



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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# Support for Tenant Participation: Priorities and Shape of Future Provision

Research Summary

Social research

Number: 20/2014

This research was commissioned to review the support provided by Welsh Government to tenant participation. The Welsh Government has, for some time, provided core grant funding to two different organisations to provide tenant support, as well as grant funding specific projects. With a view to ensuring value for money, the Welsh Government is seeking to understand what support can be provided at a local level and how priorities might be funded in the future.

## 1 Key Findings:

### Funding for tenant participation

- 1.1 In Wales, there has been a strong level of investment in tenant participation at a national and a local level in recent years.
- 1.2 The Welsh Government has provided core funding in 2013/14 to TPAS Cymru of £275,000 and to Welsh Tenants of £205,000.
- 1.3 The Tenant Empowerment Grant Programme has been suspended pending the outcome of this review, but was at the level of £150,000 per annum in recent years.
- 1.4 Housing associations and local authorities are funding separately a wide range of tenant participation activities themselves.

### The regulatory framework

- 1.5 Since the last funding round, the operating environment has changed for housing associations and community mutuals.

Tenant participation is now promoted and safeguarded for housing associations and community mutuals by the Welsh Government's Regulatory Framework, which requires them to work with their tenants and service users in planning and assessing the quality of services.

- 1.6 Local authorities are regulated by the Wales Audit Office, but tenant participation outcomes are not subject to any regulatory or inspection regime. Requirements of local authorities focus on tenants voicing views on matters under consultation by the authority.

### **Building on progress**

- 1.7 A range of stakeholders agree that the adoption, promotion and support of tenant participation has made considerable progress in the last 25 years, and that the principle of involving service users in decision-making about services is accepted across the social housing and public sectors.
- 1.8 There is now a Tenant Advisory Panel functioning at a national level but its scope is restricted to providing a voice on tenant issues to the Regulatory Board for Wales for tenants only from housing association

landlords (and not from local authority ones).

### **Support for effective participation**

- 1.9 The widely held view among the practitioners who were involved in this research is that tenants need support to make an effective contribution, and that they need an independent and trusted body to help them. Some stakeholders see wider skills, confidence and capacity-building investment as critical to effective participation.
- 1.10 A number of stakeholders interviewed during the course of the research strongly support the suggestion of one organisation providing a range of services in relation to tenant participation, from advocacy to training to facilitation. It should be noted, however, that neither Scotland nor England has such an organisation.
- 1.11 Stakeholders are aware that there are barriers (whether in Scotland, England or Wales) to having one tenant-orientated organisation, such as the need for existing organisations to merge or work together in different group or partnership arrangements, and the 'cultural fit' between the

organisations best placed to deliver those services.

- 1.12 Tenant Advisory Panel interviewees expressed frustration that a range of tenant organisations – not just TPAS and Welsh Tenants – do not work in such a way as to share openly good practice and information.

### **TPAS and Welsh Tenants**

- 1.13 The research findings suggest that the work of TPAS and of Welsh Tenants has been valued by stakeholders in the sector.
- 1.14 Many of the stakeholders involved in this research question why two organisations are needed to support tenant participation, and there are perceptions of rivalries and competition between both organisations. There is evidence of overlap between TPAS and Welsh Tenants.
- 1.15 Nearly all stakeholders identify, however, a clear distinction in identity and purpose between both organisations.
- 1.16 While both organisations report to the Welsh Government on a range of activities being undertaken, there is little evidencing of the outcomes of these activities. There could be improvement in the Welsh

Government's specification of the outcomes it is seeking.

### **Other organisations engaging with citizens and tenants**

- 1.17 Several stakeholders identify the potential for broadening out the support of engagement, advice and support and independent brokering around engagement in services, and not setting social housing apart (though this would have broadened out this study beyond its brief). They challenge the perceived monopoly of Welsh Tenants and TPAS.

### **Tenant Empowerment Grant**

- 1.18 Evidence from this research suggests mixed support for continuation of the Tenant Empowerment Grant programme. Tenant Empowerment Grants have a good geographic and thematic spread, are viewed as encouraging innovation and helping tenants look outwards.
- 1.19 There is criticism that the quality of Tenant Empowerment Grant outputs can be '*hit or miss*', that they can create unrealistic action plans that organisations may not sign up to, and it was also felt that they are susceptible to being staff-led rather than tenant-led.

