



Involving tenants is an investment not a cost – its no surprise!

By Nic Bliss

ALMOs have been noted as tenant involvement trend setters. Several fed in strong contributions to the joint National Tenant Organisation/University of Birmingham recent report *An Investment not a Cost* examining the business benefits of involving tenants.

Funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government, the report identified that “investing in tenant involvement can produce financial, service, social and community benefits”. Having engaged with about half of the housing sector, some told us about financial savings, whilst others referred to improvements in tenant satisfaction and services. Most also referred to a *social dividend*, such as developing informal support networks and tackling isolation, particularly amongst elderly people, and growing self-esteem, confidence, and potentially employability, amongst those that get involved.

These conclusions will come as no surprise to most ALMOs, particularly those with well developed tenant involvement. But perhaps more surprising was how little the sector could clearly articulate benefits. Our second conclusion was that “the housing sector needs to be doing much more to identify and publicise the benefits that derive from involvement”. With the current emphasis on value for money, it is particularly important that ALMOs and others are clear about outcomes. Not least because – funnily enough – there are still people out there who don’t get it! Middle management was particularly identified to us as a strata where tenant involvement is seen as a tick-box add on that diverts from delivering the real day job. C’mon – admit it – even in the best ALMO, there will still be staff who think that way.

And perhaps more importantly, during the course of our work, we identified 40 out of 120 landlords we rang to encourage attendance at workshops who we described as *impenetrable*. As in – when we rang to ask about tenant involvement, the person who spoke to us had no idea what we were talking about, and refused to put us through to anyone. Happily none of these were ALMOs. But as a housing movement, where one noted housing association recently announced “the death of tenant participation” in Inside Housing, we really need those who understand the fantastic potential outcomes from involving tenants to be shouting about it.

With that in mind, we are now working on a follow on project to develop a simple commonly accepted framework for landlords to identify tenant involvement benefits. No doubt ALMOs will be first in line to get on board.

For further information – www.nationaltenants.org