

Every Voice Counts

A spotlight on tenant engagement



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The NFA would like to thank all the ALMOs who provided case studies for this briefing. Further information about individual ALMO tenant engagement strategies can be found on the individual ALMO websites.

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Cover photograph: Stockport Homes Digital Inclusion Programme

Published By:

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Whilst all reasonable care and attention has been taken in compiling this publication, the authors, publishers and editorial team regret that they cannot assume responsibility for any error or omission that it contains.

Foreword



I am delighted to introduce this tenant engagement briefing by the National Federation of ALMOs.

It is an incredibly timely and relevant publication and I would urge everyone working in the sector to take a read and reflect on the great practice that is happening in ALMOs across the country.

Excellent tenant engagement has never been about ticking a box or a one size fits all approach. It's about finding the right mechanisms and processes and projects that work for each individual organisation to deliver the tangible difference to the services tenants receive and the opportunities they can access.

What this briefing shows is how organisations can bring together the more well-established forms of involvement with newer ideas and initiatives. If tenants are to stay truly engaged and influential there must be ample options to get involved in ways that suit them and reflect our changing lifestyles. It is heartening to see how ALMOs across England have adapted and innovated with new practical ways to engage and embraced technology and social media to reach even more people in the community.

ALMOs place tenants right at the heart of the business and that is more important than ever. Tenants must be heard **and** listened to in order to ensure organisations remain focused on delivering safe and affordable homes within thriving communities.

Enjoy the read.

Jenny Osbourne
Tpas Chief Executive

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Introduction

“The only motivation I need is my passion for people. Tenants know what they need and want much better than I do. I just keep my ears and mind open” – Jen Barfoot, Chief Executive, Homes in Sedgemoor.

ALMOs are council owned arms-length management organisations which manage housing stock on behalf of their local authority. As at March 2018, there were 33 ALMOs managing nearly 450,000 properties. The National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) is the membership body for all housing ALMOs.

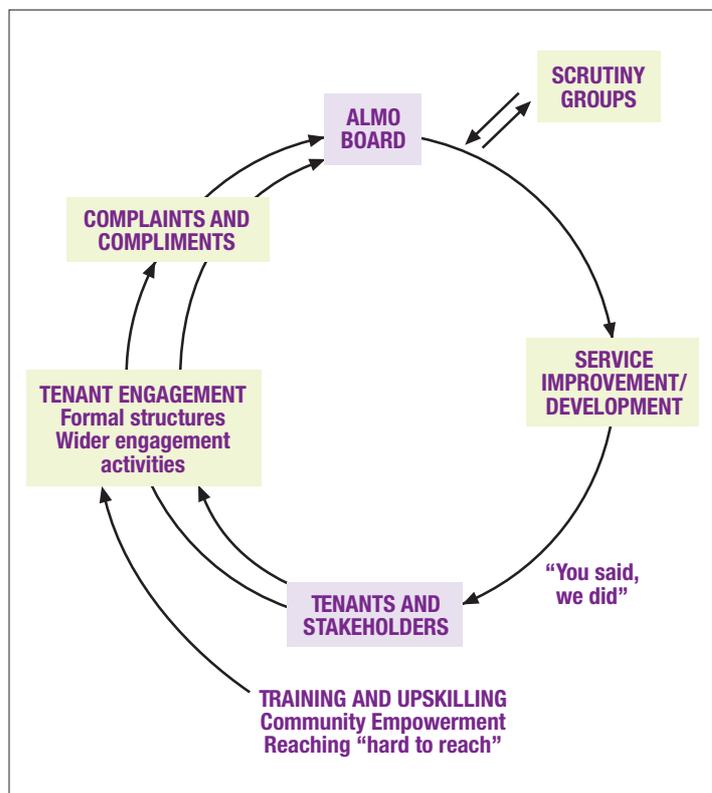
ALMOs have a core commitment to engage tenants in all aspects of their work. This Best Practice Briefing updates the 2015 survey and briefing, *Our Homes Our Say*, and highlights up-to-date good practice examples from across the country. Due to space we have not been able to mention all the initiatives which ALMOs are involved in, but it provides a flavour of the work being done across the country.

ALMOs work with some of the most vulnerable individuals in the country: often people with insecure circumstances, who are more likely to be in poor health, and who may be less likely to have the space, time or inclination to engage with public sector organisations. As a result, ALMOs have always worked hard to **empower** individuals and communities, utilising a range of initiatives including digital inclusion, tenancy sustainment, training and employment support, financial wellbeing and healthy living programmes to support them to improve their life chances and be in a position to engage.¹

ALMOs promote **traditional engagement frameworks** alongside more creative practices for those who are less likely to engage in these traditional methods. Tenants are involved in setting the governance framework, monitoring and scrutinising performance and reporting back to the Board, with most ALMOs choosing to have **tenant board members** to ensure the tenant voice is heard.