## **The role of landlords**

1.20 All interviewees involved in this research identify co-operation and collaboration with tenants at a local level (including feeding back on outcomes) as a landlord responsibility.

## **The role of Welsh Government**

1.21 Many of the stakeholders involved in this research (and working outside the Welsh Government) are unclear about the national strategy or vision in relation to tenant participation.

1.22 The majority of interviewees support the Welsh Government's role in monitoring the effectiveness of tenant participation in housing associations and community mutuals via the Regulatory Framework.

1.23 The difficulty of embedding effective tenant participation in the local authority sector in the absence of a regulatory or inspection regime for housing services was raised as an issue by a small number of stakeholders.

1.24 Stakeholders involved in this research consider the Welsh Government to have a role in funding partnership working around support to tenants and cross-sector events

and comparisons that enable the sharing of good practice and learning.

1.25 A diverse range of stakeholders identified the need for the Welsh Government to continue to provide strategic leadership in promoting tenant participation. For the majority of stakeholders, this continued focus requires continued funding of independent support for tenant participation, but with movement away from local interventions (best funded by landlords themselves) to regional and national initiatives.

1.26 From our interviews with stakeholders within the Welsh Government, the research team understands the priorities for future support for tenant participation to be:

- Helping the service user in shaping housing-related services
- Sharing and promoting good practice in tenant participation
- Having the facility to consult with tenants on matters of housing policy (this was recognised by other stakeholders too, e.g. Tenant Advisory Panel members and Chief Executive survey respondents)
- Investing money to help get initiatives started, with a view to these becoming self-sustaining.

## **The future**

- 1.27 A number of stakeholders involved in this research were keen for the Welsh Government to take a leadership role in a citizen-centred approach. There was a demand from some to see Welsh Government clarity around the extent to which it wished to develop engagement with citizens.
- 1.28 Some interviewees identified the challenges of the current operating environment in relation to welfare reform, living costs and affordability, and suggested that this would lead to greater tensions in relationships between landlords and tenants.
- 1.29 A strong emphasis for future support was placed on inclusion – in particular digital inclusion, as well as financial and health. Employment and training was also identified as a priority.
- 1.30 There was recognition among stakeholders of the growth of the private rented sector – and support among some for developing the capacity and voice of tenants in that sector. There are concerns as to whether existing organisations have the capacity to do this. There was a view that supporting tenant voice at a strategic level (much in the way that

housing association tenants have a body operating at a national level in the form of the Tenant Advisory Panel) ought also to extend to local authority landlords.

- 1.31 This research found that the Welsh Government is expected to lead on the application of equality and diversity to engaging with tenants. Support is still needed to ensure that the profile of involved tenants reflects the wider tenant profile of any social housing landlord.

## **Government funding**

- 1.32 On an operational level, local authorities and housing associations already consider that they fund tenant participation. They view it as core to their business approach.
- 1.33 Nearly all stakeholders involved in this research consider it important to protect a funding source outside landlord budgets for independent advice.
- 1.34 Several stakeholders challenged the current operating arrangements of tenant-based organisations as costly and inefficient (though very little evidence was cited in support of this and focused mainly on overlaps into policy input or multiple conference events). Views were also put forward

that other organisations could be providing back-office services, or that some of the organisations concerned could establish a group structure to encourage both collaboration and cost-sharing.

### **Other ideas**

1.35 Very few ideas emerged regarding other arrangements or sources of funding: most of these ideas focused on organisations working more effectively together but a couple of organisations raised the prospect of sums of money being raised from social housing landlords through a levy system. There was a concern that any levy-type system would need to demonstrate some direct and real benefits to tenants. There are also administrative disadvantages identified by the research authors.

1.36 One stakeholder proposed that the Welsh Government could promote its vision for effective tenant participation by making it a condition of certain types of funding explicitly designated for other purposes (e.g. major repairs allowances), and that this would help to promote participation in the local authority sector.

1.37 Another stakeholder suggestion was that private sector companies

(typically large building/maintenance companies that have a long association with the social housing sector) might be approached to provide support for training to tenants, since the sums of money needed are small relative to the budgets of these types of organisations.

1.38 A couple of stakeholders viewed the research focus as too narrow because it was confined to how tenant participation is supported specifically in the social housing sector (rather than more widely, for example in the public sector). Some felt the research exercise had been a missed opportunity to explore how citizens are supported to engage with public bodies (and funded by the Welsh Government to do so).

