NEW APPROACHES TO TENANT SCRUTINY

Supporting organisations to pioneer new ways of working and review current and emerging practice

WHY NOW? WHAT ARE OTHERS DOING? GETTING IT RIGHT

Sponsored by Circle Housing, South Anglia and Halton Housing Trust
About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple – to provide housing professionals with the advice, support and knowledge they need to be brilliant.

CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing industry. We have a diverse and growing membership of more than 22,000 people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world.

Find out more at: www.cih.org

South Anglia Housing was made up of the former Stort Valley, Vange, Ryeland Housing Associations, Blackwater and Barking and Dagenham. In 1995 we joined the newly formed Anglia Group. Circle 33 Housing merged with the Anglia Housing Group on 1st July 2005 to become Circle Anglia. Over the past nine years the Group has welcomed new Registered Providers, of which there are now nine. Last year, Circle Anglia was rebranded to Circle Housing; it has a workforce of more than 2,400 staff managing 66,000 homes and providing services for around 300,000 people across the UK. Providing general needs, sheltered and supported housing, Circle also has a range of responsive care, support and maintenance services.

Circle Housing South Anglia as we are now known manages 7,350 homes within 31 Local Authority areas across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Essex. Even though we are part of a large group, we still retain our individuality and independence; running our services to suit the specific and individual needs of our customers. Whilst we are able to retain our local identity; being part of a much larger organisation means we benefit from greater support efficiencies and cost savings, meaning more money can be spent on delivering the right services for our customers.

Our wider mission is to enhance the life chances of our customers by offering financial inclusion, customer engagement and employment and skills opportunities. Our principles are to put customers at the heart of everything we do. We will continue to operate with a business head and a social heart whilst supporting independence and financial resilience for our customers and provide them with new opportunities. We will continue to aspire to be a trusted provider by providing safe and secure homes that are affordable for people with differing incomes.

Halton Housing Trust is a forward thinking and dynamic not-for-profit housing association in Halton. Formed in December 2005, the Trust has grown rapidly and now manages over 6,400 homes. We employ over 280 talented members of staff who help ensure we provide quality services for all customers.

For the Trust, engaging with customers is a vital part of ensuring we continue to improve people’s lives. Through groups like our Customer Scrutiny Panel, we gain valuable insight about how our services look through the eyes of our customers. This particular panel has driven vast improvements in a range of areas such as our repairs service and customer enquiries policy. We are proud to be the largest landlord in the borough and work in partnership with our customer groups to meet our promise and key objective of ‘Improving People’s Lives.’ We have a genuine passion to work closely and communicate with our customers in many different ways and this has been highlighted with the success with our scrutiny panel.
What is this all about?

Housing providers have been involving and consulting with their tenants for years; but increasingly many are going further and giving tenants the power to challenge them with the aim of improving business performance and the quality and standard of services.

Successful businesses in all sectors have a common theme – they know, understand and respond to their current and future customers. They do this by developing approaches and mechanisms to engage with service users. These approaches are closely aligned to the organisation’s strategy and there is a clear recognition that of a robust business case for it.

This briefing looks at the potential opportunities and challenges of establishing and developing options for tenant scrutiny in a housing organisation to drive business value and customer satisfaction.

The briefing is divided into three main sections:

• The first asks ‘why should you be thinking about this now?’ It looks at the wider business and housing drivers for tenant scrutiny. It also looks at what you could achieve in your organisation by introducing tenant scrutiny or by refocusing your expectations of tenant scrutiny.
• The second asks ‘what are others doing?’ It includes a number of case studies showcasing the work of other organisations and demonstrates how tenant scrutiny can transform your organisation and increase business value.
• The third asks ‘how do you make sure you get it right?’ It sets out the things that you really need to consider to establish effective tenant scrutiny in your organisation and to deliver the outcomes that you want.

How have we developed this briefing?

This briefing builds upon extensive work CIH has undertaken over the past few years on resident led self-regulation, co-regulation and tenant scrutiny. We have consulted widely existing guidance on tenant scrutiny and we conducted an in-depth questionnaire in 2014 of 30 housing organisations at various stages of developing, implementing and reviewing tenant scrutiny arrangements. We asked respondents about the drivers, outcomes, challenges and opportunities afforded by establishing tenant scrutiny arrangements.

The organisations we surveyed included a mix of housing associations (70%), local authorities (22%); and ALMOs (8%) from across the country. The majority of respondents (73%) had tenant scrutiny arrangements in place for between one and five years, with 23% having tenant scrutiny arrangements in place for longer than five years and just 4% less than one year. Out of our survey, only two organisations stated they had no intention of introducing tenant scrutiny arrangements. Their reasons for not introducing tenant scrutiny arrangements were not seeing business, service or customer benefits to the organisation; and having in place alternative mechanisms for customer engagement and involvement in decision making and service review.

Thanks to the following organisations for their detailed comments, practice case-studies and feedback:

• A1 Housing
• AmicusHorizon
• Berneslai Homes
• Barnet Homes
• Boston Mayflower Ltd
• Bristol City Council
• Cestria Community Housing Association Ltd
• Circle Housing South Anglia
• Community Gateway Association
• Cross Keys Homes
• Cottsway Housing
• East Durham Homes
• East Midlands Housing Association
• Family Mosaic
• Gateshead Housing Company
• Halton Housing Trust
• Housing Plus
• New Charter Housing Trust Group
• Newydd Housing Association
• Northern Ireland Housing Executive
• Nottingham City Homes
• Rykneld Homes Ltd
• Salix Homes
• Sancturay Housing
• Six Town Housing
• Solihull Community Housing
• South Tyneside Homes
• Stevenage Borough Council
• Stockport Homes
• Tower Hamlet Homes
• West Cornwall Housing
• Yarlington Homes
Why should you be thinking about this now?

Tenant scrutiny involves adopting a tenant centred approach to operations delivering benefits to the business and to tenants and communities.