For some tenants, a complaint is the way that they first – and possibly only – engage with an organisation, and for this reason, we have included complaints management in this briefing. ALMOs operate **comprehensive complaints frameworks**, with tenants involved in the development of these frameworks and the scrutiny of complaints.

ALMOs have robust processes to ensure that the information from tenant engagement is fed into governance processes and is used to **improve services and processes**, ensure **value for money**, and **develop new services** to meet the needs of communities. These change from ALMO to ALMO depending on tenant feedback and local needs. They also utilise a range of methods to communicate the outcomes of tenant engagement – the **“you said, we did”** element of the feedback loop. Openness and transparency is a key part of this, with annual reviews, scrutiny reports and other documents freely published and available online and in print.



Transferring Power through Tenant Engagement

¹ For in-depth case studies, please see the NFA's *Life Chances* Briefing (May 2017)

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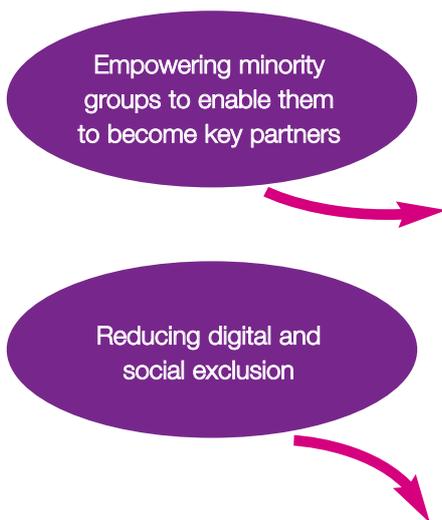
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Empowering Communities

The most important outcome of successful tenant engagement is the transference of power from organisations to tenants and communities, and as a result, better outcomes for those tenants, communities and organisations. This is especially important in local authority and other social housing where tenants often do not have the choice to ‘take their services elsewhere’ if they are not happy. For this reason ALMOs have, from their inception, encouraged tenants to take up places in their structures and have provided a framework of opportunities to get involved, from formal board membership to formal and informal tenant engagement to community-based events. Genuine involvement of tenants balances the power relationship and ensures that ALMOs work in the best interests of their tenants.

ALMOs are also deeply embedded within the local communities where they are located and work hard to build the social capital of those communities, empowering them to better their life chances and better hold their landlord to account.

The following two examples highlight how ALMOs work to empower their tenants and communities:



Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH)

CBH originally set up the Disabled Community Forum and the Polish Community Forum as a starting point to help bring communities together and to empower those who are need of extra help. Both groups were hugely successful and were proactive in working with CBH to address the needs of those who may be underrepresented or disadvantaged in Cheltenham. After achieving all their objectives, the forums were eventually handed over to enable the members to form their own independent peer groups. A prime example of this is the formation of the Oasis Ability Hub and the Cheltenham Polish Tenants’ and Residents’ Association (TARA) who have become key partners of CBH. Both groups are making great progress in forging new relationships with local businesses, developing innovative ways of setting up peer support, and organising various social activities to form new social networks.

Stockport Homes

Working together with the Starting Point Community Learning Partnership, Stockport Homes is tackling digital and social exclusion in their communities, targeting the hardest to reach by using motivators such as food, health, and family ancestry. The organisations recognise the frequent link between digital isolation and social isolation, and they are actively working to empower people.

The project actively targets the hardest people to reach, involving partners such as JobCentre Plus, libraries and community groups. Local people are equipped to steer their own digital inclusion by building up skills, securing funding to purchase their own kit, and deciding where local support should take place.



Since March 2016, this partnership has supported communities to gain around £83,000 of external funding, plus £3,869 in matched funding. It has developed 28 local “Digital Heroes” and increased local capacity through training Stockport Homes’ staff volunteers to deliver community and drop-in digital sessions.

Most recently the partnership has created a new social enterprise, Windmill coffee shop, which employs excluded young people and reinvests profits into local communities.

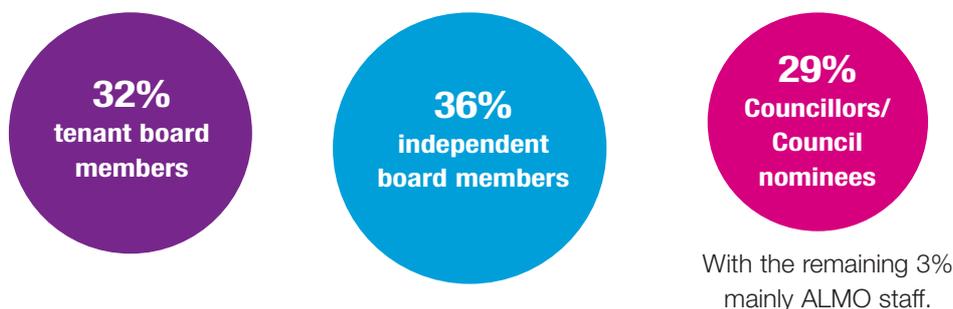
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Governance and Decision-Making at Board Level

ALMOs are completely owned by their local authority and are run by a board of directors; in all but one case, Your Homes Newcastle, this is made up of Independents, Councillors/Council nominees and recruited tenants whereby no single group is in the majority. In the case of Your Homes Newcastle, they have recently moved away from the traditional governance model to a different model which is more applicable to them (see box).

