

## Is there a case for tenant board members?

**By Phil Morgan**

A few years ago I was approached by the Housing Corporation to discuss tenant board members. It was explained to me that tenant board members were wrongly placed for modern boards and that it would be helpful if any requirements for tenants to be on boards could be removed. Tenants could, of course, still apply for independent Board places. Quite understandably at that time I explained, politely, why I thought that tenant board members were a valuable part of Board governance. Then John Prescott announced there would be a tenant on every Housing Association Board and the issue was quietly shelved.

Today, however, Housing Association and ALMO Boards look very different. The role of Board Members has increased substantially, and commentators, including myself, have emphasised the importance of Boards having the necessary skills to carry out that role effectively. Housing Association Boards have reviewed their governance structures and reduced, or removed, their arrangements for tenant and local representation. The revised NHF Code of Governance makes it clear that where there is such 'representation' that it should be subject to robust interview and selection. So was the Housing Corporation right about removing tenant board members all those years ago?

Certainly the need to ensure effective governance comes first. In that context I think a case can, and should, be made for tenants on boards. I also think it has to be in the context of a more robust approach to Board governance and skills. Succession planning, which can build on successful scrutiny panels and other tenant structures, and comprehensive induction and training can help with skills. Recruiting independents that bring the remainder of the skills necessary for a successful board can support this.

There has always been a cohort of very successful tenant board members and chairs - perhaps now is the time we as a sector should be looking for ways to use this cohort more effectively to help mentor and support the tenant board members of tomorrow?

Phil Morgan Limited  
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