

ALMOs get behind #HousingDay

Press release

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Arm's length management organisations (ALMOs) are built on the principle of putting tenants at the heart of all they do. Chloe Fletcher, Policy Director of the National Federation of ALMOs (NFA), discusses the importance of working in partnership with tenants and why the NFA is supporting this year's Housing Day.

Housing Day is a fantastic way of sharing the great work all housing providers do as well as sharing the stories of our tenants with not only each other, but the wider public too. As ALMOs were founded on the principle of involving tenants throughout all decision making processes we believe they are well placed to help tell those stories and publicise the great things their tenants are doing locally.

To ensure tenants' voices are represented within ALMOs, not only are their boards structured so that one-third of members are council tenants, each ALMO has its own tenant engagement structures to make sure the wider resident voice is heard.

Last year's Housing Day put the focus on the staff across the housing sector who work hard to deliver the valuable services many take for granted. Workers from across the spectrum helped paint a picture of a 'day in the life' of a housing professional, with the hashtag even trending on Twitter. This year, organisers want tenants to make their voice heard too, something that we at the NFA fully support.

ALMOs across the country are planning a range of initiatives to get tenants involved and share their stories about why social housing is important. These will challenge the recent media trend of portraying affordable housing as being synonymous with benefits, unemployment and anti-social behaviour. Showcasing real tenant stories will show the faces behind the headlines and underline the importance of social and affordable housing in this country, as well as the changes that need to be made to tackle the current housing crisis.

ALMOs have also made good use of Tenant Panels in recent years to ensure tenants can challenge the performance of the organisation and hold the ALMO to account on delivery. With 47 ALMOs across the country managing more than 650,000 homes, there are hundreds of tenants engaging with their ALMOs to ensure services are run in an efficient and effective way.

ALMOs such as Brent Housing Partnership, Berneslai Homes, Stockport Homes and Welwyn Hatfield Community Housing Trust have used different types of Tenant Panels successfully, whether to scrutinise local housing services or deal with complaints, over many years.

Welwyn Hatfield Community Housing Trust runs a mystery shopping plus scheme, where tenants are trained to be 'real life' mystery shoppers, giving feedback on genuine interactions they have had with all aspects of their housing service. This is one of a wide range of tenant

involvement options, enabling the Trust to develop and improve services further based on customer feedback.

Other initiatives include a thriving repairs focus group, which has already delivered tangible changes to the maintenance service, and a new Neighbourhood Improvement Scheme which delivers environmental and estate improvements that have been suggested by residents. Improving housing standards is only one part of ALMOs' work to regenerate neighbourhoods. They also have an active role in improving the local environment and contribute to the quality of the lives of tenants through providing after school clubs, employment and training schemes and activities for both young and older people.

Your Homes Newcastle's 'Going for Gold' project gives tenants the opportunity to drive up environmental standards on their estates. Customer estate inspectors have committed hundreds of hours in volunteering to look for graffiti, fly tipping and litter across 129 estates every year. Tenants report any issues including overgrown grassed areas, weeds and dog fouling. At the end of each visit, inspectors award the estate a bronze, silver or gold medal and suggest changes to improve the appearance of estates. Inspectors also look for possible investment opportunities in the different areas they visit, meaning groups across the communities benefit from the visits.

Our most recent welfare survey assessing the impact of the spare room subsidy on tenants and ALMOs highlights the work that ALMOs are also doing to provide advice on debt reduction, tackle fuel poverty, encourage digital inclusion and support vulnerable or isolated tenants deal with the recent changes to the welfare system.

Tenant involvement is key to making the ALMO model unique in the social housing sector and means ALMOs are well-equipped to deliver more locally responsive services to their communities. The NFA works closely with tenant organisations including The Tenant Empowerment Organisation (TPAS) and Tenants and Residents Organisations of England (TAROE) to promote tenant engagement and share best practice in this area and we are encouraging all ALMOs to respond to the recent "call for evidence" for the "Tenants Leading Change" project to make the business case for tenant involvement in social housing.

We are looking forward to Housing Day this year to help promote a more positive image of the vast majority of hardworking, caring tenants as we try to challenge the vicious stereotypes perpetuated by the mainstream media. Social and affordable housing is desperately needed across the country to provide safe, warm and decent housing for all parts of the community. With the General Election on the horizon, we need the government and the wider public to recognise this and put housing at the top of the political agenda and we welcome this opportunity for all tenants to challenge the 'Benefits Street' myth and share the true stories behind many people's need for social housing.