

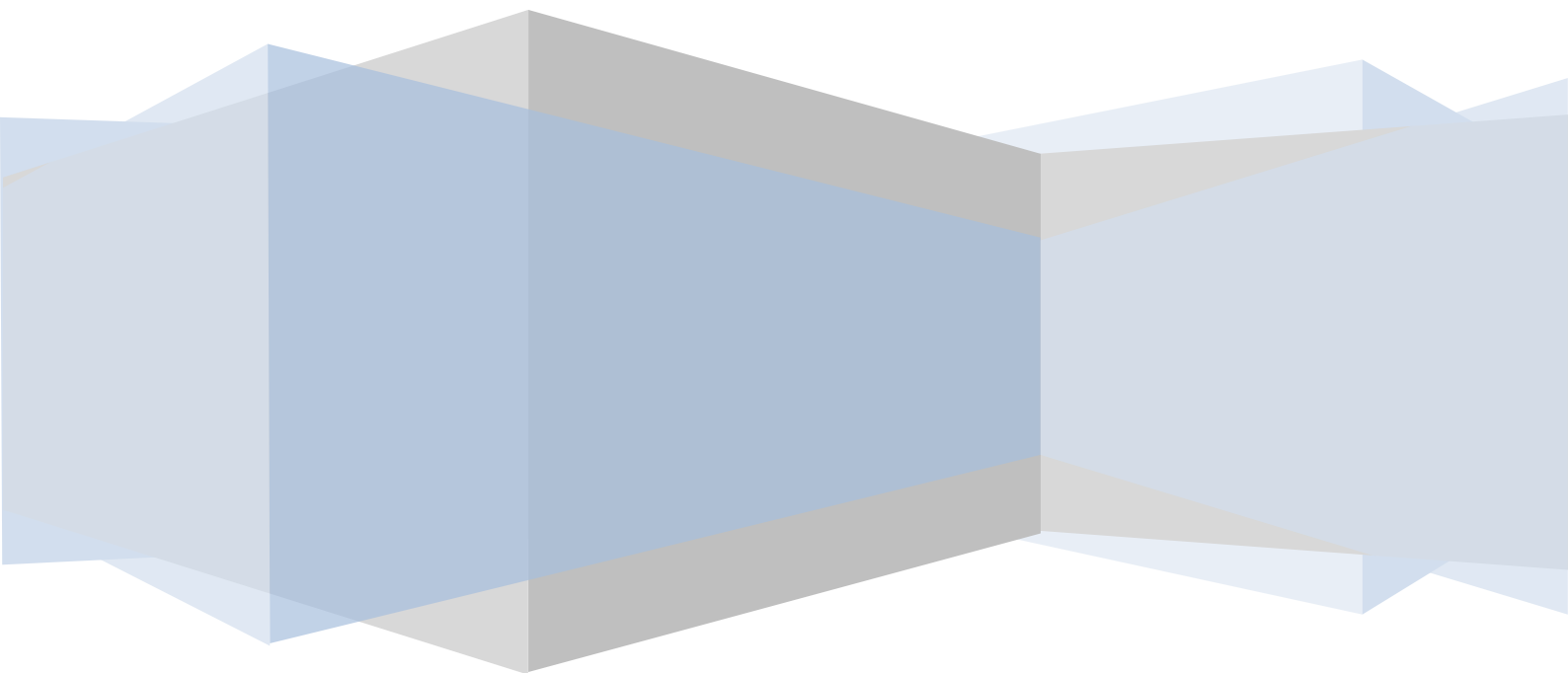


Department for  
**Social  
Development**  
[www.dsdni.gov.uk](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk)

# **A Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2015 to 2020**

**January 2016**

**Department for Social Development**



This publication can be made available on request in different formats. For more information e-mail [shrppolicy@dndi.gov.uk](mailto:shrppolicy@dndi.gov.uk)

## Ministerial Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the tenant participation strategy for Northern Ireland. This strategy sets out ways in which the Department for Social Development and its partners will introduce tenant participation services within Northern Ireland's social housing sector.



There are around 121,000 social homes in Northern Ireland managed by the Housing Executive and registered Housing Associations. These homes are at the heart of people's lives and contribute significantly to creating a safe, healthy and prosperous society. My vision for social housing is more than just providing a home to those in need, however; it is about creating communities with efficient services that respond to local needs.

As this document shows, using tenants' views to shape services delivers better, more responsive services. Developing services and business objectives around the needs and expectations of tenants should also provide reassurance to investors and lenders that resources are being directed at the priorities that matter most.

Tenants must be encouraged and supported to become involved in one or more of the range of participation options available to them. Tenants should be given the opportunity to develop their skills further to enable them to progress to a higher level of participation. Many social landlords in Northern Ireland already do this. Indeed there are many good examples of tenants participating at all levels throughout the social housing sector. We have benefited greatly from talking to and exchanging ideas with tenants, social landlords and others in the development of this strategy. It is not my intention to interfere with the good work already ongoing, but instead to learn from and build upon it.