It is an approach where a housing provider’s frameworks for directing, accounting for, monitoring, assessing and reviewing its own direction and performance are based on the views and priorities of tenants — done well, it can allow tenants to hold their landlords to account for their decisions, performance and conduct.

This tenant-focused approach sits alongside other parts of a housing provider’s governance, management and quality frameworks such as the business planning cycle, internal audit, setting and monitoring performance indicators, options appraisals and oversight and scrutiny by the governing board.

Tenant scrutiny can deliver better outcomes for you and your tenants in different ways covering a wide spectrum of activities. In terms of delivering outcomes, it can be viewed as a continuum extending across the organisation: from ensuring effective governance and delivering business services; to supporting individual and community empowerment.

Ultimately, the purpose of establishing tenant scrutiny is to improve organisational performance and the standard of services. It can be effective in doing this because:

- it provides a valuable reality check about the quality of services
- it ensures tenants’ experiences are routinely considered alongside other forms of performance data
- it provides a mechanism to ensure that landlords are delivering the services tenants want, which means they can tailor their services to reflect local needs and priorities
- tenants can be powerful advocates for efficiency and value for money.

The role of the regulator
The role of housing regulation has changed. In England, the role of consumer regulation has been re-focused on setting clear service standards for registered providers with a much higher threshold for regulatory intervention. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard contains specific expectations for registered providers to support scrutiny arrangements:

‘Tenants should have opportunities to shape service delivery and to hold the responsible board and councillors to account. Providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities. Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider’s performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery.’

However, in our survey we found that the role of regulation was less of a driver for tenant scrutiny than the needs of the business or customer satisfaction.

This is because in the past, many housing providers have operated in the context of executive-led self regulation, within a tight framework of external audit and regulation. In England, this model has changed dramatically in recent years. HCA takes a largely reactive ‘light-touch’ approach to customer protection and external audit has been significantly reduced.

This change means housing providers themselves need to develop more effective mechanisms to manage their own activities in a way which increases tenants’ abilities to guide and direct business decisions and performance. Tenant scrutiny is a key component in this new approach to self-regulation.

Drivers for change
There are a range of positive drivers for creating effective opportunities and approaches to tenant scrutiny:

Driving organisational efficiency
Continued pressures on public spending coupled with income challenges as a result of changes introduced by welfare reform has driven housing providers to review how they deliver services. This will include the need to:

- deliver more cost-effective current and future services
- rationalise existing services
- develop customer insight driven current and new services
- provide cost effective procurement and outsourcing where this takes place.

Tenant scrutiny can be a key mechanism to drive efficiency in a housing organisation. It can provide a formal mechanism for tenants to meaningfully decide what and how services are provided.

Supporting long term investment in communities
Housing providers are important and long-term community anchors. They also operate a business model which is predicated on community investment, capacity building and long-term stability. To be effective custodians of the long-term interests of the business and the community in which it is based, housing providers need to have robust and effective mechanisms for accountability, challenge and management; and tenant scrutiny can support this.
Driving customer satisfaction
Tenant satisfaction is increasingly important in housing. Knowing what customers want makes it possible for businesses to tailor everything they do to providing the services that customers want. Tenant scrutiny can provide a mechanism to identify, assess and measure service performance in terms of delivery, timeliness, staff approach and attitude; and an effective scrutiny process is predicated on the provision of accessible, relevant and comprehensive information.

Responding to a diverse range of customer needs and expectations
Beyond the provision of social housing, landlords are providing homes and services to people at every level of the housing market. They are working with an increasingly diverse range of customers and are providing homes on a greater variety of terms than ever before. Many housing providers are now seeking to operate more commercially and to expand their involvement in profit-making activities such as market rent and homes for sale while still retaining their social purpose.

The diversification of the customer base will increasingly mean that providers will need to think with a ‘commercial head’ about delivering customer satisfaction. Putting tenant priorities at the heart of business and project planning and service design and review can help a housing provider provide services which genuinely meet the needs and desires of its customers. To do this effectively, providers will have to develop much more effective approaches to understanding and responding to the needs and wants of their diverse customers. Tenant scrutiny can make this happen.

In addition to the drivers above, there are a range of objectives that can be delivered by effective tenant scrutiny. The following were the key objectives that the organisations we spoke to highlighted:

• to ensure there are effective and challenging governance arrangements in place
• to enable constructive feedback to help challenge performance
• to help identify options for service improvements and efficiencies
• to actively engage in bottom-up service reviews
• to support better tenant engagement and empowerment.

These objectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive and it may well be possible to achieve more than one of them. However some degree of ‘trade-off’ between objectives is inevitable, so it is vital to have a clear idea of the priorities for your organisation before you start. Understanding exactly what you are hoping to achieve and what success would look like is an essential first step when you are looking to change or develop a new approach.

The main section of this briefing looks in detail at these objectives and how different organisations are reviewing their approaches to deliver against one or more of them.
What are others doing?

This section sets out in more detail how organisations have used effective tenant scrutiny arrangements to deliver against the key objectives stated above.

**Objective 1: To ensure there are effective and challenging governance arrangements in place**

Tenant scrutiny can provide a mechanism to assure effective governance. There are three distinct elements to this:

**Strategic governance**
Tenants can play a key role in shaping the strategic direction an organisation can take, ensuring a correct balance between new business aspirations and opportunities and ‘getting-the-basics-right’ for the core tenant base in term of existing service delivery. Tenant scrutiny structures can formally engage in business planning with the board and the executive as part of a continuous decision making cycle: having input into budget setting, business planning, development of the corporate plan and review of vision and values. This approach can also support organisations to evidence why certain decisions have been taken, and to assess the impact on business decisions.