In our latest Annual Survey (December 2017) the average make-up of an ALMO Board was:



The majority of ALMOs have an independent chair (72%) while three ALMOs have a tenant chair.

Board members are equally responsible for setting business plans, governance arrangements, monitoring progress and scrutinising performance and value for money. They also set the tenant engagement framework and ensure that tenant voices are being heard. Although tenant board members do not and cannot speak for all tenants, they can ensure that the focus on tenant issues is maintained.

"I first got involved in tenant involvement because my ethos was that every tenant should have a good home. Their landlord should make sure they are listened to, and have a high quality repair service. They must also make sure that a tenant's home is safe and secure for everyone. As many tenants will tell you, this was not the case all those years ago. That is why I became involved, so little by little I could support tenants to change their lives and their homes, and 17 years later, I am still here doing just that" – Chris Moseley, Chair of the Board, Homes in Sedgemoor

Your Homes Newcastle

ALMOs and local authorities are continually reviewing the structure of their boards to make sure they balance tenant participation with the skills needed to govern organisations which are increasingly growing in complexity.

Following an extensive consultation process across the city, Your Homes Newcastle and Newcastle City Council have reviewed the ALMO governance model to make it more effective for the organisation. They have reduced the Board from 19 members to 12, with 4 Council representatives and 8 Independents. Selection to the Board is undertaken using a skills-based role profile. Tenants can apply for an Independent place, and currently one Board Member is also a tenant. At the same time, a Customer Services Committee has been established consisting entirely of tenants which reports into the board. The Customer Services Committee carries out monitoring, scrutiny and oversight of the housing management services for the organisation.

For Newcastle, this model enables more tenants to be engaged at a high level whilst balancing the need for a Board with the skills to manage the organisation.

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Tenant Board Member Voices



Jamie Hirst, Tenant Board Member at Stockport Homes Group

“I applied for the position (on the board) to contribute back into the community and the organisation, and to provide customer insight. I have to admit, that before taking up my position I was a bit concerned that as a customer board member I would be taking up a token role, with no real input. How wrong was I!?! Right from the beginning, with support from the governance team, I have played a full part in the board and its sub-committees. I have had my views both challenged and respected, whilst at the same time respectfully challenging the views of both other board members and the senior management team.

I have had opportunities to receive individual briefings on the group’s approach to specific issues, including; how customers are being supported through welfare reform, and most recently about the organisation’s Equality and Diversity work.

The organisation doesn’t “make do” and wherever possible goes the extra mile. Its strong customer and staff engagement clearly pays off as the group enjoys a strong brand loyalty I have not previously witnessed in 20 years of working in various public sector organisations.”

Georgina Walters – Resident Board Member at Homes for Haringey (HfH)

“It has been my vocation since joining the Board in 2009 to support and encourage progressive change; striving for quality social housing for residents in the Haringey community. As a resident board member, I am committed to representing my fellow residents and the wider community. Moreover, I am pleased to help local people have a say in the services they receive. I want to see HfH address issues like homelessness and anti-social behaviour and help to create safer neighbourhoods where residents can live, grow and thrive.

Good resident engagement is crucial in shaping services that residents want and board members are the key to advocating effective service delivery. As part of the Board, I help to review services, inform improvement, target areas for saving money; all of which impacts the lives of residents, their families and the wider community for the better. I find this an extremely satisfying and fulfilling part of my role.”



Rodger Haldenby, Vice Chair of the Board and Chair of the Performance & Improvement Committee at St Leger Homes of Doncaster

“The outstanding feature of the company who secured the contract for the Decent Homes work in Doncaster (St Leger Homes of Doncaster) was its core values of tenant involvement at all levels of the business. I was lucky enough to be selected, first all for the Area Boards for Tenant Scrutiny, but later for the Board itself. I felt that once you had gained the trust of the other board members (independent members and selected council members) the tenant board members became part of the committees that had involvement with Audit, Health & Safety, Quality, Governance and Procurement.

Tenant Board members have had input on many policy changes for St Leger Homes, and the company want that involvement too from our TARAs and tenants themselves.