I am publishing this strategy to set out what social landlords should do in order to give tenants the opportunity and choice to participate in the decisions that affect them and to set out also how government will help. I want this strategy to challenge all social housing landlords to increase the extent and effectiveness of tenant participation in Northern Ireland and to encourage and support them to match the performance and commitment of the best.

Lord Morrow

Minister for Social Development

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction and Background.....	5
2. The Current Position in Northern Ireland .....	6
3. Developing Tenant Participation in Northern Ireland.....	7
4. Levels of Tenant Participation .....	13
5. The Benefits .....	14
6. Tenant Empowerment .....	14
7. Conclusion.....	15
APPENDIX A - Regulatory Standard - Desirable Outcomes .....	17
APPENDIX B - Tenant Participation & Empowerment Case Studies .....	20

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### What is the tenant participation strategy?

This is a plan to increase tenant involvement in the delivery of social housing services and the decisions that are made about these services. It is for social landlords - the Housing Executive and Housing Associations. It is for social housing tenants, all other residents, homeless people, those living in hostel accommodation and other service users. It aims to improve the quality of social housing services for tenants and landlords. Involving tenants helps landlords to give a better service and also give better value for the money that landlords get from rents and from government.

### How did we write the strategy?

Before writing this strategy we researched how tenants already get involved in social housing in Northern Ireland. We also found out about how this happens in England, Scotland and Wales. We looked at the different roles that governments, social landlords and tenants perform across the UK. We met and heard from tenants and social landlords across Northern Ireland. We took all these things into account to write this strategy. We also carried out Impact Assessment screening to consider how implementation of the strategy would impact those affected.

### Why do we need a strategy?

The research we did showed us that there are strong examples of tenant-focused services and getting tenants involved in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, this is not consistent across all Housing Associations. Stakeholders told us that tenants and tenant groups are willing to have a greater say.

Looking at good examples from England, Scotland and Wales showed us that tenant engagement works best when the government provides leadership and support. We are publishing this strategy to help landlords have a consistent way of engaging tenants. This strategy will help all social housing tenants have opportunities to get involved in housing issues that affect them. We want Northern Ireland to have the best possible social housing. It is also important that the strategy works for tenants in both the current and any future models of social housing in Northern Ireland. We believe this strategy will give tenants a voice and help make their housing better.

This tenant participation strategy, and the associated action plan that accompanies it, will run for five years. Progress will be reviewed mid-term and again at the end of the five year period. The review will look at how well the strategy has worked and identify any improvements that should be included in the succeeding strategy.

Many of the measures outlined in this strategy are primarily aimed at tenants and social landlords. They may also be relevant to other community members, such as, other residents in an area (e.g.

home owners, private renters). This could also include local elected representatives, other government departments, the voluntary and community sector, and support organisations.

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## Beyond participation – towards tenant empowerment

While tenant participation allows tenants to become involved in the decisions about the services they receive, tenant empowerment allows tenants to take more control over those services. The area of tenant empowerment, and the work required to develop it, is part of the action plan that accompanies this strategy. Future discussions will take place to develop this area of work and further consultation will take place before any decisions are made around its introduction.

## 2. THE CURRENT POSITION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Four organisations are currently involved in helping and developing tenant engagement in Northern Ireland, their roles and functions are outlined below:

### *1. Department for Social Development (DSD)*

The Department has responsibility for policy and the strategic development of all housing-related matters in Northern Ireland. Housing Associations and the Housing Executive provide the social landlord functions with DSD funding. DSD uses formal consultations to consult tenants about new policy direction and legislation. It also engages regularly with organisations concerned with tenant rights and community involvement e.g. Council for the Homeless, Supporting Communities NI and Housing Rights Service.

### *2. Northern Ireland Housing Executive*

Social housing providers must provide effective and efficient services to all tenants and make sure that their rights are safeguarded. The Housing Executive must, by law, consult tenants on matters affecting their tenancies. Since the 1980s it has developed and expanded its activities to encourage a more active and participative involvement from tenants and community groups in the delivery of housing services. Tenant participation is an integral part of the Housing Executive's structure. Its tenant's charter and Community Involvement Strategy sets out the range of services it provides, from repairs to consultation on regeneration schemes. It recognises the significant benefits that are derived from working with communities in the delivery of their services.

### *3. Supporting Communities NI (incorporating Housing Community Network)*

Supporting Communities NI (SCNI) is a registered voluntary and community organisation that promotes best practice in community participation. It provides tailored support, advice, information and training to new and existing community groups and other statutory and voluntary organisations. It is funded by the Housing Executive. SCNI and the Housing Executive have set up a formal Housing Community Network (HCN) to involve residents and their local community associations. HCN discusses and develops their local services and deals with general housing issues.

Tenants have ongoing engagement with Housing Executive officials through the HCN structure at many levels. They have direct communication with district office staff and with the central network. The central network is the Housing Executive's central panel advising on policies and procedures. HCN member activities include estate inspections, community navigator initiatives for new tenants, pre-tenancy workshops and mystery shopper exercises. SCNI primarily support Housing Executive tenants. However, it has assisted some Housing Associations also, for example, by providing mystery shopper exercises.

