

*In a blog following Inside Housing's announcement of Who's Who in Local Authority housing development, Su Spence, Chief Executive of Poole Housing Partnership, reflects on the importance of the tenant voice.*

## Tenant Voice

We have heard much this year about the tenant voice and how important it is, both in shaping housing services, but also in supporting what is happening in our local communities. The ALMO sector prides itself on how much it supports hearing the tenant voice and how tenant engagement shapes organisations from the top down. We have tenants sitting on Boards and chairing our organisations, undertaking scrutiny of our services, making recommendations for changes and improvements and sometimes even working with our officers to help run our services. In Poole (as I am sure they do elsewhere), tenants do even more for their local community. In the last couple of years they have secured funding and built 2 local play areas, developed community gardens, provided over 3000 meals via the Fareshare scheme, established a bike club and run many local events. This has been carried out either with PHP's support or on their own, utilising skills they have gained from their involvement within the organisation, or just by linking into our photocopyers or using our social media pages to publicise events.



Through all of this we (PHP) hear the tenant voice. We hear about what they are proud of and the issues of the day that are causing most concern. We hear about the skills they have, which may not be current enough to support them getting a job, but can be used to support their community. We hear about their families and laugh as we all share thoughts on how to deal with an awkward relative or a naughty child. Although we don't often hear about how hard it is to deal with the welfare reform changes or uncertainty over tenancies. We always hear about how difficult it is to rent in the private sector, or buy their own home and how they worry for the future.

PHP has many of these formal structures to capture the tenant voice and help it guide our organisation. I take no credit for this as many were in place before I became Chief Executive and I marvel at the teams that are able to build structures and create a place where tenants talk openly. We combine these with the ongoing conversations and use this knowledge and challenge to help shape our services so that they are reflective of our communities. But I also know that traditional routes need to change to ensure we are truly capturing the thoughts and views of the communities we serve, to shine a light on the skills that people have and offer choices. It means that those places and structures that we are currently so proud of must also morph and change, to not only reflect the new realities of how and when they can most influence, but also what works best for our current communities and the pressures they face.

Involved residents are part of PHP, because not only do they keep the organisation customer focused and efficient, and yes, that means it all costs less than it otherwise would,



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but it is also their community we serve. After all, they should be able to influence and shape their communities in the same way that everyone else does. We can and must do more to ensure the tenant voice is heard and we must challenge ourselves to change how we do that, so it truly is their voice.

I'm really proud of the things Poole tenants do to shape their community and I know they are too – because they tell me.