The basis of getting the chance to have some input into what happens in the community is to make yourself available to attend meetings and to involve yourself in the community. You don’t have to be a wordsmith, or eloquent, but I find I can make a difference by being visible and having the conviction that all tenants can make a difference in the neighbourhoods and communities. St Leger Homes have always consulted on every aspect of change that may affect a tenant’s life and wellbeing. Sometimes, tenants say there is too much consultation, but with consultation comes trust with an outcome, and knowledge that the outcome is tenant focused and tenant led.”

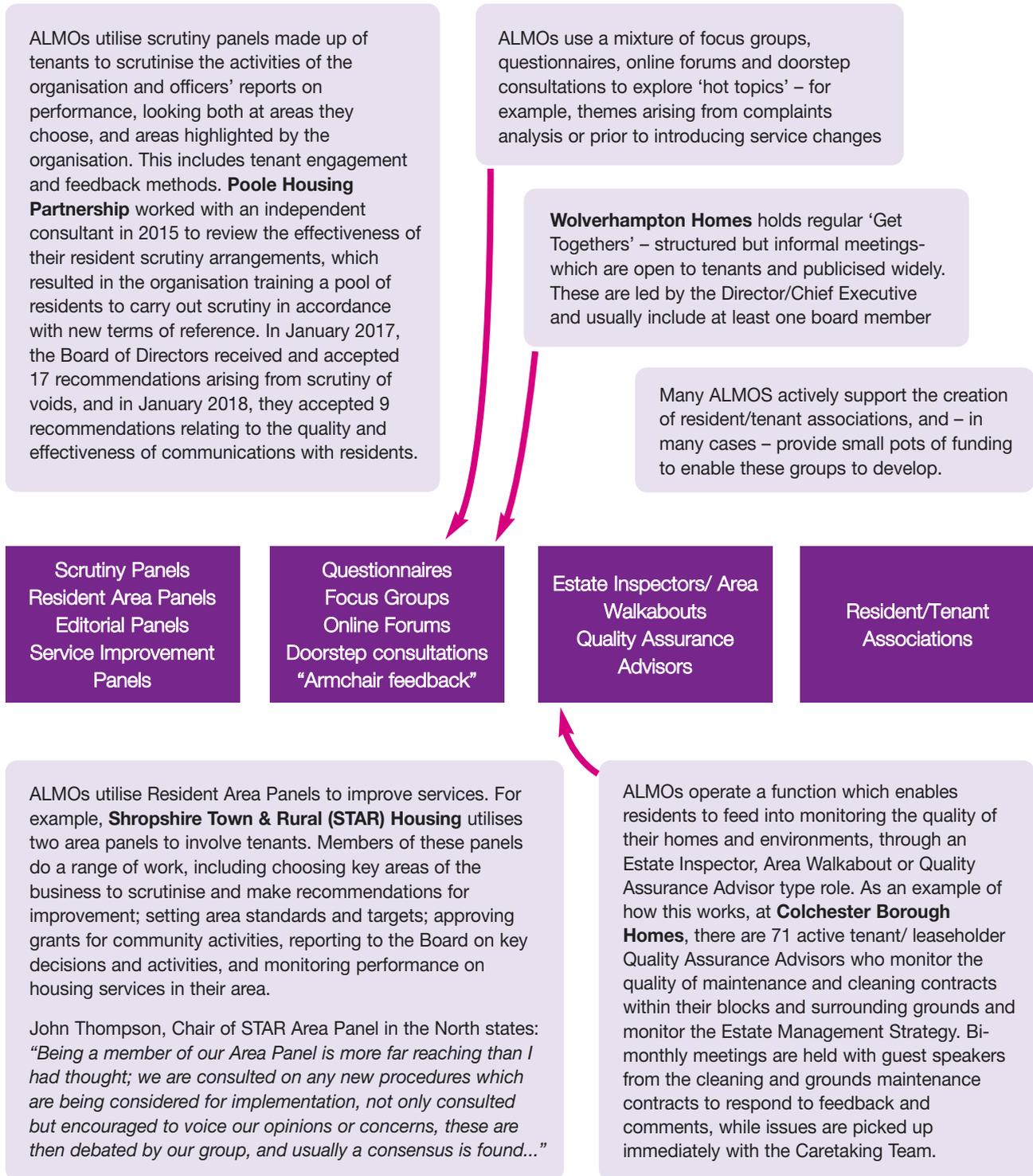
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Opportunities to Engage

“Tenants at the heart has always been my mantra, today off to my bi-monthly meeting with engaged tenants – direct access to me, my management team & Board” – Helen Jaggard, Chief Executive Berneslai Homes

Every ALMO operates a resident/tenant engagement and involvement strategy which is designed around the needs of the communities where they work, with the majority operating all or many of the mechanisms below.