#### *4. Housing Associations*

Whilst Housing Associations in Northern Ireland are not-for-profit, non-public bodies, the current regulatory framework requires them to consider a range of methods and opportunities to consult and obtain feedback from tenants.

Housing Associations must:

- Consult their tenants on issues affecting their tenancies;
- Have a complaints procedure in place; and
- Survey tenants annually.

There is no central tenant network for all Housing Association tenant/resident groups. There are examples of tenant committees and groups for individual Housing Associations where tenants discuss issues, share best practice, consult on policy developments and attend regional/central fora.

Some Housing Associations have tenant involvement activities and tenant services which are similar to those of the Housing Executive. Some have tenant strategies or charters and encourage tenant participation on audit and risk committees or as service inspectors. A number of Housing Associations have tenants on their boards.

A number of Housing Associations have noted that scale is an issue, with the size of some of the social housing developments in Northern Ireland making the setting up of residents groups difficult. As an alternative they have instead entered partnership with existing local resident groups to support their tenants.

### **3. DEVELOPING TENANT PARTICIPATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

This new Tenant Participation Strategy sets out 10 principles of good participation in Northern Ireland. These are based on:

- What social landlords should do;
- How tenants' capacity for greater participation will be developed and supported; and
- What government will do further to lead this development.

The measures outlined in this part of the strategy will apply to all Social Housing Providers and their tenants in Northern Ireland, but not landlords in the private sector. The strategy does not replace any existing legal duties that apply to landlords.

## PRINCIPLES FOR TENANT PARTICIPATION

All parties must be committed for tenant participation to work effectively. Everyone needs a clear understanding of what participation is trying to achieve. It should build meaningful relationships between landlords, tenants and the wider community. It must also promote good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

The 10 principles below set the context for the measures that follow.

### **Principles for Tenant Participation**

- 1 Tenant participation comes from and promotes a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, board members and staff at all levels. It exists when all these interests work together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.
- 2 Tenant participation is a continuous process. Participants share information, ideas and influence. They work towards a common understanding of problems and a consensus on solutions.
- 3 Good tenant participation is about sharing information. All participants need to have all the information available to consider issues properly. That information needs to be clear, timely and accessible. Information must be in a form that all participants can understand.
- 4 Decision-making processes should be open, clear and accountable.
- 5 Tenant representatives should have enough time to consider issues properly. They should have the opportunity to work out a common view before meeting landlord representatives.
- 6 The landlord must recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
- 7 Good working relations evolve gradually so must be flexible to adapt to local circumstances.
- 8 Tenants' organisations need adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
- 9 Tenant participation in rural areas must suit the particular circumstances and needs of rural tenants.
- 10 Tenant participation must meet the requirements of legislation on equality and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.



Effective tenant participation methods, developed by landlords who have asked and listened to their tenants' needs (including where tenants are living with disabilities), will remove barriers arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability.

## WHAT SOCIAL LANDLORDS SHOULD DO

This strategy is not intended to interfere with existing good practice. Its aim is to build upon it and challenge all social housing landlords to increase the extent and effectiveness of tenant participation in their individual organisations.

The standards, recommendations and guidance apply to both the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations.

In general, social landlords should do three things to foster greater participation from their tenants:

- Develop and deliver a strategy for tenant participation;
- Have due regard for the information contained in the DSD Tenant Participation Strategy, particularly the regulatory standards and desirable outcomes (Appendix A), when developing/reviewing their own strategy; and
- Ensure that tenants and other users are made aware of and are clear about the participation activities, the strategic approach to tenant participation and are encouraged to become involved.

Social landlords should therefore develop tenant participation strategies, adaptable to their own business needs, but that will also provide a menu of participation activities for their specific tenants. The landlord's strategy for tenant participation should, as a minimum, reflect the *10 principles for tenant participation*. It should also ensure that:

- Tenants/other services users have a choice in:
  - The areas they want to participate in;
  - The level of participation; and
  - Whether to be involved as an individual or part of a group.
- Tenants have an opportunity to influence:
  - Policy decisions that will affect them;
  - Decisions that will affect their general area or community;
  - Services that they receive as an individual user; and
  - Their landlord organisation's business planning and identification of future priorities.
- Tenants, particularly under-represented groups, are encouraged and supported to become involved through training and other support mechanisms.

Social landlords that already have strategies which meet some or all of the expectations of the *Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2015 to 2020*, should test these against this strategy's expectations and:

- If existing approaches work and meet the strategy expectations, then landlords should continue to use them.
- Where they do not meet expectations, landlords should set out an action plan to meet the strategy expectations.

The strategy goes a step further in that it challenges social landlords to improve on existing services, therefore, social landlords should regularly consider what else their particular organisation can do to promote and improve tenant participation.

