



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Housing Research Summary

Evaluating Tenant Participation in Housing Management and Design

Background

The Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, and Rowan Associates were commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to carry out an evaluation of tenant participation in housing management and design in Wales.

The main aim of the research was to gain a detailed picture of the level, quality and types of tenant participation activity in Wales, and to determine the benefits that these are bringing to the design and management of social housing.

Specifically, the research set out to:

- assess the extent to which the Welsh Assembly Government goals to increase and improve tenant involvement are contributing to achieving the National Housing Strategy's tenant participation aims;
- achieve a greater understanding of how tenants in Wales are participating in the design and management of their homes, including the levels and effects of participation;
- produce recommendations as guidance to the Welsh Assembly Government and others on how to best promote the most effective forms of participation in the future.



Main findings

Some of the main findings of the research are set out below.

The costs and benefits of tenant involvement

- All the studies and literature reviewed as part of the project agreed that there is a need for a wide range of different opportunities for participation which legitimise informal as well as formal structures for involving tenants. Most studies found a wide variation in the level of resources landlords invested in tenant participation, and reached conflicting conclusions on whether there was a correlation between money spent, and the effectiveness of participation.

Tenant participation frameworks

- The tenant participation framework in England and Wales does not have a statutory basis for involving tenant organisations. The requirements for core standards for tenant participation compacts in England and Wales are very similar, with an additional element in the Welsh standards which focuses on requirements for developing formal structures for participation. This differs from Scotland where the Scottish Executive has passed legislation placing a statutory duty on local authorities and housing associations to engage with tenants, and offers tenant organisations the opportunity to register as Registered Tenant Organisations, and from Northern Ireland, where the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has a statutory duty to consult with tenants,

and has established a voluntary framework for community involvement.

Tenant participation compacts

- The majority of Welsh tenant participation compacts analysed were found to have fairly low levels of compliance with the guidance produced on tenant participation compacts by the Welsh Assembly Government. Over one fifth of social landlords who provided compacts appeared not to have developed these in partnership with tenants.
- The Welsh Assembly Government guidance on tenant participation compacts encourages social landlords in the direction of following traditional routes of tenant participation rather than validating the development of a range of ways to involve the majority of tenants.

The level, quality and types of tenant involvement

- The majority of tenants taking part in the research said that they want to have a say in the services provided by their landlord, and for their views to be listened to and produce results.
- Tenants said that it is the outcomes of tenant involvement that are important, rather than the process. However, the existing regulatory framework, performance indicators, monitoring and evaluation all concentrate on testing the process of participation rather than on identifying positive outcomes.

- A significant number of tenant organisations said either that they did not know what difference their involvement had made, or that their involvement made no difference to what their landlord did. The majority of landlords said that tenant participation always or sometimes results in positive outcomes.
- Social landlords in Wales provide an estimated £1.5 million per year for resourcing tenant involvement. Over half this sum is spent on training and direct support for tenant organisations.
- Many examples were found of tenant organisations working effectively and in partnership with their landlords, and achieving positive results in housing, community and environmental activities.
- The most common problem relating to the development of successful tenant involvement identified by both tenant organisations and social landlords, is the reluctance of the majority of tenants to take part in formal tenant organisations. In particular, tenant organisations said that they have difficulty in attracting certain groups of tenants, for example young people, black and minority ethnic tenants, single parents, disabled tenants and those with support needs. The majority of these groups said that they prefer to have their say individually or in informal ways, rather than through joining a tenant organisation.
- A number of housing associations expressed concern that the Welsh Assembly Government Pattern Book imposes restrictions which limit the ability of tenants to effectively participate in the design of their homes, and that tenants' views on Pattern Book designs have not been formally sought for over ten years.
- The most frequent suggestion for improving tenant involvement is to improve the use of information technology and mobile phones to gather tenants' views and improve communication. Another frequent suggestion for improving involvement is to encourage more autonomy for tenant involvement at local level, with devolved budgets which can be spent on agreed priorities for area improvements.

