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GUIDE TO TENANT PARTICIPATION

2017 edition

Overview & Aims
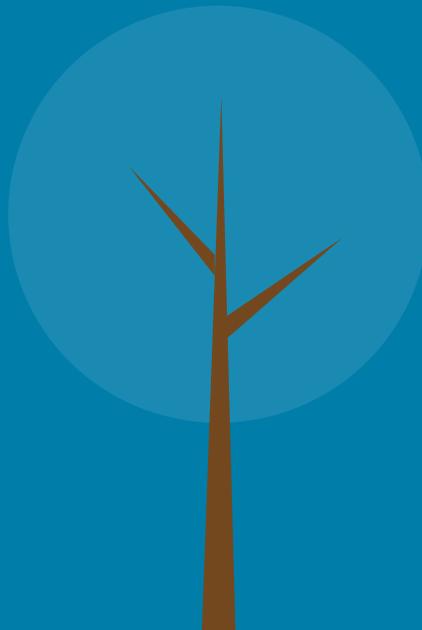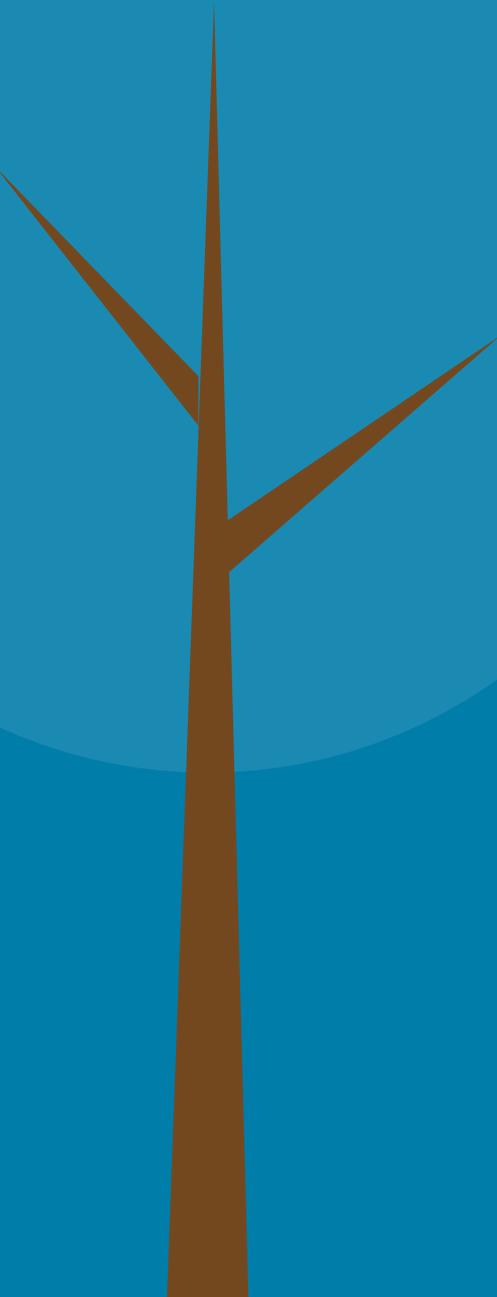
Overview

Social landlords in Wales are now operating in a changing and challenging environment. Communities and individual lifestyles are also changing. The support and interest to refresh and create new models of tenant and community engagement that deliver real positive outcomes remains strong.

Social landlords are no longer merely a provider of homes. They are increasingly linked to issues of health, welfare, social, financial and digital inclusion and community regeneration. Tenant Participation has become a term for a wider set of activities that spreads across a range of services and which includes involving tenants in wider community issues.

Tenant Participation has been around a long time. Previous practices and experience still shape a lot of attitudes and the level of commitment to TP. In changing times there is a need for landlords' staff and tenants to understand and evidence the real value of TP by working together to identify solutions to improve services, manage resources and build better communities.

When done well, effective TP can deliver a range of benefits and add value to social landlords, communities and individuals. The benefits may not be immediately evident, but will evolve as effective communication, participation and trust develop.

Benefits can include:

- Better service delivery and improved value for money.

- Building social capital and community capacity.

- Enhancing accountability to tenants.

- Improvement of reach and/or take up of service. Service more open and inclusive.

- Efficiency savings.