The timeframe to develop and review individual tenant participation strategies will be taken forward as part of the action plan that accompanies this strategy.

## HOW TENANTS WILL BE SUPPORTED TO PARTICIPATE

This strategy will not be successful simply by setting out the role of social landlords and government. The Housing Executive has shown the value of the Housing Community Network to support its tenants. Also, as is evident in other parts of the United Kingdom, it is important that tenants have support that is independent of their landlords or indeed government. Tenants should be given the skills, support and encouragement to be able to embrace opportunities to participate. The objective of this strategy is to raise the levels of tenant engagement across the housing sector and to make sure that tenants are supported.

Therefore, the Department has committed to making a strong case for the necessary funding to put in place an Independent Tenant Organisation in Northern Ireland that would support all social housing tenants to develop the skills needed for effective participation.

DSD will also provide guidance which will include information on:

- Setting up and maintaining tenant panels or community groups at a local level;
- Developing tenant participation strategies or activities;
- Effective tenant involvement in governance and board membership; and
- Developing tenant-based surveys.

The work to put in place an Independent Tenant Organisation and also to provide guidance to support the strategy will be taken forward as two separate elements of the action plan that accompanies this strategy.

## HOW GOVERNMENT CAN LEAD

DSD will act in various ways to support tenant participation directly. The Department's Regulatory Framework will include, within its consumer standard, a specific outcome in relation to tenant participation, as follows:

### Regulatory Standard

Social Housing Providers manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers are encouraged to participate in the available range of participation options so that they can influence their landlord's decisions:

- Social Housing Providers adopt a strategic approach to tenant participation in the development and review of housing and related services including service failure;
- Social Housing Providers have due regard to the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland; and
- Social Housing Providers ensure that tenants and other users are made aware of the participation mechanisms that are in place and are clear about the various levels of participation available to them.

DSD is required to "exercise supervision and control over Registered Housing Associations" (Article 4 (1) (c) of the Housing (NI) Order 1992) and has a key role in promoting "best value" in the delivery of social housing in Northern Ireland.

The Department is responsible for grant funding, monitoring, regulation and issue of guidance and policy directives to Housing Associations and have a statutory duty to consult with its representatives. Registered Housing Associations are directly accountable to their board but must work within the rules and the requirements of the Regulatory Framework and the guidelines laid down by DSD.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is a non-Departmental Public Body and its board is accountable to the DSD Minister for delivery of his strategic priorities and to ensure these are reflected in the NIHE corporate and business plans. Delivery of the strategy's expectations applies to the Housing Executive also.

Social Housing Providers should shape their services to reflect their tenants' views and also help tenants and other service users to become more involved by:

- Regularly seeking the views of tenants, being responsive to and considering those views;
- Offering tenants a menu of participation activities so that they can participate as individuals, within formal or informal group structures or as specialist posts;

- Providing opportunities for tenants to scrutinise the services they receive and the decisions that impact them;
- Providing the appropriate training and support to tenants and staff to encourage, promote and provide the skills required to make participation an integral part of the organisation; and
- Developing relationships and engagement opportunities for tenants and others within the community or those whose role has an impact on tenants e.g. other government departments or housing organisations.

More specific outcome measures will also be used by the Regulator to ensure social tenants and landlords gain real benefits from tenant participation, examples of these are attached at **Appendix A**. It is accepted that this is an evolving process and a bedding-in period will be needed before consistency in standards can be reached.

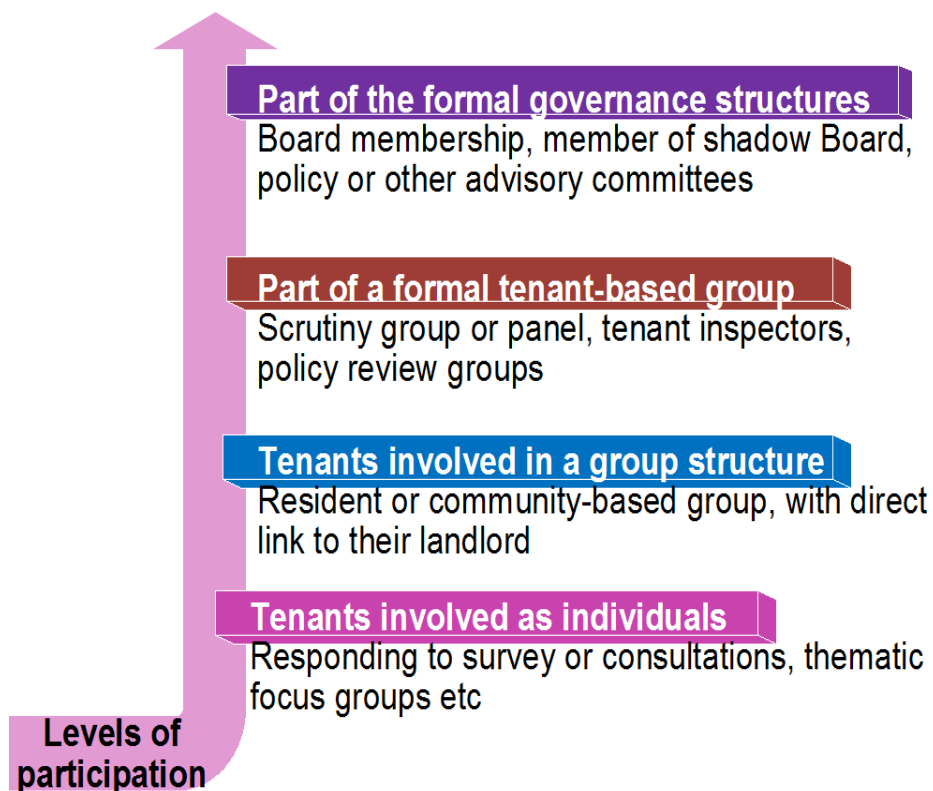
As part of the Regulatory Framework, Social Housing Providers will need to provide evidence that will satisfy the Regulator that the consumer standard has been met. The evidence should demonstrate the action taken by the Social Housing Provider to address tenants' feedback and how these suggestions have influenced business plans. Evidence should also identify the options that have been developed to facilitate tenant participation and how the landlord has promoted these.