About the study

The research involved:

- a literature review to evaluate the costs and benefits of tenant involvement in design and housing management, and identify good practice examples;
- an evaluation of tenant participation compacts in Wales;
- a comparison of tenant participation frameworks in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland;
- establishing a baseline of the level, quality and types of tenant involvement,

through questionnaires and telephone interviews with tenant organisations, social landlords, national organisations and support providers. 92 tenants groups, 51 housing association or local authority landlords, and 10 support providers completed questionnaires or gave their views in telephone interviews;

- gathering qualitative information from tenants and staff in six case study landlords through 24 focus groups to establish stakeholders' experiences of tenant participation. 98 tenants and 72 staff gave their views in the focus groups.

Main recommendations

The following are some of the main recommendations made by the Chartered Institute of Housing and Rowan Associates.

Recommendations for the Welsh Assembly Government

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- develop a National Tenant Involvement Strategy and remove the mandatory requirement on social landlords to put in place tenant participation compacts. The current emphasis on traditional routes of tenant participation should be loosened, and a range of ways of involving tenants should be validated, with emphasis placed on achieving positive outcomes as well as effective processes. New guidance should be issued to social landlords requiring that they put in place a tenant involvement strategy based on the Welsh Assembly Government model;
- include in the audit and inspection framework for social landlords, the testing of tenant involvement strategies and outcomes of tenant involvement;
- advise and support local authorities who are consulting their tenants about stock options to ensure that all tenants receive accurate, adequate and accessible information in accordance with the 'Right to Know';
- amend guidance to require that all social landlords support tenant organisations, and help to ensure that such groups are independent and tenant led by providing them with information to access services, training and support;
- review the Pattern Book for housing associations in consultation with landlords and with tenants who live in Pattern Book homes;
- develop a dissemination, support and training strategy for tenant organisations and landlords, including a database of good practice, training and support opportunities, and potential sources of funding for supporting and developing tenant involvement.

Recommendations for tenant organisations

Tenant organisations should:

- explore ways of extending and encouraging the involvement of a range of tenants, and ensure that they make use of good practice examples from other groups;

- seek clarification from their landlords about what they are expected to fund from their budgets, and whether they have access to funding from the landlord's other budgets for training and conferences;
- recognise that it is acceptable for tenant organisations to vary in their activity and numbers according to current needs and circumstances.

Recommendations for social landlords

Social landlords should:

- develop tenant involvement strategies in line with the Welsh Assembly Government National Tenant Involvement Strategy, and ensure that tenant involvement becomes a core activity for all departments of the organisation;
- keep an up to date database of contact details for all tenants to enable them to effectively communicate and gather views;
- ensure that all information provided for tenants is accurate and accessible, carry out surveys to establish tenant access to the internet, and explore ways of developing the organisation's communication with tenants through these means;
- develop systems to effectively feedback to tenants on the outcomes of their involvement;

- support tenant organisations and help to ensure that such groups are independent, tenant led and adequately funded;
- develop strategies which recognise and respond positively to the fact that tenant involvement will often include community development issues.

Recommendations for national organisations

- WTF and TPAS Cymru should acknowledge that the majority of tenants would prefer to have their say in ways other than through formal tenant participation structures, and take this into account when planning future strategies and developing services;
- WTF and TPAS Cymru should work together to establish and maintain fully comprehensive, accurate and up to date information on contact details for all tenant organisations in Wales;
- WFHA and TPAS Cymru should ensure that they provide adequate and effective support for existing and potential tenant housing association Board members, including an annual audit of Board members' training needs;
- All national organisations should disseminate information effectively on good practice in tenant involvement, through websites, information provided to members, and contributions to the Assembly Government's database as recommended in this report.



The report [Evaluating Tenant Participation in Housing Management and Design](#) and further copies of this summary can be obtained from:

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