### **Conclusions**

1.39 It is our opinion that some of the achievements of today's culture of tenant participation in the social housing sector bear testimony to how society has changed, how increasingly it is seen as 'common sense' and good business to engage customers and services users, whether as public or private sectors.

1.40 The achievements also reflect what can be achieved when there is a clear Government vision and strategy, a regulatory framework, grass-roots organisations working doggedly over many years to lobby and campaign about housing conditions, and other types of organisations working to tackle the structural inequalities through building skills and confidence within organisations and among the people who interact with them. Many different types of organisation have played a part – nationally and locally – in improving the choices for and expectations of (at least) social housing tenants in recent years.

1.41 There is a strong message from stakeholders that the world has changed and that it is not the Welsh Government's role to monitor or determine what should happen at a local level. The vision of tenant participation in housing management services seems for the most part to be ascribed to social housing landlords as their duty.

1.42 This review provides a strategic opportunity for the Welsh Government to step back, set out a new vision of what it is seeking to achieve and encourage national and

local partners to play a role in helping to deliver it.

1.43 Stakeholders see the Welsh Government's responsibilities as:

- independent support for tenant participation, but a broader concept of participation and the participation of a broader group of people;
- advocacy for tenants across tenures;
- a programme of training that brings progression to people's lives; and
- ways of sharing learning and knowledge in regional and national forums.

1.44 The research team identified a range of options for future funding arrangements:

**Option One:** Retain the status quo and cut funding proportionately to the Tenant Empowerment Grants (administered by the Chartered Institute of Housing), TPAS and Welsh Tenants.

**Option Two:** Cease funding to one or other of the organisations or the grant scheme.

**Option Three:** TPAS and Welsh Tenants to form a closer working relationship with each other.

**Option Four:** TPAS and/or Welsh Tenants to form closer working relationships with other organisations.

**Option Five:** the creation of a group structure (or shared services vehicle) that provides shared services to a range of organisations which engage in participation and consultation activities of different kinds.

**Option Six:** the Welsh Government to tender a range of contracts in 2015 for the key activities it seeks to fund over a period of three years and cease core grant funding.

1.45 Option 1 (cutting funding proportionately) is an appropriate short-term measure to take, but offers no strategic vision, only a financial one.

1.46 With respect to Option 2, this research would suggest a continued pause on the Tenant Empowerment Grant programme is a sensible option, chiefly because there is evidence of considerable investment currently by Welsh social housing landlords in tenant participation. The research team does not view cutting

funding to one tenant organisation at the expense of another a sensible solution, since both have their respective merits and strengths.

1.47 With respect to Options 3, 4 and 5, it is helpful to consider these together, since they offer a future path that is within the agency of other bodies rather than subject to the control of the Welsh Government, and it is for the organisations concerned to determine how they wish to shape their futures. The research findings have established that many stakeholders across the sector have an aspiration for a single organisation, an organisational (and for some a physical) hub for citizen engagement, empowerment and learning.

1.48 At this moment in time, the research team does not see the scope for TPAS Cymru and Welsh Tenants to join into one structure because the level of trust and alignment of purpose is not there to make this happen; an important first step might incorporate developing a Memorandum of Understanding.

1.49 Option 6 emerges as a desirable option for both negative reasons – there are barriers attached to implementing any of the options



(Options 3-5) that depend on the willingness or appetite of independent organisations to work differently – and positive ones, that the Welsh Government has an opportunity to articulate a new vision for tenant participation.

1.50 There is learning to be drawn from the experiences of the peer organisations in Scotland and in England, where Governments have set up contract bidding processes from which partnership working has emerged as a consequence.

1.51 Considerable risks are likely to face both TPAS Cymru and Welsh Tenants as a result of funding cuts, although how they choose to develop joint working relationships with their chosen partners can help to mitigate these. If pursued, this kind of organisational change takes time to plan and manage.

1.52 The Research Team understands that both TPAS and Welsh Tenants have already been warned well in advance of this review of impending cuts.