Further support for tenants will be provided by the Department with the introduction of a 'tenant advocate' role and the establishment of a new 'housing policy panel'.

Both these roles will be developed as part of the action plan; this development work will encompass engagement with stakeholders.

## 4. LEVELS OF TENANT PARTICIPATION

Tenant participation in social housing is about how tenants or others can have a voice in what a social landlord does. Involving tenants in running their homes and communities has been an accepted principle in social housing for many years.<sup>1</sup> Landlords have developed many different ways to ensure that tenants have a say in the services they receive. Tenants should be given a choice in how they take part. The diagram below gives an example of the levels of participation, activities, or opportunities that could be made available to tenants who want to participate.



Tenant participation can take a variety of forms. There are a wide range of examples of effective tenant participation both in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the UK. Some of these examples are attached at **Appendix B**. A local example of various levels of tenant participation is summarised below.

### *Northern Ireland example*

Through a 'resident participation and consultation policy' meaningful relationships with residents are established and tenants can become involved through a number of opportunities:

- **Armchair panels** – residents represent themselves or their household and there is no requirement to attend meetings;

<sup>1</sup> Tenant Services Authority & Audit Commission (2010) *Tenant Involvement: Assessing Landlords' Progress* <http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org>

- **Residents' forum** – residents have been elected to represent the schemes in which they live. The forum meets regularly and also formally meets Housing Association staff at least three times per year. The purpose of this participation is to inform, and seek to improve, service delivery; and
- **Housing Management Committee/Board of Management** – the chair and vice chair of the residents forum sit on the housing management committee and board of management. This ensures residents are involved in decision - making at a very senior level of the organisation.

## 5. THE BENEFITS

Research shows that a relatively small investment in participation activities can bring significant benefits for tenants, the wider community and landlords.<sup>2</sup> Tenants who get involved can improve their skills. Neighbours can build stronger links helping communities to stick together. Neighbourhoods can become more settled places. Happier tenants and communities mean properties are not likely to lie empty for long and rents are more likely to be up-to-date.

These benefits can only last if Social Housing Providers focus on their tenants and always put the customer first. Real commitment to the 10 principles is therefore essential. Some of the benefits of effective tenant participation are shown below:

- Tenant/Landlord relationship enhanced;
- Tenant/Landlord develop new skills;
- Creates better communities;
- Can lead to improvement in services;
- Performance indicators can be used to measure outcomes;
- Contributes to Risk Management;
- Provides scrutiny opportunities;
- Tenants have the opportunity to influence design; and
- Creates more positive outcomes for organisations.

## 6. TENANT EMPOWERMENT

The Department has committed, at the appropriate time, to develop proposals to introduce tenant empowerment initiatives in Northern Ireland similar to those in other jurisdictions.

Engagement with stakeholders will be needed in relation to the introduction of tenant empowerment in Northern Ireland. Further research will also be required to enable the

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<sup>2</sup>Tenant Services Authority & Audit Commission (2004 and 2010): Housing: improving services through resident involvement; *Tenant Involvement: Assessing Landlords' Progress* <http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org>

development of delivery options. Consideration needs to be given to the legislative requirement to support empowerment. This work will be taken forward as part of the action plan.