- Staff and tenants become more aware of each other's perspectives and organisational and financial limitations.

- Opportunities for tenants to increase their self-confidence and skills to become job-ready. It also helps people to become, or remain socially engaged.

- Reducing social isolation and improving health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

- Developing new ways of co-producing services and mutual support structures.

Tenant Participation is not an end in itself, but rather a means to improve services, performance, develop and strengthen communities and show value for money.

Effective Tenant Participation can add value to social landlords, communities and individuals.

Top 5 Current Challenges Impacting on TP

As social landlords and tenants seek to develop and rethink models of TP they are often left wrestling with a number of challenges. From our conversations across Wales, the main issues are:

Engage with residents using new channels like digital, social media and big data.

1. The need to broaden tenant engagement to include younger people and other hard to reach/ seldom heard groups.

2. Engaging with residents using new channels like digital, social media and big data.

3. Enabling tenants to influence decisions and have their say without the formality of meetings, committees, minutes, and reams of paperwork.

4. Offering more TP activities/opportunities with fewer resources.

5. Involving tenants in tackling issues and finding local solutions for significant challenges like Bedroom Tax, Welfare Reform, Service charges etc.

TPAS Cymru's Aims of this Document

We have researched and identified 11 'models' of TP in use across Wales that have emerged from the housing sector to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing operating context. The models have been documented to show how these approaches are being used; their benefits and limitations.

Tenant profile, geography, history, organisational culture, size and various other factors will have an influence in determining the best approach to TP. In many instances a range of engagement models will be required to involve tenants and models may have to be adapted to suit particular circumstances. Rarely will a single model suit every situation.

We want tenants and landlords to regularly review the success of their participation and engagement practices and to adapt to other approaches set out in this document.

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Conditions for Effective Tenant Participation (TP)

Tenant Participation is a partnership activity. It doesn't just happen, it has to be worked at, planned, developed and reviewed to inform a continuing process. Effective TP needs the following ingredients to work successfully:

- Models - tenants and officers need frameworks (formal or informal) so that change can be channelled and actioned.

- Approach - TPAS Cymru strongly believes that whatever model you follow, every effort should be made to be inclusive and ensure equality best practices are followed.

- Attitudes - there must be mutual respect and commitment to change and share power.

- Representatives must consider a wider range of viewpoints not just their own personal agenda.

- Commitment from landlords and tenants to communicate outcomes to all stakeholders.

Demonstrating the Value of TP

People's motivation to get involved and support TP will vary directly according to the degree of positive change resulting from previous TP activities.

TP needs to be seen as a positive investment so organisations need to plan and include evaluation methods within their participation models to enable them to assess and evidence the difference it has made and what has changed as a result of tenant involvement.

Tenants need to see the outcomes of their involvement. They need to know that their views have been listened to and where possible acted on. This requires feedback on what tenant influence has achieved or an explanation of why something was not implemented.

Demonstrating How TP Makes Good Business Sense

Developing and maintaining the positive value and importance of TP requires establishing and highlighting the business case/benefits. This should include reference to evidence, outcomes, impact and effective resource management and value for money. Tenants also need to have opportunities to shape and influence the organisation's business plan.

The link should be clearly made between the value and benefits of TP and how tenant involvement contributes to the organisation's business plan, aims, and objectives: there needs to be a 'golden thread' connecting the TP activities with the content of the business plan. Whilst the primary purpose of the business plan is to guide operations and strategy it is also a means of engaging and informing stakeholders about future policies.

There needs to be a 'golden thread' connecting the Tenant Participation activities with the content of the business plan.

There is a wealth of evidence showing the monetary savings made by housing associations in England as a result of Tenant Participation.

Tenants Leading Change - An investment not a cost: The business benefits of tenant involvement.