**Corporate governance**
Corporate governance refers to the system of rules, practices and processes by which an organisation is shaped, directed and controlled; for example: learning from best practice in the housing industry, legal compliance and accountability to external bodies such as the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) or the Charity Commission. Corporate governance provides the framework for attaining an organisation’s diverse objectives; and so embraces every aspect of management, from action plans and internal controls to performance measurement and external regulation or assessment. Tenant scrutiny mechanisms can be a significant way of involving tenants in this area of corporate assessment, review and management. For example: tenants could be involved in the review of board performance or could provide an additional reality check for corporate decision making.

**Constitutional governance**
Housing organisations have a responsibility to ensure that the organisational (or constitutional) form they have adopted provides a housing and service delivery mechanism best suited to the environment in which they operate. This is particularly important at a time when organisations are considering mergers or group structures. In reality, constitutional governance is often driven by strategic, regulatory and commercial objectives: for example, funding, financial or economic efficiency reasons. But what is of key importance to tenants is that an organisation is structured in such a way that best meets the needs and expectations of the wider tenant body. A tenant scrutiny group can be an important mechanism to feed into decision making processes around constitutional direction and managing organisational change.

**Learning from others**

**South Tyneside Homes** has a scrutiny panel made up of 12 members which has the freedom to decide the scope of their reviews. The scrutiny panel links directly into South Tyneside Homes’ governance arrangements (both to sub-committees of the board and the board itself). The scrutiny panel also has a link to South Tyneside Council’s Housing Performance Panel. Scrutiny at South Tyneside Homes has the buy-in from managers, the board and the council who see tenant scrutiny as adding value to housing services and ensuring continuous improvement. Key service improvements have included:

- revised the lettable standard including the addition of a customer checklist and a repairs promise
- established a website monitoring group with staff and tenants to oversee improvements and on-going monitoring
- communication much more tenant-focused.

Contact: Nicola Stephenson
Nicola.Stephenson@southtynesidehomes.org.uk

**Berneslai Home** has a strong track record of having an open and honest culture with customers at the heart of the organisation. Having a tenant-led scrutiny process for the organisation and Barnsley Federation of Tenants and Residents is core to this customer focused approach and Challenge Berneslai is the tenant scrutiny mechanism which achieves this.

The Federation a two-tier approach to scrutiny - monitoring local offers and consumer standards which leads to in-depth scrutiny, ensuring the monitoring side is not diluted and that enough time is dedicated to real scrutiny. Challenge Berneslai is embedded in governance and has a direct reporting line to the board. Referrals for scrutiny are taken from the bi-annual monitoring meetings, when officers from Berneslai Homes provide a robust self-assessment against the range of 55 local offers for 2014/15. The meetings are attended by a wide range of customers who have the opportunity to test compliance and refer any concerns to the scrutiny panel.

Benefits for customers:
• greater influence to shape services
• increased customer confidence
• empowered communities
• increased opportunities for involvement.

Benefits for Berneslai Homes:
• tenant lead process
• enhanced customer role
• confidence that service meet requirements
• local offers that reflect local priorities
• honest robust self-assessment process
• increased accountability.

And the difference it’s made?
Scrutiny has generated:
• a sheltered housing review
• review of the lettings policy
• review of empty property standard
• review of local steering groups
• formation of a task-and-finish group into the grounds
  maintenance service
• formation of a group looking at the ‘new tenant experience’.

Contact: Sarah Schofield  SarahSchofield@berneslaihomes.co.uk

Salix Homes introduced a new customer governance framework in 2011. This led to the successful development of three customer panels focusing on People, Property and Places. These three panels operate alongside the customer senate who work in partnership with staff and board to scrutinise and review services and drive through changes and improvements.

By empowering tenants to work in partnership with management and governance and have a genuine say in how the organisation is run, they have delivered numerous changes and new ways of working, achieving savings of more than £1.5million for the organisation.

One of their most successful projects was to bring our contact centre in-house. Customers worked with Salix to renegotiate the service level agreement and procure a much enhanced out-of-hours service. Salix is now achieving year-on-year savings of £110,000 in this area alone. Performance has risen from 20% to 80% and the organisation is now answering 95% of calls, compared to just 74% two years ago. The out-of-hours service, delivering a 24-hour response to anti-social behaviour, has led to a 60% reduction of incidents reported in high-rise blocks.

Contact: Margaret Connor  margaret.connor@salixhomes.org

Solihull Community Housing (SCH) has a scrutiny committee made up of ten tenants and two leaseholders which reports directly to the board. The SCH board previously had a performance and service improvement sub-committee but delegated the functions of this committee to the tenant scrutiny committee. The chair of the scrutiny committee attends full board once a quarter to present a report giving the customer viewpoint with regard to:
• key performance indicators
• complaints and compliments
• results of scrutiny exercises.

The scrutiny committee invites heads of service to attend their meetings to answer questions regarding services.

Contact: Mary Moroney-Barnett  mmoroney@solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk
Learning from others

Newydd Housing Association’s tenant scrutiny group is made up of six tenants recruited by the association’s tenants who have complete freedom to scrutinise any topic they wish. So far they have looked at:
• customer care
• human resources
• out-of-hours maintenance service
• voids
• service charges
• sheltered housing.

The scrutiny group also has access to five days of the internal auditors time each year to assist them with analysing detailed, and sometimes is confidential, data.

The success of the tenant scrutiny group project so far can be measured by the six excellent reports which have led to major improvements in service provision. Outcomes of the group’s work so far include:
• service charge satisfaction increased from 82% to 87% over 12 months after the scrutiny group’s report was published
• the scrutiny report on customer services led to the creation of the customer services department which has seen a reduction in waiting time on the phone from an average of 17 minutes to three minutes
• the HR scrutiny report led to the implementation of the lone worker system – PeopleSafe - and tenants being involved in all recruitment interviews
• the scrutiny group made changes to the satisfaction survey which saw an increase of 50% in the response rate.

The scrutiny group’s latest topic is rent arrears and the future topics are likely to be aligned to the organisation’s risk register.

Contact: Jason Wroe, jason.wroe@newydd.co.uk

Innovative and creative approaches to resident involvement are not just a legacy of consumer regulation: effective resident involvement has the potential to transform businesses.