## 7. CONCLUSION

### MONITORING AND REVIEWING THE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

In this strategy DSD has made the following commitments:

- We will work with stakeholders to develop independent tenant support. We will make a strong case for government funds to support this.
- We will provide guidance on:
  - Setting up and maintaining tenant panels or community groups at a local level;
  - Developing tenant participation strategies or activities;
  - Effective tenant involvement in governance and board membership; and
  - Developing tenant-based surveys.
- We will seek funding to support local tenants organisations (e.g. for training, to set up panels, to undertake projects) and to develop a tenant participation support programme.
- We will bring in regulation to support this strategy. Landlords will be assessed and monitored to make sure they are in line with the standard set out in regulation.
- We will provide social landlords with guidance on the new regulatory standard for tenant participation.
- The Board of Management of the Housing Executive will be accountable to Minister for ensuring delivery against the strategic expectations outlined in this strategy.
- We will establish an advocate for tenants. This advocate will monitor the delivery of this strategy.
- We will work with the housing sector to establish a housing policy panel for Northern Ireland. This will represent social housing tenants in the development of departmental policies that are relevant to their interests.
- We will, at the appropriate point in the implementation of this strategy, bring forward proposals to potentially introduce into Northern Ireland the “right to manage” and the “right to transfer” and an equivalent to the “community cashback” initiatives of England and Wales.

This strategy addresses our key commitments and outlines how we intend to meet our key objectives. The Strategy will be subject to a mid-term review and again in the lead up to December 2020, when consideration will be given to the development of the succeeding tenant participation strategy.

It is accepted that the new processes will take some time to bed in and before a level of consistency is attained throughout the Northern Ireland social housing sector. Therefore, the accompanying action plan will be reviewed and revised periodically to reflect the up-to-date position of activity to complete each individual action.

## IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality between all the Section 75 groups. Without prejudice to these obligations, the Department is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

This Tenant Participation Strategy underwent impact assessment screening, which identified no adverse impacts, in the following four areas:

- Equality;
- Regulatory;
- Social Inclusion; and
- Rural Proofing.

During the development of the policy, DSD also adhered to the relevant articles contained within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

At each review stage, and allowing a period of time for Social Housing Providers to attain consistency in the new processes, DSD will consider further Impact Assessment screening exercises.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Department has worked with tenant groups, social housing providers and housing related organisations and other stakeholders to identify the key elements of this strategy. The Department would like to thank the tenants and staff of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Housing Association sector, Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, Supporting Communities NI, Housing Rights Service, Council for The Homeless , the Voluntary and Community Sector in general, and any others who were involved in the development of this strategy and consultation.



## APPENDIX A - Regulatory Standard - Desirable Outcomes

Example 1 - Meaningful Participation	Outcome
Social landlords should regularly seek the views of tenants, be responsive to and consider those views in relation to the identification of priorities and the development of services for their organisation so that tenants and where appropriate, other users...	<p>...can participate in their landlord's decisions</p> <p>...are satisfied that their views and priorities are considered in landlord services</p> <p>...have a range of ways to get involved, including ways suitable for those who are hard to reach or seldom heard</p>
Activities	
<p>Mechanisms to enable tenants to actively participate e.g. in planning, standard setting, monitoring and reviewing, decision - making at the operational and strategic levels, involvement in the complaints process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tenant participation compacts, local agreements, neighbourhood initiatives or review groups; formal tenant and resident associations; tenant inspectors or committees; scrutiny panels, board membership; other committee membership with direct interaction with the board.</li> </ul>	

Example 2 - Scrutiny Of Services	Outcome
Social landlords should demonstrate, through a range of mechanisms, how tenants have the opportunity to scrutinise and provide feedback on the services they receive from their landlords so that tenants...	<p>...have opportunities to be involved in developing, monitoring, assessing and reporting on the quality of the housing services the landlord provides</p>
Activities	
<p>Mechanisms to enable tenants to give their individual views on the services provided and more formally to take part in inspection activity in all areas of service delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual home visits/one-to-one discussions; letter, e-mail, texts; surveys including survey monkey (telephone/postal/electronic); interactive web or apps, focus groups;</li> <li>- Formal structure – scrutiny panels, tenant inspectors, scheduled focus groups.</li> </ul>	

Example 3 - Support and Innovation	Outcome
<p>Social landlords should promote, encourage and provide support for tenants to become involved and look for innovative and modern ways to gain the views of tenants, so that tenants...</p>	<p>...are able to get involved if and when they want to at a level they feel comfortable with</p> <p>...get support to build their skills for more effective involvement</p> <p>...have opportunity to progress from different levels of participation right through to membership on the board of management</p> <p>...can take part in reviewing opportunities for involvement to ensure they are working well.</p>
<p>Activities</p>	
<p><u>Levels of participation:</u></p> <p>Level 1 – individual - responding to questionnaires, surveys, one-one discussions;</p> <p>Level 2 – groups/structured events - tenant participation compacts, local agreements, neighbourhood initiatives or review groups; formal tenant and resident associations;</p> <p>Level 3 – formal tenant based panels or groups – tenant inspectors, tenant participation officers, scrutiny panels, policy advisory committees or panels, youth committees, disability forums; and</p> <p>Level 4 – tenants involved in the governance of the organisation such as tenant board members, tenant policy advisors, tenant participation in the organisations sub committees such as investment boards, or shadow boards.</p> <p><u>Enablers of tenant participation:</u></p> <p>Resources - separate budgetary provision for administering tenant participation functions; start up grants for tenant groups, providing guidance and/or support on how tenants may secure funding from other sources; identifying and advertising non-financial resources for participation activities (e.g. Administration support, venues for meetings).</p> <p>Training – formal training for staff and tenants who wish to participate at levels 3 and 4 identified above, familiarisation or training for levels 1 and 2 as required, targeted training for the individual needs of tenants where required;</p> <p>Innovation – modernising the approach to gaining views of tenants such as apps, survey monkeys, social media, web-based discussion forum, podcasts; understanding the barriers to participation and developing solutions such as dedicated staff as tenant champions, incentives, having as wide a range of activities as possible at the various levels.</p>	