Putting Tenants at the Heart of the Business

Tenants and residents are the biggest stakeholders when it comes to social landlords so should therefore be enabled to play a significant role in shaping the organisation's business plan. Social Landlords' business plans should reflect the needs, aspirations and priorities of tenants and service users as appropriate. Of all stakeholders, they have the greatest interest. Their homes, their services and the reputation of their landlord may be at stake.
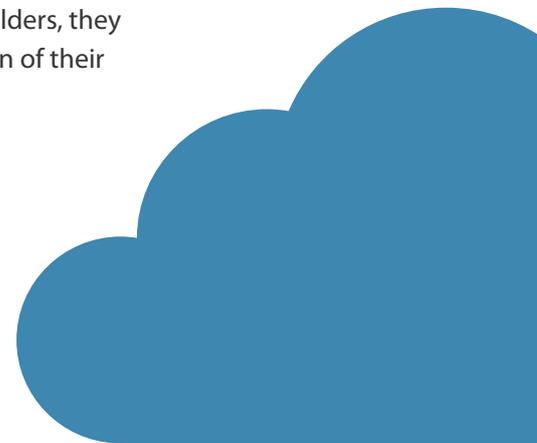
Creating a Culture of Tenant Participation - Mainstreaming

There needs to be a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants and landlord organisation at all levels. TP requires open and frank discussions to reach mutually satisfactory outcomes. An open and constructive relationship can take time and effort to develop but it's essential if TP is going to be mainstreamed.

The 'Culture' of an organisation starts at the top, so Board members, elected members and senior staff need to value and support the development and benefits of TP and show that they're prepared to listen to the needs and suggestions of tenants.

Tenant Participation should not be seen as something that only concerns tenants and specialist TP support staff: it's not a separate activity outside the main business of the organisation. This approach is known as Mainstreaming: it means that all staff should have awareness and understanding of the benefits of TP, what's changed as a result of tenant participation activities, how tenants and residents can get involved and how it benefits everyone connected with the organisation. This understanding of TP and its benefits also enables staff to encourage tenants to get involved and have their say and ensures that no major decisions are made without consulting with residents. In a mainstreamed model, TP should be included in staff role descriptions, job advertisements and management appraisals.

> Create a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenant and landlord.

Understanding what is of interest to Tenants

We need to ask 'why would tenants get involved?' Tenants need to have an interest in the issues being discussed. Are they topics which affect tenants and their communities? If the customer satisfaction questions only address the landlord's concerns or interests, tenants are less likely to answer them. If, however, some of the questions are relevant to tenants' needs or problems (and are phrased using plain language) residents are more likely to respond to them.

An essential starting point is for landlords to have an accurate profile of their tenants in terms of: age, household size, disability, ethnic background, preferred languages and formats for communication. Also required are community profiles or mapping to provide context of where tenants live and their local issues. This will enable landlords to identify groups which are underrepresented and consider what barriers to participation may exist for those particular tenants.

Adequately Resourcing TP

Involving tenants in a range of different ways and going out to them, rather than expecting them to come to the landlord, takes time, money, effort and skills on both sides. The crucial question is whether this cost is an extra to essential business, or, whether it is core to the business and therefore a major priority. Tenants should be involved in agreeing and monitoring the budgets for Tenant Participation and ensuring adequate monetary and staff resources are made available for these activities.

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Don't Use 'Apathy' as an Excuse

It's often the case that tenants don't want to be part of TP activities. We have to be realistic about this. It's sometimes said that residents or tenants 'can't be bothered' or 'aren't interested' but this can be too simple an excuse. So-called apathy can be a result of poor participation and negative experiences tenants or staff may have had in the past. It may not be apathy but a logical choice – because the issues don't interest them or our methods of communicating with them are poor, or because we don't make it easy for them to be involved. Previously we may not have fed back to them the outcomes of their involvement and therefore they don't see any benefit for any effort they might have made.

The question of how we can involve as many people as possible in the housing and communities that affect them can be answered in part by meeting the conditions above and by providing a range of methods and approaches identified in the following models.

The Different Models

Business & Tenant Benefits of each Model of Tenant Participation

TPAS Cymru loves great tenant participation and we have set out 11 ways of doing it. TPAS Cymru want you to:

1. Understand which model or approach you currently use.

2. Recognise the advantages and limitations of each approach.

3. Consider whether a different approach may suit your community better or try a 'pick and mix' approach to achieve inclusive and wide reaching tenant participation.

	Improving Communities	Improving Services & VFM	Accountability	Individual & Community Capacity	Skills for Employment
Tenant and Resident Associations	✓		✓	✓	
Data driven insight		✓	✓		
Service Improvement and monitoring		✓	✓		✓
We will support you	✓			✓	✓
Job creation and Social enterprise	✓			✓	✓
Digital	✓	✓		✓	
Focus Groups		✓	✓		
Co-operatives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Co-production	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Special interest groups		✓		✓	✓
Critical Friend		✓	✓	✓	✓

Many of the original TRAs were set up by local people themselves because landlords were not engaging with them.