AmicusHorizon was placed into regulatory supervision in 2007. The organisation faced financial difficulties and disharmony: customers were unhappy with an inconsistent service, staff were worried, de-motivated and lacking in vision. The organisation embarked on a massive programme of change, key to which was the development of tenant-focused structures and the revitalisation of trust in the organisation.

AmicusHorizon created a co-regulatory resident governance structure in stages. A resident board member steering group was established first to design and implement the new framework. AmicusHorizon took care to work face-to-face with tenants until they came to believe in the values of openness, honesty and integrity at the heart of the organisation. AmicusHorizon established local area panels (LAPs) for residents which covered areas of operation in London and Surrey, Sussex and Kent. These fed into a Residents Council. Acutely aware of the role repairs played in the fortunes of customer satisfaction, AmicusHorizon also set up repairs and maintenance panels (RAMPS) to scrutinise performance. Once the main structural elements of resident governance were in place, AmicusHorizon undertook a major review to test its effectiveness.

AmicusHorizon’s approach to resident involvement has worked for the business. Customer satisfaction is now at 95%; and the organisation has been a top 20 Sunday Times Best Company. AmicusHorizon also achieved ‘co-regulatory champion’ status. AmicusHorizon’s residents have led improved performance and the culture and structures which allow them to do this are now embedded.

Contact: Paul Hackett, paul.hackett@amicushorizon.org.uk
The customer inspection and improvement panel is the scrutiny panel for East Durham Homes. Since they were set up in 2010 they have carried out eight inspections and come up with 125 recommendations for improvement. They are currently carrying out an impact assessment review of all their eight previous inspections to find out how effective they were and what has changed as a result.

Actions that have been implemented as a result have improved communication, others have made a service more efficient and in some cases it has lead to the purchase of equipment to improve the way a service is provided.

Scrutiny of the estate management service has led to heavy duty tool kits being purchased which meant that more jobs could be done and less time was spent waiting for tools. This has improved performance and productivity from the organisation’s point of view and it ensured customers are receiving a much better and quicker service.

Both the board and the organisation value the work of the panel and give members all the support that they require as the panel is Boston Mayflower’s core ethos. The organisation made a commitment to the panel and has employed an officer to support its work. The panel also has access to training and development such as IT skills and report writing. They recently had project management training with the CEO of the organisation.

Boston Mayflower has also recently introduced an induction programme for all new members which includes six small sessions on: introduction to scrutiny, group working, overview of Boston Mayflower services and activities, understanding VFM and performance information, regulation of social housing and protecting and respecting customers.

Achievements of the panel
Successes have included:
• the panel suggested that the organisation charge for missed appointments for both residents and contractors — when consulted 78% tenants agreed
• the board has made amendments to the lettings and transfer policy to include preference for those in paid employment, voluntary work or foster carers
• produced a leaflet on succession for residents to easily explain the process

A more simple recommendation has been to use an information pack produced by one of the organisation’s partners for decent homes improvement works and roll that out as good practice across the rest of their partners.

Overall the scrutiny panel has been very effective in delivering improvements. It brings out actions that never would have happened and delivers real improvements. They have a strategic link to the board and all recommendations put forward have been approved to date. It gives customers power to make a real difference and improve services. For East Durham Homes it improves services, makes them more accountable and helps the organisation deliver value for money.

Contact: Peter Eldrett peter.eldrett@eastdurhamhomes.co.uk

Objective 3: To help identify options for service improvements and efficiencies

Tenant scrutiny offers a structured approach to enable landlords to learn from the experiences and aspirations of their tenants and to deliver the services that tenants actually want and in the way that they want them. These are qualitative measures.

Where tenant scrutiny results in perceptible changes in the service experience of tenants, this can lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction.

Learning from others

The Boston Mayflower panel was formed three years ago and underwent intensive training at the local college. The panel work within the remit of their terms of reference and submit approximately four reports a year to Boston Mayflower board.

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Rykneld Homes tenant scrutiny panel was established in April 2011. The panel forms an integral part of Rykneld’s governance framework. Annual work plans of scrutiny projects are devised and agreed as part of the business planning process and deliver recommendations for service improvement during the year. The feedback given by the panel has led to some quite radical changes in the way some services are delivered. One of the first scrutiny projects completed by the panel was a review of the lettable standard. As a result of their recommendations, Rykneld Homes has totally changed its approach. The lettable standard has gone from doing the minimum amount of works prior to let and completing necessary repairs once they have moved in, to making sure the property is repair free and decorated.

This has ensured all properties undergo all necessary works prior to tenants moving in - reducing tenant stress, worry and avoidable contacts. It also reduces repair costs for the long term. The

New Approaches to Allocations
The panel were passionate about making sure tenants have the minimum amount of work to do and money to spend when moving in. They wanted to ensure tenants were not getting into debt for the sake of decorating their home.

Although the investment made up front to change the lettable standard has cost more, Rykneld projects it will spend a lot less over a five year period on repairs and maintenance for those properties. For the landlord, it has returned dividends in social value, value for money and has positively impacted on tenants’ health and wellbeing.

Contact: Heather Summers Heather.Summers@rykneldhomes.org.uk

**Stevenage Borough Council**’s Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) was set up in 2011 to ensure that housing customers could truly shape and improve the services they receive.

Its service reviews to date include the leasehold service, repairs service, voids process, complaints service and a current review of the decent homes service. All of these reviews have led to service improvement plans which staff are responsible for delivering and the CSP monitor on a regular basis.

The panel chose the service review of the voids process as customer satisfaction with new homes was relatively low and re-let times were above target. Their report and recommendations were completed in May 2013 and resulted in an improvement plan, agreed with key staff. At the first review meeting in December 2013 the panel were pleased to note that void turnaround time had improved significantly during the course of the year. The CSP’s review has prompted the council to consider its whole approach to the end-to-end void process and as a result fundamental changes are planned, which are expected to deliver further value for money improvements.