Example 4 - Community And Partnership	Outcome
<p>Social landlords should develop where appropriate relationships or initiatives with other landlords, housing related organisations, local councils and elected representatives, and government departments and agencies to provide and improve services and deal with the wider community issues that impact on tenant’s lives. Social landlords should support tenants so that they ...</p>	<p>...can contribute to the development of their community and neighbourhoods in a structured way</p> <p>...get support for the wider issues relating to their home such as anti-social behaviour, health, wellbeing, financial stability</p> <p>...can come together to discuss and address community issues</p> <p>...share best practice with other social tenants or residents</p> <p>...can have a platform to provide feedback and influence Northern Ireland’s housing policy</p> <p>...have access to shared local services or partnerships</p> <p>...can work together to expand the services and focus of tenant participation</p>
<p>Activities</p>	
<p>Mechanisms of an informal and formal nature to engage and interact with the community - informal such as resident and community groups, fun days, organised social activities; formal such as community representative groups including the locally elected representatives, businesses, community planning officials, groups for specific projects such as new schemes;</p> <p>Tenants involved in activities such as inter-agency workshops, structured meetings with officials, service providers, support organisation, government departments or agencies to discuss issues such as roads, lighting, anti-social behaviour;</p> <p>Structured social tenant network – selected tenant representatives from each organisation come together on scheduled basis to share information and best practice, identify common issues, discuss impacting policy, identify joint venture activities such as youth forums, policy panels;</p> <p>Joint services such as inter-landlord scrutiny panels or inspectors, mystery shopper exercises, targets services or policy reviews; joint funding initiatives such as financial support services, community regeneration projects.</p>	

## APPENDIX B - TENANT PARTICIPATION &amp; EMPOWERMENT CASE STUDIES

## NORTHERN IRELAND

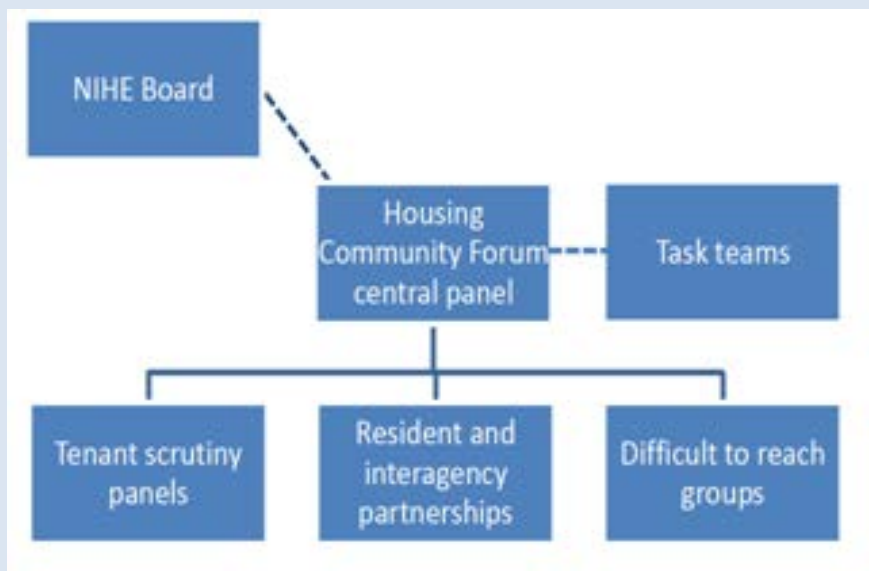
The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is the largest single social landlord in Northern Ireland.

## NIHE

The Housing Executive has involved residents and local community associations in discussing and developing local services and addressing housing issues for many years. With its wide network of community groups the Housing Executive has access to more than 400 tenant groups and has an established Housing Community Network which has different tiers of involvement.

Under its previous resident inclusion strategy, tenants were involved at four levels, local, area, regional and central with representatives from each level feeding into meetings at the next level. The Housing Executive funds Supporting Communities NI, an independent province wide voluntary organisation, to work with community groups and housing providers to achieve meaningful community participation.

The network has evolved and the new NIHE Community Involvement Strategy has created a new structure, with tenants involved in area scrutiny panels, inter-agency partnerships and working with difficult to reach groups. These groups are represented on the central panel who meet with the NIHE board twice a year. All policy changes are discussed and consulted at central forum.



## ENGLAND

This case study outlines some of the services and tenant participation activities provided by a registered social landlord in England. This is a large Housing Association and their main feature is that they are community driven and extend beyond housing.