1. Tenant and Resident Associations

Also known as: Traditional Approach

Historically, Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) were the preferred method of tenant participation. Indeed, many of the original TRAs were set up by local people themselves because landlords were not engaging with them. Gradually over recent years, the numbers of TRAs have declined in Wales as more informal and less traditional methods of participating have become available to tenants.

TRAs however, still have their place and can be successful and important methods for tenants (and residents) to get involved in, and make decisions about, their local communities.

Examples of How This is Used

Traditionally, TRAs were established/set up, to deal with a particular issue or issues in the community e.g. to deal with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) or to build a community facility such as a playground. There are still several strong tenant groups across Wales who meet regularly and represent the needs of the wider community of tenants and residents living in the area, sometimes acting as a conduit to ensure that views/suggestions/concerns of tenants are heard by the landlord. Similarly, TRAs are often used by landlords as a way of gathering views or consulting with a 'representative body' of the wider tenant community.

Advantages

- TRAs which are fully constituted can access funding from other sources – empowering the community and supporting the landlord to supply additional services and/or facilities.

- They are 'local' voices who know the area, the issues, needs and concerns of the residents and as a result are able to capture voices that otherwise may not be heard by the landlord.

- Some TRAs have community facilities/centres that can be used for various training courses and events to strengthen the community and the skills/knowledge of the residents.

- Some TRAs have their own digital channels.

Disadvantages

- TRA meetings can be seen as too formal for some tenants.

- There's sometimes a lack of clarity about the purpose and intended outcomes of some TRAs.

- TRAs can sometimes be dominated by a small group of strong individuals.

- They aren't always representative of the wider tenant community.

Additional Points to Consider

Encouraging tenants or residents to 'get involved' in TRAs can be a struggle. However, there are methods available to try and encourage more interest in associations or groups.

- Make sure that you advertise, using as many different methods as possible, e.g. word of mouth, posters with pictures, local radio etc. Highlight the difference the group's activities have made to the community – sell yourselves!

- Accept that once a TRA's purpose has been achieved they may decide not to continue as an active group. That's not a sign of failure. It may be the most appropriate move for the group to make. Occasionally groups can re-emerge after a period of inactivity to address new issues and concerns.

- Try to hold some informal events e.g. coffee mornings or evenings as a different way of encouraging new members to attend and find out what you do/ what you've done.

- Try changing the times of meetings i.e. if meetings are always held in the day, try a few evening meetings to make them more accessible to those who work during the day.

- Accept that residents/tenants may want to support you, but may not want to attend meetings i.e. they may be happy to deliver flyers for you or make tea/cakes etc. for events. Don't lose their support – involve them in whatever ways they are most comfortable with.

- 'Review' your group annually – this is an excellent way of making sure that your purpose, activities and outcomes still reflect the needs of the community you represent.

- Look at good practice examples of other TRAs who have achieved their intended outcomes and are successful in 'reaching' their tenants and residents.

Learn More

TPAS Cymru has many resources available for ensuring great outcomes for all via Tenant & Resident Associations. Talk to us about how we can help.

Review your group annually to make sure that your purpose, activities and outcomes still reflect the needs of the community.

2. Data Driven Insight

Also known as: Quantitive Participation

This approach has its strength in using data and tenant feedback to help drive co-decision making, improve services, measure satisfaction and set priorities. At its core is the belief that quantitative insight and data patterns are more representative than the limited insight of a committee or small group of tenant activists. Views and opinions are captured from all tenants impacted by a particular service, proposal or initiative.

Examples of How This is Used

- Annual Tenant surveys measuring satisfaction, maintenance priorities and tenant input into long term plans etc.

- Post repair satisfaction forms – immediately pushed either digitally via email, SMS, website etc. or complete paper survey.

- Feedback at the point of interaction. This is usually done digitally with simple questions on a tablet or use of 'Pulse' buttons in a physical location such as payments office e.g. how was the service today? Press the button which best represents you i.e. happy face or a sad face.

> Views and opinions are captured from all tenants impacted by the service, proposal or initiative.