## **Recommendations**

1.53 Based on the findings of this study, the research team would recommend therefore that the Welsh Government

and other stakeholders consider the following:

### *For Welsh Government*

- Introducing a modest cut to the funding available to both TPAS and Welsh Tenants from the beginning of July 2014 – this would allow enough time to plan properly the changes the organisations would need to make (and our understanding of the Welsh Government’s position is that it has no option but to implement some cuts in this coming financial year)
- Continuing cessation of funding to the Tenant Empowerment Grant programme for the next financial year
- Consulting with relevant organisations to investigate the feasibility and potential outcomes from offering (or allowing organisations to bid for) a small investment sum (say up to £75k) in 2014-15 to explore closer partnership working. Potential partners would be able to bid for resource support in developing closer working in recognition of barriers around capacity, and to help drive innovation and explore

the wider vision stimulated by stakeholders

- Scoping and exploring further the value of conducting a consultation with social housing landlords – both housing associations and stock-retaining local authorities – regarding a levy-based system to contribute to a tenant advocacy and campaigning organisation
- Working with partners (such as the Welsh Local Government Association, Community Housing Cymru, the Chartered Institute of Housing, Housing Leadership Cymru and others) to set out clearly a three-year strategy and focus for tenant participation from the financial year 2015 onwards. This may involve no longer looking to provide core grant funding to organisations but rather to organise a procurement process for services, which would help to drive innovation, partnership working between organisations and other potential alliances and structures. Ideally all core grant funded organisations with some kind of ‘participation’ remit ought to fall

within consideration of this wider procuring of services.

*For the Welsh Government and the Learning and Development Panel*

- Seeking assistance from the Learning and Development Panel that sits under the Regulatory Board for Wales in respect of drawing up the specification for some of the contract services, if this is the preferred option
- Setting a clear focus on outcomes (as part of the success criteria) for any contracts that are to be let.

*For the Welsh Local Government Association*

- Identifying how a strategic voice for residents from the local authority sector might be able to feed into a body holding local authority performance to account in delivering citizen-centred services (e.g. whether an equivalent for local authority tenants to the Tenant Advisory Panel ought to feed into the Wales Audit Office)

*For those involved in delivering services (whether to the social housing sector or within it as social housing landlords)*

- Monitoring events and activities involving tenants, where they are expected to influence services, policy and strategy, for the diversity and representativeness of people involved
- Ensuring that there is a methodological framework in place for evaluating the outcomes of whatever approach is adopted to ‘tenant participation’
- Consider approaching private sector companies (e.g. large building/maintenance companies) to provide support for training to tenants

*For Community Housing Cymru and other partners*

- Examining how the dissemination of good practice in relation to capturing the outcomes of involvement might best be shared among social housing landlords.

## **Aims of the review**

1.54 The purpose of the review, as set out in the brief issued by the Welsh Government, was first to review what support, financial and other, is needed for effective tenant

participation in housing at national and local levels. Secondly, the review was required to determine how priorities in this area can be delivered in future in an effective and efficient way.

1.55 In doing this, the review was asked to consider and advise on the following:

- Clarify the Welsh Government’s role in supporting tenants in a housing context
- Consider how support may be delivered on behalf of Welsh Government, including the role that organisations currently play and could play in providing this support, in particular social landlords, the two tenant support organisations and other third sector organisations such as Cymorth Cymru, Tai Pawb, Community Housing Cymru and any others suggested by the research team
- Review the current roles of the two tenant support organisations (Welsh Tenants and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service), the support and services they deliver, any duplication, and the value for money they offer.

- Examine whether one tenant support organisation would be appropriate and how this should be formed, e.g. one of the existing organisations or a completely new organisation.

## **Methodology**

1.56 The research team undertook both desktop research and qualitative fieldwork. The research methods were overseen by a steering group of five members. All of the research took place across the course of October to December 2013.

1.57 As part of providing a wider context for this study, the research team undertook a review of how support for effective tenant participation in Wales compares with the support provided in England and Scotland; this included both desktop reviews of documents and interviews with key civil servants in the three respective countries, as well as interviews with the TPAS organisations in England and Scotland.

1.58 Other stakeholders engaged in the qualitative research included people directly involved in supporting and leading effective tenant participation (whether national providers, umbrella organisations, housing associations

or local authority stakeholders), tenants, representatives of Welsh Government, and members of the Tenant Advisory Panel. The Chief Executives and Chairs of Welsh Tenants and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Cymru were also interviewed, as was the Director of the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru, together with two of his colleagues.

1.59 In total, the research team interviewed 30 stakeholders from a range of organisations, interviewed or surveyed 40 members of staff from social housing landlords and interviewed 8 tenants (excluding the Tenant Advisory Panel members who are included among the 30 stakeholders).

1.60 We would like to thank all of the stakeholders who gave their time to speak with us, and to respond to our consultations. The report has been written by Campbell Tickell, a housing consultancy working in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

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