In November 2012 the CSP reported against its review of the repairs service. This review noted that the ‘first time fix’ for repairs was in the lower quartile for 2012/13. A new repairs focus group was set up following this review to look specifically at the report outcomes and associated improvement action plan. The results of this are starting to show as customer satisfaction with repairs has increased in 2013/14 when compared to 2012/13 and the percentage of repairs carried out on a ‘first time fix’ has risen over the same period.

Contact: Carrie Southern Carrie.Southern@stevenage.gov.uk

**Stockport Homes’** Customer Scrutiny Panel has been operating effectively for over three years and is made up of up to ten customer volunteers who review two services each year. The panel focusses on the customers’ experience of receiving each service providing customers and board with assurance that services are being delivered well and identifying opportunities for improvement. Key factors contributing to the success of scrutiny at Stockport Homes have been:

- panel members commitment to the scrutiny process and their own development
- support from an independent mentor to ensure that judgments and recommendations are objective
- use of other customer involvement activities to inspire and contribute to reviews and reality test the outcomes of scrutiny.

During their review of the caretaking service the scrutiny panel considered all the information available to customers about the service. Members scrutinised customer and leaseholder satisfaction surveys, complaints information and the tenant and resident association minutes. Members visited high-rise and low-rise blocks of flats, went on estate walkabouts and interviewed key staff. The panel found that the service achieved high levels of customer satisfaction (86.5%) and generated few complaints. The panel’s recommendations have resulted in a number of valuable service improvements for customers including:

- simplified, outcome-focused service standards based on customer priorities for the service. The new service standards give customers an even clearer picture of what they can expect from the service
- more frequent customer satisfaction surveying based on the new standards. More regular surveying allows the service to pick up and act on customer feedback more swiftly
- further information on the service being displayed in blocks including more detail on the ‘out-of-hours’ service customers can expect and the results of supervisor block checks.

Contact: Jill Holt jill.holt@stockporthomes.org and Jeremy Beatty Jeremy.beatty@stockporthomes.org

**Halton Housing Trust’s** scrutiny was formed in late 2010. One particular area the panel focused on during the repairs review was the concept of ‘right first time’ which saw the implementation of a new diagnostics tool which would allow customer service advisors, when logging jobs, to gather as much information as possible. They also recommended replicating this for customers who were logging online repairs. Feedback suggests satisfaction with repairs is improving.

The success of the panel has been recognised externally by a number of other housing organisations. The group has grown in confidence and has made a number of strong recommendations for changes and initiatives for implementation to the board. To date all of these have been accepted. They are dedicated individuals who are helping to improve the way in which the trust delivers their services.

Contact: Teresa Tierney teresa.tierney@haltonhousing.org

Tenant scrutiny at **Circle Housing South Anglia** has resulted in the following service improvements:

**From the review on communal cleaning**

- monitor that contractors work following their schedule and specifications
- introduce precise cleaning specifications and frequency for flats, houses, sheltered accommodations and foyers
Objective 4: To actively engage in bottom-up service reviews

Service reviews are a review of an organisation’s services with the aim of identifying service delivery improvements. A service review can be used to improve the organisation’s efficiency and effectiveness and assists in addressing financial sustainability.

For registered providers in England, the Value for Money (VFM) Standard places increased emphasis on achieving improvement under the framework of more active economic regulation. There is growing scrutiny on the part of the regulator in registered providers’ business plans and the use of assets. Service reviews can offer a systematic approach for providers to reviewing services and achieve efficiency gains.

From the review on the underoccupation incentive scheme

- rebrand the name of the scheme with residents’ suggestions
- organise mutual exchange events
- keep website up-to-date with details of neighbourhood officers
- advertise the incentive scheme on South Anglia website
- offer training to staff on a regular basis
- advertise furniture recycling schemes to residents.

Contact: Emma Jackson
Emma Jackson  Emma.Jackson@circle.org.uk

Six Town Housing’s Customer Review Groups are tenant-led and cover separately homes and neighbourhoods. Annually, with evidence, each group and/or business manager can request a ‘spotlight review’, which reviews a business area and makes recommendations to improve that service area. Both scrutiny groups have championed wider consultation and there is now an annual consultation plan of surveys and other ways to get involved including mystery shopping and workshops.

A gas spotlight review has resulted in a total of 40 service improvement recommendations which were accepted in full.

All recommendations will be achieved over a three year period and monitored:

- Six Town Housing is committed to a three year replacement of all old boilers so that no boilers are older than 15 years old
- there are now only two choices of new boilers
- customers have been fully engaged and trained to participate in procurement of the new gas servicing and repair contract
- customer service recommendations have been built into the new gas repair and service contract
- formal complaints have reduced considerably and compliments have increased.

Customer satisfaction and confidence has improved.

Contact: Ailsa Dunn A.Dunn@sixtownhousing.org

Learning from others

Gateshead Housing Company introduced TALISMAN (Tenant and Leaseholder Independent Scrutiny Management Panel) which has already achieved positive results for Gateshead Housing Company and tenants and leaseholders. TALISMAN has completed three reviews to date on ASB, rent and income and most recently voids. The panel have made some specific recommendations to improve the experience of customers and ensure that the organisation is providing clear and simple information on how to access services. The most recent review of voids was the first opportunity for the group to look more specifically at internal processes and identify potential efficiencies that could be made from current work practices and the role of the contractor in these processes.

A number of actions have already been achieved following the reviews, resulting in an improved service for all tenants and leaseholders. The reviews are just the start of the process, with customers involved in monitoring progress to make sure the landlord can deliver on its promises.

In addition to this, the work of the TALISMAN has in many areas provided an opportunity to recognise the commitment and hard work of employees to support tenants and leaseholders. Panel members have ensured that this has featured in their reports and their presentations to board members. Their work has also helped to provide an external validation of services. In particular this was extremely helpful in the review of rent and income to get the perspectives of the TALISMAN and the customers interviewed as part of their review on how the organisation had prepared and worked with tenants through welfare reform.