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Nottingham City Homes

Like many ALMOs, Nottingham City Homes has a range of initiatives which draw tenants into engagement in traditional and non-traditional ways, including (but not limited to):

- The Street and Block Champions initiative, which supports and celebrates residents who are passionate about helping their neighbourhood, encouraging people to do whatever they can, as often as they can, whenever they can;
- The Grander Designs project which sees residents having input throughout the improvement and modernisation of independent living schemes across the city. As a result of this, the organisation now has communal areas which are designed by, and belong to, residents;
- Following the Grenfell Tragedy, NCH delivered reassurance events to residents at 13 tower blocks. Sessions were attended by representatives from across the business, local councillors and Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service;
- The organisation has Fit in the Community initiatives which focus on getting more residents active or more active through traditional and non-traditional methods such as outdoor yoga at the local community garden. They have also delivered the Golden Games at their various independent living schemes across the City which involves age appropriate activities for older people.



Two annual events showcase the positive difference that residents make. The most recent Fun Day had around 1,500 people and provided a platform for resident and partners to demonstrate what they do. There is also a Tenant and Leaseholder awards to celebrate the ongoing contribution that residents make, with residents making nominations and forming part of the panel selecting the winners.

Berneslai Homes – Challenge Berneslai

“As a responsible landlord we know how important it is that our tenants are at the heart of everything we do, and that is where Challenge Berneslai comes in.”

Berneslai Homes’ tenant scrutiny panel is independently led by Barnsley Federation of Tenants and Residents. There is a strong structure in place, which sees the organisation sharing in detail quarterly performance reports, bi-annual self-assessments of performance against local offers, and an annual self-assessment of compliance with consumer standards. This along with other tenant feedback gives “triggers” for their scrutiny or suggestions for service improvements or changes. Their most recent project was to follow the journey of an empty property, which has resulted in tenants being more involved in assessing the satisfaction of new tenants, the development of marketing plans for lower demand properties and quality assurance activities around information given to new tenants.

Newark & Sherwood Homes



Newark & Sherwood Homes have developed a ‘menu’ of engagement options which allow people to get involved at different levels to suit them depending on time, availability and interest: from starters, such as Tenants’ and Residents’ Groups, to a main such as the Tenant Forum, to a dessert as a Tenant Board Member.

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Derby Homes



Derby Homes undertook a door knock campaign over 5 weeks from September to October 2017. As the customer survey informs the organisation's Delivery Plan and Strategic Objectives for the following year, it was vital for them to speak to as many people as possible. The aim was to get a response from at least 10% of the 13,000 properties. The purpose was to speak to customers face-to-face and understand how services and neighbourhoods could be improved.

Five areas of Derby were picked which best represented the tenant population. Over the five week period, each week would cover one area, and each day of the week would focus on a new group of streets. Each day, the organisation set up a 'hub' with

the Customer Engagement van so any local residents who happened to be passing could come and speak to staff. The majority of the campaign was conducted between 9am and 4pm, but several events were carried out in the evening to capture the views of people who might have been at work during the day.

The initial target was 1,700 completed surveys, but the final tally was over 1,900. During the campaign, over 100 members of staff from all areas of Derby Homes visited approximately 6,000 properties. Delivering the survey also helped the organisation to promote the Get Online Incentive Scheme, and gather information regarding tenants' preferred communication methods, helping to ensure records are up to date.

In previous years, the data collected through the annual doorstep survey has been used to create a set of 10 customer priorities and a corporate plan to respond to these, progress of which has been monitored through the tenant led operational board. This year, data is being analysed at a more localised level to deliver local customer priority responses. These priorities will be based on the top two or three concerns reported in each of the local housing management areas.

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN)

YHN have introduced a new Customer Services Committee within their governance structure which is tenant-led, to ensure that tenants' views will directly impact on the strategic decisions of the organisation. A skills matrix ensures that tenants are recruited who have certain skills and personal qualities, and a commitment to social housing and the aims of YHN. There is a board member on the Committee whose role is to keep the main Board apprised of the work of the new committee and their recommendations, and act as a link between the two.

The Committee has a programme of areas of work to look at throughout the year. There will be regular items on the agenda to check on how the organisation is improving service delivery based on customer feedback. Senior management will receive regular customer insight reports which will give them an opportunity to address issues earlier rather than waiting for committee meetings. The Committee will monitor the action plans produced from the insight team to measure the impact and drivers for change.

The link with the Board will report back to YHN Board any issues of concern, and will identify opportunity for insight from the Board forward plan or from Board discussions, to bring back to the committee for attention.

The committee will meet quarterly but YHN is planning to engage the group digitally by providing them with laptops to get feedback and hold discussion with them at any time.

