Customer Charter - 'Delivering the right services to the right standard.'  <b>Key features:</b> Confidential feedback from residents based on their own experiences of contacting Northern Counties offices.</p>	<p><b>10 • Question of the Month</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Residents who want to give us their feedback on a particular subject.  <b>Key features:</b> Monthly residents' poll sent out with repairs satisfaction slips. Reaches around 1000 residents each time.</p>
	<p><b>5 • Tenants'/Residents' Voice</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Schemes, estates or areas where there are few Northern Counties homes, or where it is difficult to set up or maintain a Residents' Association or Group. Helps to give local residents a "voice" that is heard by us.  <b>Key features:</b> A resident is nominated by their neighbours to act as the link between Northern Counties and the local residents. They are then the Tenants'/Residents' Voice.</p>	<p><b>11 • Residents' Associations and Groups</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Residents who want to get together to discuss how their estate is being run. Great way for residents on a scheme or estate to have a collective voice, arrange social events and build a community spirit.  <b>Key features:</b> Residents' Group is more informal. However, Residents' Associations must be constituted with a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Staff can be invited to attend meetings on an ad-hoc basis to answer particular queries.</p>
	<p><b>6 • Newsletters</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Keeping you up to date on things that are happening at Northern Counties.  <b>Key features:</b> Produced twice a year and sent out to all residents. Includes Association news with regional stories. You can be involved in the Newsletter by joining the Editorial Panel or sending in your ideas for articles or features.</p>	<p><b>12 • Work shadowing</b></p> <p><b>Useful for:</b> Residents who want to learn more about the business and find out what we do on a day to day basis.  <b>Key features:</b> Residents can spend time with staff in their working environment and get a behind-the-scenes view of how Northern Counties works as a business. Please note that not every area of work will be available for shadowing, due to maintaining the confidentiality of our customers.</p>



## Appendix 2: Spend on resident involvement: key categories

The following note reports back on the cost information collected at our fieldwork sites. Quoted figures are annual, mostly for the year 2002/03.

### Tenants'/residents' groups

- All the fieldwork associations had tenants'/residents' groups. Numbers ranged from 5 to 50 and often depended on the location of stock, that is, whether properties were estate based or street properties. A high proportion (63 per cent on average) of these groups were formal (ie constituted). Funding per group by the housing association ranged from £70 to £7,101. However, the level of funding was difficult to compare, as associations were not consistent in their definitions of what was included.
- In addition, some associations separated out funding streams for 'resource centres' that were usually used by tenants' groups, for example the use of office equipment and administration support. If these costs are included then funding per group ranged from £120 to £9,786.

### Tenants' training

- Training for tenants was targeted predominantly at active members or those interested in becoming active members, for example tenants' and residents' group members, committee members and panel members. Overall spending on training in the fieldwork associations ranged from £134 to £14,000. A range of providers has used including other housing associations, CVS, PEP and TPAS.

### Newsletters

- Most fieldwork associations produced newsletter content internally, often with residents' help. Most newsletters were designed and printed externally. A couple of fieldwork associations produced newsletters internally and one small association had the whole newsletter externally produced. Most newsletters were produced on a quarterly basis. Costs per issue per customer ranged from 16 pence to £1.22.

### Expenses (tenants)

- Most fieldwork associations paid tenants' expenses for travel, childcare and carers' allowances. Some associations paid tenants to attend focus group meetings if they were targeting certain types of tenants, for example younger tenants (and Nashayman pay a 'consultancy fee' to attend tenant forum meetings). Levels of expenses paid to tenants ranged from £150 to £8,200 per annum (one association included administration expenses, for example stationery and telephone costs for tenants in this category, whereas other associations included these amounts elsewhere).

*The tenants' conference is very well attended. It is a good day out. It attracts mainly older residents. We get a lot of feedback at each workshop (eg anti-social behaviour, energy efficiency, lettings). The newsletter editorial team was formed at one conference. It builds the relationship with tenants and is motivating for staff.*

**Director of new initiatives, housing association**


## Tenant conferences

- Many housing associations organised conferences for their residents. A couple of associations arranged conferences for tenant representatives or tenant board members only. Other associations organised conferences for all tenants, often on an annual basis. These conferences had varied success in terms of the number of tenants that attended, ranging from around 40 to just less than 1,000. Some conferences were held during the week and were seen to be primarily of relevance for active tenants. Others, such as Gallions Housing Fayre, for example, were a community event/fun day held at the weekend with many attractions for families. The cost per attendee across fieldwork sites ranged from £11.52 to £100.