Contact: Louise Taylor LouiseTaylor@GatesheadHousing.co.uk

The customer excellence panel (CEP) was set up by Nottingham City Homes (NCH) to deliver its new approach to tenant scrutiny. In addition to carrying out service reviews a key element of the CEPs work is to rate the company’s progress against its four star promises.

As part of its commitment to the organisation’s corporate vision to ‘create homes and places where people want to live’ NCH has worked with tenants to develop a set of four star promises. These promises cover three areas:

- your home

NEW APPROACHES TO ALLOCATIONS
• your neighbourhood
• your service.

Each promise is rated for 0-4 stars based upon performance criteria, including the views of service users. An initial desk top review is undertaken by service managers to give a feel for how the service rates against each of the promises. The CEP then meets to look at the evidence to support these assessments and then gives its own assessment of performance. They produce a report with recommendations for areas for improvement and highlighting areas of strong performance. The CEP also rate the quality of the estates and blocks of flats managed by NCH and give them a star rating. The work of the CEP is supported by a team of ACE (Achieving Customer Excellence) inspectors who reality check standards on estates and evidence to support the four star promise assessments.

Where the assessment falls short of the required four stars, the CEP will work with officers to develop an action plan to close the gap. This action plan will be regularly monitored by the panel to ensure satisfactory progress is being made.

Some of the outcomes of this process have been:
• improved standards on estates and in service delivery
• increases in customer satisfaction
• training and qualifications for the CEP members and ACE inspectors
• some panel members have used their new found skills to increase their knowledge and confidence and have gone on to find full-time employment.

Contact: Gill Moy Gillian.Moy@nottinghamcityhomes.org.uk

Cestria Community Housing’s scrutiny committee conducted its first review of the aids and adaptations. At the conclusion of the review and after submission of the report to the board, an action plan was formulated to drive forward the committees recommendations. Some of the of the positive outcomes for Cestria tenants have been:
• review of OT application form and feedback form, resulted in an easier to read and complete application form and feedback form developed and put into operation
• new OT service specific information leaflets have been developed for tenants
• recommendation to create partnership with the local county council OT service to provide a more timely response to aids and adaptation requests from tenants. Typical response time for request down from a peak of 50 days to an average of 13 days
• reduction in occupational therapy (OT) costs from a peak of £600,000 to around £150,000
• by working closely with Durham County Council, storage area at one of our sites has been increased substantially, as OT equipment held by Cestria is now with the council
• releasing this storage space has created better stock area for repairs and heating parts which results in less waiting time for tenants requesting repairs
• new staff training has been developed to further improve the service we deliver to our customers.

Contact: Paul Hadden PaulHadden@cestria.org

A1 Housing has had a tenant scrutiny panel (TSP) in place since the summer of 2010. Since its inception the TSP has looked at various areas of the ALMO including estate inspections, the planned repairs process, the new tenant experience, the complaints procedure, and most recently rent arrears and advice. In all cases the panel has made recommendations how each service can be improved from a tenant perspective.

Some of the service improvements that have been introduced include: introductory events for new tenants called ‘Running Your Home’ where tenants can meet representatives from our housing, repairs, customer services and money advice teams; and improvements to the complaints service along with an increase and improvement of information that detail specific services.

Contact: Will Spence will.spence@bassetlaw.gov.uk
Learning from others

In November 2005 Community Gateway Association (CGA) came into existence with the transfer of 6,500 homes from Preston City Council. This was the first tenant-member owned housing association in the country – the product of a model developed out of the co-operative movement.

The Community Gateway Model aims to give tenants and leaseholders more control over their homes and living environment. It is based on the principle that rights to influence the running of the organisation are built into the structure of the organisation and its governance. In effect, ever since CGA’s creation, tenants had been scrutinising board decisions, management action and operational delivery. When tenant scrutiny came on the radar, CGA made no structural changes to what they did.

However, supporting this level of active involvement has always demanded a commitment to skills development on the part of the organisation and personal development on the part of involved tenants and leaseholders.

CGA has developed the ‘Purple Pathways’ Programme to bring the overall ethos of the Gateway Model into learning and development. The development process is described as ‘Pathways’ because this process fundamentally represents a journey through learning with a progressive focus on training, career development and talent management. Through the Pathways CGA helps all tenants identify a ‘destination’ (a goal) and the organisation creates an individual route for them to guide their journey so they can achieve that outcome. Scrutiny places demands on tenants that are not usually required in traditional tenant involvement – investigative, analytical, writing skills come to the fore.

Each Pathway has been designed in partnership with the group it has been created for. Group members identify gaps in their current skills, against the requirements, and then we look to develop them in the future. Each Pathway is really tailored to the needs of the group. The Pathway highlights key areas of focus so it can be embedded into the organisation in the longer term.

Contact: Paul Roberts paul.roberts@communitygateway.co.uk

Cornwall Housing has used tenant scrutiny to achieve service improvement and better outcomes for tenants and the organisation. The scrutiny panel has places for five tenants from the forum, four non-forum tenants, one leaseholder and one other customer.

Scrutiny has improved the wellbeing and development of the tenants involved. Panel members have been building their capacity and confidence through activities like negotiations with senior officers and presentations to the Board. Steve Hunt, a disabled panel member said, ‘Since I’ve been doing this my health has improved because I’m active and doing things.’

Rita Taylor, a member from Callington who is also a forum member said, ‘I especially enjoy scrutiny because it can help point out the good things, as well as the areas the service can improve. Being a member of the scrutiny panel helps me focus on what’s important for all tenants, rather than what I think is important.’

Contact: Emma West Emma.West@cornwallhousing.org.uk

Objective 4: To support better tenant engagement and empowerment

Tenant scrutiny can be an important tool supporting better engagement and empowerment and contributing to individual and community resilience.