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Upskilling and Training

The majority of our members provide training to tenants which enables them to enhance their skills, gain confidence, and – in a number of cases – more effectively scrutinise and interrogate the work of the organisation. For example, The Gateshead Housing Company delivers free training courses through its Moving Forward customer training programme which includes courses such as Effective Meeting Skills, Confidence Building, Digital Training and How to be an Effective Mystery Shopper among others. The programme is promoted through the tenant newsletter, social media, Gateshead Council's Learning & Skills brochure as well as at community events.

Nottingham City Homes

Nottingham City Homes utilises its Tenant Academy to provide training across a range of areas, giving customers the ability to gain the skills, knowledge and tools required to make effective decisions about services and suggest service improvements. In 2016/2017, this saw 400 residents take part in 90 courses to increase their confidence, qualifications and skills. The organisation estimates that for every £1 invested in the Tenant Academy, there is £17 created in social value.

Lewisham Homes

Lewisham Homes have partnered with the London Metropolitan University to run free courses for tenants. A 3-day course is aimed at enabling tenants to learn more about Lewisham Homes and housing, get involved in shaping services, and effectively challenge and improve Lewisham Homes' work. The 1-day introduction course gives an overview of Lewisham Homes and the partnership with the Council, and how tenants can make a difference.

Up to now over 50 people have gone through the courses, two of whom are current tenant board members. One of them, Princess Balogun, stated that "I was in search of some way to contribute to Lewisham as I do believe that Lewisham Homes has done a lot for me, the courses that I have been on and the work placement that led me to my current job role."



Engaging with Different Groups

“Rather than assuming that customers want to be part of our lives, we will get out there and be part of their lives” – Your Homes Newcastle Customer Insight and Engagement Strategy 2018-2021

The traditional engagement structures do not work for everyone, and so ALMOs are continually developing and investing in a range of initiatives which support wider participation. This includes mechanisms which reach and engage younger and older people, those who are digitally and socially excluded, BAME communities, LGBTI people and people with disabilities. The examples below give a flavour of the work that different ALMOs are engaged in.

Rykneld Homes

Rykneld Homes was awarded the Housing Innovation Award 2016 for most Innovative Community Engagement. The organisation has a dedicated Community Engagement Team which has worked in partnership with tenants and community groups over the last 10 years to develop a comprehensive engagement structure which includes:

- An award-winning Customer Scrutiny Panel; Repairs and Maintenance Improvement Group, and Tenant Inspectors;
- Support to Tenant and Resident Groups and Forums to reach grassroots voices;
- Tenant Board Members;
- The Neighbourhood Services Improvement Group, a tenant-led group which supports Rykneld Homes to develop, design and improve neighbourhood services, including an Estate Caretaker service.



The organisation established a Community Improvers Group in 2010 which works with 11-19 year-olds to develop life skills and work for the benefit of local communities. This ensures that the views of young people are heard, but also invests in the next generation of community champions.

The group gets involved in a diverse range of opportunities, for example:

- Community projects, such as clean ups, garden improvements, cooking programmes, learning about homelessness and having their say about how North East Derbyshire District Council can support young people;
- Scrutinising written materials to ensure they are easy to understand;
- Mentoring other young people;

Community Improvers earn points through the Dreamscheme which they can then exchange for rewards and days out.

This group has improved the relationship between Rykneld Homes and young people, increased volunteers working with Rykneld Homes and partner organisations, enhanced engagement with young people living in the community, and seen a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

Poole Housing Partnership

As part of a wide tenant engagement programme, Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) supports 21 Resident Associations across its stock, mainly in sheltered housing schemes, working hard to improve tenants' health and wellbeing and reduce isolation. The organisation works closely with the local social prescription service to try and engage with 'harder to reach' and more isolated individuals in the community. They also focus their community engagement events/activities in the areas of highest deprivation, and use a range of activities specifically to target those who are 'hard to reach'. For example, the community gardens tend to attract residents who have not been involved with PHP before. A Wellbeing Day provided a range of activities for all ages, including a crèche to make the event more accessible to single parents. In relation to BAME communities, last year PHP worked closely with Dorset Race Equality Council to stage two events to celebrate diversity within their communities.

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St Leger Homes

Recognising that not all tenants want to use traditional means of engagement, St. Leger Homes of Doncaster has produced a number of short films lasting between 60 and 90 seconds to showcase stories from their Tenants' Choice Awards finalists. These highlighted numerous projects that are taking place across the borough, looking at how tenants make a positive difference to their community life on a daily basis through volunteering.

Hearing from tenants and residents first has helped to break down barriers with those who are traditionally harder to reach and involve. For example, the films² focusing on the contribution of young people have helped to reach younger people. The films have increased feedback from individuals and communities in large numbers, and proved an effective way to communicate with certain groups. As a result, the organisation has now used this approach for its Annual Review.

Tower Hamlet Homes

Tower Hamlet Homes (THH) operates in a borough with a significant non-White British population (69%). One of the challenges they face is that the overwhelming majority of people who choose to engage with the organisation are White British, primarily older in terms of their profile, and leaseholder in terms of their tenure.

