

Attracting and Retaining Tenant Board Members

Tim Morton from Engage Associates

ALMOs fiercely protect their reputation of having tenants at the heart of their business, with effective engagement methods that encourage and support tenants to become members of their Board. **Currently all ALMOs have Tenant Board Members on their Boards.**

Speaking at the NFA Annual Conference 2015 I will be discussing why this is so important and what mechanisms can be used in practice to attract, support and retain Tenant Board Members - or **Board members who are tenants**, as we prefer to say in Engage Associates.

I've been involved with social housing tenants since my first job in the sector back in 1984, where I worked with tenants who had recently moved back into a refurbished tower block to set up a Tenant Management Co-op. Unlike many of those who work in social housing I did not start life on a council estate and at that point I had never stepped into a tower block. A senior manager said to me just before we met the tenants for the first time "I hope you've got your flak jacket on" just as we entered the room. I confess to a moment of panic. These were council tenants after all, and you know what they're like.

But. They had chosen to move into the tower block and to wait while it was refurbished, they had chosen to explore this model of tenant management over 18 months, they had to be over 30 and many were older still. Everyone had a job unless they were retired like the brother and sister who had returned to the UK after many years' service in the Indian Army, both white of course. **My prejudices were shattered and have remained in pieces ever since.**

In our work we regularly meet all kinds of people who rent social housing, some with huge life experiences, some just setting out, but all with a commitment to make their community a better place. Some do this through local activities; campaigns, gardens, play schemes and some take the plunge into management and boards, some of course move through these activities over time.

I don't recognise the stereotypes of social housing and tenants presented in the media, and believe it is part of the process of dismantling the housing part of the welfare state. It is important therefore to challenge these myths because if they were true why on earth would you have tenants on the board?

Tenants bring a broad range of qualities to the Board, and the social housing sector would be much poorer without their insight and passion.

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