With increasingly scarce public resources, there is an imperative for landlords to provide more targeted services and, in conversation with tenants, to identify the most effective way of delivering them. Targeting resources can be informed by an aspiration to strengthen independence and self-sufficiency through the provision of services which support self-sufficiency and resilience such as digital inclusion, energy efficiency schemes, employment and training and financial capability.

Tenant scrutiny can:

- formally roster the support of tenant champions within the community who can help your organisation develop better information about tenant needs and aspirations and advocate for the organisation more broadly among the wider tenant body
- act as a hub and a conduit for all formal contact points between you and your tenants and distil and interpret a range of information from different sources
- evaluate the effectiveness of relationships with third parties, such as contractors and the third sector who regularly engage with tenants
- offer specific opportunities for individual tenants to develop their skills and capacity and work-readiness
- identify, monitor and review the effectiveness of measures your organisation has introduced to support independence and resilience.

Our survey revealed that some housing organisations have gone on to offer work experience and permanent employment to tenant panel members.
How do you make sure you get it right?

This section sets out some of the key considerations that you will need to think about when developing or reviewing your approach to tenant scrutiny.

Before you introduce tenant scrutiny arrangements you need to be clear about the following points:

What do you want tenant scrutiny to achieve?

This question is key because it will influence:
- the structural elements you employ to support scrutiny as an activity
- the relationship between scrutiny arrangements and other mechanisms within your organisation for service management, performance monitoring, quality assurance, financial monitoring and economic regulation, tenant involvement, customer feedback and governance
- the skills, attributes and knowledge tenant scrutiny panel members are likely to need and this will determine how you approach recruitment and who you appoint.

How can you ensure that your scrutiny arrangements are accessible, representative and inclusive?

The wider tenant body will be disengaged and sceptical if tenant scrutiny arrangements are not sufficiently accessible, representative of and inclusive of tenants in their diversity. A real challenge for many organisations is that 'the usual suspects’ always get involved. This is not in itself a bad thing: consistently enthusiastic tenants are an invaluable resource for organisations; acting as both a critical friend and an advocate for the organisation; however, service outcomes will impact on diverse customers differently and organisations need to take this into account if they are to obtain meaningful critique. For this reason:
- recruitment of tenant scrutiny panel members should consciously take account of diversity
- there should be an emphasis on raising the profile of scrutiny and making as many tenants aware as possible of what it is and how to get involved. Some landlords have produced a guide to tenant scrutiny which explains what scrutiny is, how it works, and what scrutiny has achieved. Others offer financial support for childcare or funding for training to enhance panel members’ CVs
- attention should be given to how other forms of involvement (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) which may be more appealing to different groups (e.g. younger people) can inform and/or be incorporated into the scrutiny process. Some landlords have used interactive approaches to engagement such as use of Skype, video conferencing or online chat where panel members experience difficulties in attending meetings.

For tenant scrutiny mechanisms to be fit for purpose, the following elements are essential:

Have you identified clear roles and responsibilities?

Roles and responsibilities of tenant scrutiny panel members must be clear and agreed from the beginning. This will:
- avoid confusion in terms of activity
- will support clarity of purpose
- will provide focus for any training, development, mentoring, communication or secretarial support which the organisation may need to put in place to support panel members.

How will you develop skills and actively support capacity building?

In order to deliver against expectations, it is crucial that those undertaking scrutiny are supported and have the right skills and knowledge. This will mean organisations have to invest in the training, development and mentoring of tenant scrutiny panel members. Tenants will need support to:
- understand housing jargon and the technical, regulatory and constitutional elements which relate to the governance and management of a business
- develop inter-personal skills so they can engage as informed equals with service managers, the executive and board members
- develop group working skills so they can operate constructively as a scrutiny panel and manage internal conflict
- network with other tenant scrutiny groups and associated tenant bodies such as TAROE and TPAS to bring transformational learning into the organisation
- finally, staff will need to be trained and supported also to understand how tenant scrutiny relates to their role.

What terms of reference will you put in place?

It is vital that there are terms of reference and an enforceable code of conduct for scrutiny panels which will govern the operation of the panel. This will:
- strengthen the credibility of the group and enhance the confidence of others, such as the governing board and the wider tenant body
- it will provide a referenced point for dispute resolution or disciplinary action
- it will support the formality and reputability of the scrutiny
process as a core component of governance, business management and tenant involvement.

A code of conduct could include:
- qualities required of scrutiny panel members e.g. objectivity, not furthering a personal agenda, accountability, honesty and integrity, transparency and openness and leadership
- declarations of any conflicts of interest which might compromise objectivity
- conduct e.g. time commitment, making a contribution, willingness to work through conflict and maintaining positive relationships, confidentiality, financial probity.

Terms of reference could include:
- a statement of purpose of the panel
- definition of activities to be undertaken by the panel
- recruitment policy for panel members including exclusions to the process (e.g. existing board members or staff members, etc)
- tenure
- management and operation cycle
- equality and diversity
- working with other performance management, quality assurance, regulatory and governance structures within the organisation
- approach to monitoring and review.

How are you going to effectively resource your approach?

Tenant scrutiny cannot be effective unless it is resourced by the landlord. Resourcing includes:
- a secretariat (to support meeting preparation, minute taking, room booking, budget control and dissemination of papers)
- skills support, such as a governance officer or support from tenant involvement staff
- technical support, such as access to laptops and the internet
- a dedicated budget which the panel can use to commission its own support, consultancy or training.

How can you make sure you maintain the momentum?

Some landlords have highlighted difficulties in maintaining the momentum of scrutiny panels. Ways of maintaining the momentum of tenant scrutiny include:
- keep it fresh: refreshing areas for scrutiny and measures of performance on a regular basis will keep the process interesting and relevant
- change should happen quickly: organisations should ensure that recommendations made by a tenant scrutiny panel should be implemented quickly. Landlords should set deadlines for implementation which are monitored and reviewed
- celebrate success: it is vital that scrutiny panel members, the governing board, staff and the wider tenant body can see tangible benefits to scrutiny.