## Tenant controlled budgets

- A number of the fieldwork housing associations had tenant controlled budgets which were earmarked for tenants to make decisions on. They were used to fund community activities, for example, estate improvements, community initiatives and environmental projects. One association had an environmental improvements budget where tenants made decisions on awarding funding for improvements to estates, blocks and properties. Tenants' groups identified potential projects but a majority of all those living in the affected area had to agree to the project before the funding was approved. At Gallions Housing Association, the Residents Board controls a significant proportion of tenant participation spend. And Impact Housing Association devolved budgets to residents of supported housing to fund social activities/events, which also often, had a capacity-building element. Staff and residents found additional match funding from external sources.

## Appendix 3: Blank copy: Impact Housing Association Resident involvement monitoring form

 <b>Resident involvement monitoring form</b>	
<b>Names of those involved</b>	Resident, team and officers involved
<b>Type of involvement</b>	For example residents' meeting, consultation event, social gathering
<b>Resources involved:</b>	Venue costs: Travel costs: Staff time: Cost of refreshments:
<b>Feedback</b>	Who will inform residents of what has been achieved as a result of their involvement and how?
<b>Outcomes</b>	State the outcome from this involvement eg improvement in resident/staff relationship, numbers attending a meeting, decisions made, potential service improvement or number of responses to consultation.
<b>Action plan</b>	Identify what has happened or is planned as a result of this involvement (state if no further action is required).
<b>Date:</b> .....	<b>Date received:</b> .....
<b>Signed:</b> ..... (Officer involved)	<b>Signed:</b> ..... (Resident involvement co-ordinator)

## Appendix 4: Reports and good practice tools for supporting housing association boards

### National Housing Federation documents:

Action for Effective Boards: a guide for housing organisations and their board members, 2001

Board effectiveness in transfer organisations, 2002

Approaches to appraisal: a handbook for the effective board, 1998

Competence and Accountability 2004: Code of Governance, 2004

In control: the manual for voluntary board members, 2000 (being revised in 2004)

To Pay or Not to Pay? The principles and practicalities of board member payment, 2003

### Housing Corporation documents:

Treading the Boards, A self assessment framework for board performance, 2001

Central Consultancy Services: Competency frameworks for Board members (available from Tel: 0121 643 4745)

## Appendix 5: Tools to support boards

**GALLIONS HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

**BOARD SKILLS AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name:

	LEVEL OF SKILL		
	Little knowledge/ experience	General knowledge/ experience	High level of knowledge/ experience
The housing needs that the RSL aims to meet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Residents' needs and concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strategic management in a public or private body	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
General business activities including the management of staff, property and contracts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal matters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community relations and needs, including equal opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working with local authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development and building	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Management of information technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race equality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*If you have indicated a high level of experience/knowledge in any subject, please indicate how you have acquired this and/or what training you have received.*

### BOARD MEMBER EFFECTIVENESS QUESTIONNAIRE



NAME:

How effectively have I ...	Not at all	Less than moderately	Moderately	More than moderately	Totally
Upheld the values and objectives of the Associations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Upheld the core policies of the Association?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Made a positive contribution to the Board/Committees' work and made the expected contribution outside of Board and Committee meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Used particular skills and experience to improve the quality of the Board/Committees' decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prepared for and attended Board and Committee meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prepared for and attended Away Days, training events and conferences during the year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Declared any relevant interests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respected confidentiality of information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Upheld the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Which responsibilities do I perform well?

Which responsibilities do I fulfil less well?

In which area(s) do I wish to concentrate my development activities?

Is there any training that you would like to enhance your own contribution?

## References

- 1 Audit Commission, *Housing: Improving Services through Resident Involvement*, Audit Commission, 2004.
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