In order to promote diversity, the organisation has decided to move away from a rigid application/membership-based model for the formal engagement opportunities to encourage more observers who can drop in or try out what it means to be involved. So far, this has delivered two new BAME residents on the residents' panel.

The organisation is reaching out more to community organisations to help publicise the opportunities to get involved. For example, they are working with REAL to improve the representation of disabled residents, and reaching out to LGBT residents through an organisation called ELOP.

Northwards Housing

Northwards Housing has recruited 30 tenants to be Digital Champions. Their role is to engage with traditionally 'hard to reach' and digitally excluded tenants and teach them the basics of the internet, with the support of a digital inclusion officer. So far the team has engaged with more than 500 tenants.

The champions run drop-in sessions in public buildings, including retirement housing. Tenants can call in for help with a specific problem, or can attend for several weeks to build up their skills. This informal approach appeals to 'hard to reach' tenants. There are also drop-in sessions aimed at job-seekers, structured courses and one-off interest sessions, which engage people who would not ordinarily be interested in a digital session. The digital inclusion officer does home visits which often leads to group attendance.



As a result of the volunteering, six digital champions have gained full-time employment and one has become self-employed. Others report decreased isolation and increased confidence.

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Complaints

For some tenants, the first – and possibly only – time they come into contact with the ALMO is when they make a complaint. All ALMOs operate a complaints policy and procedure in line with best practice. Although this differs from place to place, the broad features are:

- how to complain is advertised through multiple means, including on-line, in tenant literature, face-to-face, and during interactions with staff;
- complaints procedures are agreed by tenants;
- all complaints are answered in an agreed timescale with learning from complaints requested at closure of complaint.
- ALMOs undertake regular complaint trend analysis and analysis of survey and other feedback data through learning frameworks
- analysis of complaints, outcomes and proposed service changes is shared with managers for action and monitored by senior management teams
- complaints, outcomes and service changes are regularly monitored by various tenant scrutiny groups, and complaints analysis feeds into business planning up at the executive team and board level.
- outcomes reported through 'You said, we did' sections in tenant publications, social media and website, annual tenants report, public meeting papers.

ALMOs have a clear focus on delivering the highest quality services to tenants, and for this reason, they are continuously looking for ways to improve how they work. We highlight some examples below which focus on management of complaints and evidencing that the organisations have listened.

Cornwall Housing – Case Study



In Summer 2016, Cornwall Housing started talking to tenants in communities and canvassed views by email about how they could improve their resident engagement. Residents said their priority was for the organisation to listen and act on residents' views. As a response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the organisation felt that there was renewed vigour to the conversation.

In a working group made up of tenants and staff from across the business, they considered in what circumstances the organisation could be deemed "not listening and acting." For example, they may be sent the minutes of a Resident Association meeting or a staff member may attend a meeting, and it is not clear that the group or an individual are expecting a response from the organisation on a particular point.

As a result of this, the organisation has just got support from the involved residents to create an online form for Resident Associations and community representatives so that they can specifically request responses to key points or questions about their communities. From this, they will be able to monitor the timeliness of responses and analyse what residents in different communities are saying.

Newark & Sherwood Homes

Newark & Sherwood Homes introduced an Affinity Mapping Approach when analysing customer complaints which enables them to identify, tackle and eliminate basic service issues and prevent them from being a repeat concern. Complaints are regularly analysed and grouped by commonality and recurring themes through Affinity Mapping. This then feeds into improvement plans which are developed with relevant managers. Progress against the plan is reviewed through one-to-ones and team meetings, as well as being measured against weekly raw data. This enables the organisation to evidence clear improvement in performance which has a direct link back to tenant feedback and performance improvement actions.

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Six Town Housing

Six Town Housing has introduced a number of changes to the way that the organisation works as a result of complaint analysis. This includes:

- Following feedback about ways of paying rent, the organisation reviewed and introduced a range of ways to self-pay, which was taken up by 1,000 customers immediately;
- Following feedback from leaseholders, the organisation has set up a Leaseholder Forum, improved website pages, and is working on leaseholder guide and right to buy fact sheets.
- The organisation has also dramatically re-shaped itself to deliver a locality-based service to customers. This has included training teams in all aspects of Neighbourhood/Tenancy Management to provide a locality worker who works within the neighbourhoods, avoiding the need for tenants to have to call into the office to access services.

Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) – Case Study

HiS won an award at the UK Complaint Handling Awards 2017 for the innovative and proactive approach it had taken to manage complaints.