How will you measure the success of your scrutiny arrangements?

Tenant scrutiny must be outcome focused. A scrutiny panel must be clear about its purpose and intended results. While establishing processes for scrutiny, be clear from the outset what successful scrutiny will look like – what has changed as a result of scrutiny and what has been achieved? Scrutiny panels need to be mindful of the following elements:
- aims: be clear about what scrutiny wants to achieve
- objectives: identify specific changes or improvements that scrutiny wants to make happen to the service
- actions: plan and execute actions toward each intended outcome
- outcomes: measure success by what has improved, not which actions were undertaken.
Final thoughts

From our research we have identified the following key conclusions to help you shape your approach to tenant scrutiny:

**Be clear about the relationship and the differences between tenant scrutiny and wider tenant engagement:** tenant scrutiny interfaces with a range of other different mechanism for tenant involvement in a housing organisation. Tenant scrutiny will be stronger if it can draw on the work and views of other tenant groups within the organisation such as tenant forums and customer panels. This is important because it supports joined-up conversations in the organisation and mitigates the risk of scrutiny operating in a silo. However, to avoid overlap of action, possible rivalry and misunderstanding, and to ensure the seamless transfer of relevant information between different tenant groups and structures, it is vital that the purpose of a scrutiny panel is communicated clearly and effectively across other involved tenant groups to ensure that there is a good relationship between them.

For tenant scrutiny to be focused, it needs to be distinguished from - but informed by - wider engagement activities.

**Get the culture right and embed scrutiny in an organisation:** effective tenant scrutiny will require organisational buy-in from staff at all levels. This means having the right culture: a clear understanding and acceptance of tenant scrutiny by the governing board, leadership, staff and wider tenant membership. This may involve significant cultural change. There are two elements to this:

- communicating with staff about the importance and benefits of tenant scrutiny. Although most staff will be accustomed to being asked questions by tenants about performance, tenant scrutiny could be experienced as challenging by some. Staff will need to be trained and supported to understand how tenant scrutiny can provide a necessary reality check about service quality, develop a better relationship between tenants and staff in the long run; and lead to improved performance and business value.
- ensuring tenant scrutiny arrangements integrate with other business and performance measurement system and approaches to governance: tenant scrutiny should be fully part of the formal structure which forms the operating and assessment framework of an organisation. Tenant scrutiny should relate to the decision-making structure of the organisation, including its relationship with (and separation from) governance and management. There should be a clear and accepted way in which it influences the setting of strategic direction. For tenant scrutiny to be effective, it must integrate with the strategic and performance management frameworks of a landlord.

**Refresh membership, succession planning:** as tenant scrutiny arrangements become more embedded in housing organisations, there will inevitably be churn and turn-over of scrutiny panel members. Some organisations have reported high levels of drop-outs in early years. This can present organisations with a real challenge, particularly if panel members leave in significant numbers. To mitigate this risk, organisations should:

- have mechanisms in place to review tenant panel membership: this may mean establishing appointment cycles to avoid turn-over at one period
- having some turnover of different tenants involved in scrutiny, to keep perspectives and challenges fresh
- avoid appointment cycles for tenant scrutiny groups that result in the whole membership changing at once
- have a robust recruitment process to ensure panel members have the right attributes, are clear about what is expected of them and are supported in their role
- consider surveying tenants more widely to find out what might make involvement in scrutiny more attractive or why they choose not to be involved; this could be because of the regularity of the meetings, the times, the workload, or tenants may find the prospect daunting, etc. This will help future planning
- consider offering participation incentives e.g. training or shopping vouchers to provide a value-added offer to prospective members.

To pay or not to pay: there is by no means a uniform view on this question. Some landlords and tenant scrutiny groups hold the view that payment could compromise the impartiality of the scrutiny process or provide the ‘wrong’ type of incentive for active involvement. Others see it as an important means of recognising that tenants give up their time and contribute their skills and energy to improving the business and should therefore be paid. Other landlords adopt a more flexible approach and place financial incentives within the wider context of tenant involvement e.g. offering points in exchange for shopping vouchers for a spectrum of involvement activities ranging from answering a survey to being a scrutiny panel member. All landlord’s should have an adequate reimbursement policy, however, which meets all the costs a tenant may incur in being involved in scrutiny.

**Being positive about change:** tenant scrutiny is a process and as such it is active and organic. One of our respondents commented critically ‘the verb “scrutiny” has developed into a noun’ and there is always the risk that landlords and tenants can become fixated on maintaining tenant scrutiny as a structural entity rather than looking at creative ways of vivifying the scrutiny process to deliver meaningful outcomes or changing the structure and focus of scrutiny if it is no longer for purpose.

**For tenant scrutiny to deliver meaningful outcomes for the business and for customers, it must have real and effective power:** it must be more than an exercise in consultation or tenant participation. This means the ability to make an impact on the decision-making processes in an organisation, including management and governance.
Finding out more

Co-regulation: a briefing for housing associations, housing authorities and ALMOs

Tenant panels – options for accountability
http://nationaltenants.org/tenantpanels/

Developing tenant scrutiny and co-regulation in social housing - Lessons from the co-regulatory champions

Stories in tenant scrutiny and co-regulation in social housing - Case studies from the co-regulatory champions and others

Tenant scrutiny - now and in the future

HCA – Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England

Accenture 2013 Global Consumer Pulse Survey


LGiu (2013) Strong foundations: building better dialogue between tenants and landlords

Top tips for tenants: holding your landlord to account through scrutiny

TPAS Cymru: getting results, showing the evidence: monitoring and evaluation guide and toolkit with a focus on outcomes

Quality Assured Scrutiny: Quality Assured Scrutiny is the framework of standards and new tenant scrutiny accreditation service from TPAS, HouseMark and CIH championing co-regulation.
http://www.cih.co.uk/qualityassuredscrutiny
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