### Case Study

This Housing Association owns and manages around 8,500 homes in London. They have developed and built new schools, health centres, and chemist and shopping areas in partnership with local authorities. Some of the opportunities for tenant participation include:

- Youth empowerment board with successes in projects and developing local youth;
- Relationship managers who are the first point of call for tenants to discuss problems or queries relating to their tenancy;
- Aids and adaptations – the Association is committed to helping older and disabled people to remain independent in their homes for as long as possible. Technical staff work with Occupational Therapists to provide adaptations;
- Estate boards made up of local residents to deal with local issues. The boards meet four times a year and together with Association staff they make decisions about a range of issues;
- The joint estates and street panel (JESP) is a group that represents tenants and leaseholders across the Association. Meeting every three months three residents from each of the estate boards are chosen to be on the panel. They discuss issues such as the standards of services, resources and how much rent is paid.
- Policy Advisory Groups - each estate board puts forward a resident Director to sit on the main Association board. They meet four times a year to decide on policies, strategy and the direction of the organisation.

Further examples of community activities and tenant initiatives include young advisors and leader's programmes, outreach service for vulnerable residents, fun days and events, community safety, focus groups, surveys, housing surgeries, estate inspections and mystery shopping.

## SCOTLAND

This case study profiles how a Scottish Housing Association engages with tenants.

### Case Study

This Housing Association manages a portfolio of over 3,500 homes with offices across Scotland. They address housing needs of people in both urban and rural areas, including older people and those who need specialised support. The Association has developed a tenant participation strategy which includes a 'menu of participation' that outlines the various ways in which individuals and groups can get involved. Some of the areas covered include:

- Customer Panel – the 11 member panel reflects the diversity of the Association's 3,500 tenants, have a direct relationship with the board, act as a critical friend of the Association, scrutinise their performance, highlight what is good and what could be better and make recommendations for improvements. Customer focus reports – these are aimed at providing tenants, staff and management committee with information and evidence on performance in customer care.
- Register of interested tenants - if tenants do not want to be involved but their name is on the register they may be contacted as part of a consultation process.
- Communications group - formed to ensure that letters, leaflets and newsletters are written in plain English and is run entirely by email, thus facilitating tenants living in remote areas or with limited mobility.

## WALES

This case study profiles a Welsh local authority's approach to tenant participation.

### Case Study

The local authority believes that improving tenant and resident engagement promotes their commitment to listen and learn from its communities. The engagement helps them to be open and honest in their approach, be transparent in their decision - making and be accountable to the communities they represents. The following mechanisms are identified through their tenant participation strategy:

- Tenants and residents associations - tenant groups represent people who come together to improve their local community. They represent the views of the community and work with the tenant engagement team and other organisations on a variety of issues.
- Tenants working group - tenants do not have to be a member of a formal group to get involved; the tenants working group invites council tenants from across the council area to regular meetings and events to have their say, comment on services and contribute to the development of policies and procedures. A database of interested tenants is held and invites sent to consultation events or questionnaires and surveys sent via their preferred method (post, email etc) to everyone on the list. There is no pressure for tenants to take part regularly, just join in as and when it suits them or on topics that they are interested in.
- Citizens panel – the panel is currently made up of over 1000 residents of the council area who help inform decision-making on a wide range of issues. The council listens to the panel; the panel points the council in the right direction, suggests improvements needed, new ideas and measures levels of awareness of council services.
- Sheltered housing consultation - the council is undertaking a review of sheltered housing; in 2009 a survey was distributed to all sheltered housing tenants to gather their views. Since then, two focus groups have been established; a housing staff group and a tenants group. The tenants group is made up of sheltered housing tenants and also tenants aged 55+ who live in general needs housing. The groups convened as part of a consultation event using the 'world café method' where a number of questions, issues and suggestions were discussed. The groups will continue to look at the future of sheltered housing to inform future service delivery.
- 'Say it' on the council website – the council believes that everyone should have the opportunity to have their say on issues that affect them. The 'say it' section includes information on past and present consultations.

## TENANT EMPOWERMENT

This case study provides some information on the use of the English government's community cashback scheme under tenant empowerment

### Case Study

Residents of this estate in inner city London are the first in England to take control of services under the government's community cashback scheme. Community cashback rewards tenants who group together to manage small-scale local services and budgets in order to deliver better services, also enabling them to invest any savings back into the community.

The residents association, representing council leaseholders and tenants of 36 flats, was awarded a starter grant administered by tenant participation advisory service and the national federation of tenant management organisations to help them set up the community cashback agreement with the council. Under the agreement the association will provide cleaning services to the block's communal areas and the council will pay the group what it costs to run the service.

The resident association chair said:

*"bringing control of the cleaning services directly into the hands of the residents will allow us to provide a more tailored and proactive service. This is a great step that, in addition to providing a more responsive solution, also empowers the residents to take more responsibility for the environment they live in and fosters a community spirit"*