Prior to 2017 HiS had high complaint numbers and low satisfaction scores; customer feedback was getting lost in a complex and inflexible three stage complaints' process. As a result customers were not feeling listened to and performance indicators were not being met. The organisation underwent a significant change:

- A Customer Focus Officer was employed in 2015 who became the central focus for all things feedback related. Her role was widely publicised so that a face-to-a-name approach could be used. She wrote an open letter to customers asking them to get in touch and tell her what they thought. She also ran surgeries across all neighbourhoods. A key part was acknowledging the negative press and feedback, and demonstrating that the organisation was going to listen to it, learn from it and make a change based on it.
- A full Complaint Management Review was undertaken, looking at how best to rebuild trust with customers, and provide a flexible and user friendly complaints process. Actions which came from this included the full remodelling of the complaint process, policies and procedures; introduction of a new learning outcome process; introduction of 'better because you told us' articles relating to complaints learning, complaints workshops and a complaints text message service (a 'rant and rave' text messaging service).
- Following this, a 'Customers First' programme was introduced which put the customer back at the heart of everything the organisation did. This is a bespoke training package created for HiS by an external provider for all staff from the Chief Executive to Business Administration Apprentices. 10 Customers First champions were introduced in place to drive forward initiatives to make improvements and raise standards.

The results in that year were outstanding- complaints in 2015/2016 fell by 63% and continue to fall dramatically with performance and customer satisfaction indicators significantly improving. These improvements continue to be made. For 16/17 and YTD HiS have received more compliments than complaints. Performance Indicators continue to be met and customers know who to contact if they have an issue, and the Customer Focus Officer works with them to resolve their issues quickly. She also holds a complaints learning workshop each quarter to ensure that all colleagues understand the importance of feedback. Results are shared with all customers in terms of how the organisation is performing, along with case studies and lessons.

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“You Said, We Did...”

ALMOs operate ‘you said, we did’ activities to communicate to tenants and other stakeholders how tenant engagement has produced changes to the organisation. This includes traditional methods such as tenant publications and events, and also more innovative ways, such as the short videos that some ALMOs produce to highlight feedback, for example **Six Town Housing**, **Blackpool Coastal Housing**, **Northwards Housing** and **Your Homes Newcastle**.



Six Town Housing

Six Town Housing has produced a video to show the work that Tenant and Resident Associations (TARAs) carry out, featuring interviews with volunteers.

This shows how TARAs are given support to develop communities and have a direct line to their ALMO, the police and the council to discuss issues on behalf of others in their community. It is designed to demystify TARAs and support other tenants to get involved.³

Although ALMOs have increasingly moved to digital communication (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, websites), they are still also communicating through traditional literature.

CityWest Homes

Following an external communications audit, CityWest Homes has launched City Voice, a resident magazine for tenants who have no internet access.

Alongside this, the organisation has launched a monthly online newsletter version for those with email access. In the magazine edition, digital workshop opportunities are actively promoted to help and encourage more residents to get online. It is hoped that this will help all tenants to learn more about the organisation and what it is doing.



Tenant Engagement activities and outcomes are also communicated through public scrutiny papers, board reports and annual reports, all of which are openly available. For example:

South Tyneside Homes

South Tyneside Homes produces an online Annual Report for all stakeholders which is written by tenants for tenants. It is designed to be easy-to-digest and accessible, with tenants examining performance against business plans.⁴

³ The video can be found here: <https://youtu.be/2KMFA9GhEF0>

⁴ <http://www.southtynesidehomes.org.uk/article/19433/Tenants-Annual-Report>

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Berneslai Homes

Berneslai Homes produces a Resident Involvement Impact Assessment (RIIA) for most of its resident involvement activities.⁵ This is a routine check to ensure that the activity is value for money and making a difference; a validation that the activity has made an impact and is worth repeating. The RIIA is updated annually and published online so that customers are fully aware of the cost and impact of their involvement. The annual assessment has helped Berneslai Homes change its satisfaction survey model, review the local engagement model, and enhance social media engagement.



⁵ <https://www.berneslaihomes.co.uk/get-involved/the-difference-you-make/>

Conclusion

This report has showcased best practice examples around tenant engagement in the ALMO sector, and shown how fundamental tenants are to the running of ALMOs. At the top of the structure, tenants sit on board and governance structures, setting agendas and holding ALMOs to account. ALMOs actively encourage tenants to reach this level, providing training and support.

ALMOs also have a range of methods for engaging with other tenants, both formal and informal. Many of these have been embedded within the ALMOs from their inception, such as scrutiny panels, TARAs, surveys and estate walkabouts, while others are a response to the changing needs of communities. ALMOs are also heavily invested in empowering tenants and communities to ensure they can and do get involved, with a focus on reaching those who do not traditionally engage.

By continuously reviewing their tenant engagement structures and processes in partnership with tenants, ALMOs are ensuring that they remain fit for purpose for the future.

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The NFA Team

Further details can be found at www.almos.org.uk/nfa_team



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