Advantages

- Data driven approach gives deeper and wider insight.

- Participation barriers are smaller for the tenant. They can participate in a matter of minutes and there are no committees, minutes, travel time, babysitters etc. to consider.

- No relying on the opinion of a limited 'usual suspects' of tenant activists.

- Digital survey tools are easy to develop and deploy.

Disadvantages

•   Meaningful response rates are a real challenge - What is statistically significant?

•   Interpreting the data: this is a real skill that needs professional training.

•   What is good? – when evaluating a service, the tenant may not be able to tell if a 3 days' response is actually good or not compared to other housing providers.

•   Leading questions – even the smallest word or inflection can create subconscious bias.

•   Are tenants going to answer truthfully? Vulnerable people may have a fear of speaking out. They may think they are at risk of losing their home if they give a negative response.

•   Not really tenant involvement, unless they are involved in planning, interpretation and outcomes of the data and actioning next steps.

Additional Points to Consider

How do you feedback to your tenants? People want to see that you have responded to their comments, yet some of the best insight is gained anonymously? How do you go back to 'anonymous'?

Do you incentivise insight? E.g. rewards for replying, entry into prize draw etc. This can significantly uplift response rates, but can lead to positive bias (people incorrectly believe that they will only win if they answer positively)

Learn More

We believe that this type of insight needs great skill in interpreting data and insight. Data and statistics is not enough to get to the heart of tenants needs and aspirations. Talk to us about how we can help.

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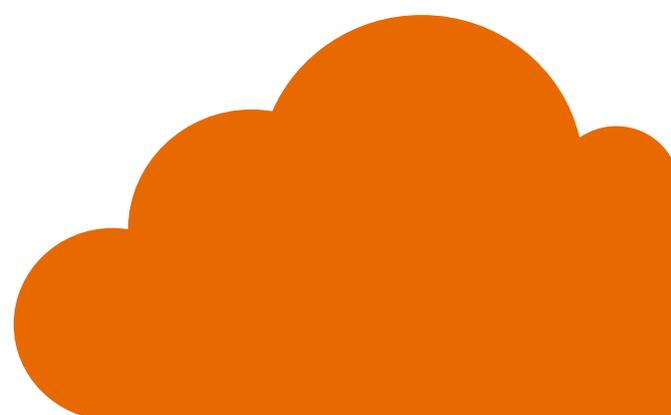
3. Ongoing Service Improvement & Monitoring Groups Approach

Also known as: Quality Improvement Approach

Ongoing service improvement and monitoring groups are a collection of tenants/residents who meet to review and assess landlord services or a specific service issue. The structure of such groups can range from informal with very little in the way of management arrangements to quite formal where the group becomes independently constituted. The nature of the group will depend on its purpose and why it was set up. These groups can be an effective way of reviewing services or to influence service design and delivery which in turn leads to a more responsive, effective service for users.

Examples of How This is Used

Landlords currently use a range of approaches to involve tenants in established formal groups which aim to review services. These include groups such as:

- Service Panels

- Tenant Inspectors

- Tenant Auditors

- Quality Assessors

- Service Reality Checkers

Advantages

- Can result in improvements to quality/effectiveness of landlord services.

- Improve diversity or equality of access to services.

- Can deliver efficiency savings and better value for money.

- Create better understanding between tenants and landlord as to how and why services are delivered and the challenges landlords face.

- Can help the landlord to be accountable to tenants for its service performance.

- Enables tenants to check the health and performance of their landlord.

Disadvantages

- Some panels may be unrepresentative of the wider body of tenants.

- Can be dominated by a vocal minority.

- Only a handful of tenants shape services for potentially thousands of fellow tenants.

- Can be based on subjective viewpoint if not evidence based.

- Some tenants with insight and experience may be excluded from this method which may be viewed as being too formal for some people.

Additional Points to Consider

- Ensure you can measure the outcomes of the involvement so that the business case value can be demonstrated.

- Consider how the wider body of tenants can feed in 'evidence' to ensure decisions and viewpoints are evidence based.

- Need to set clear and realistic expectations about what can be achieved.

- Need to link the approach to organisation Business Plan objectives.

- Establish system to feedback and be accountable to wider body of tenants.

- Group members give up a lot of time to participate. Make sure you think about their expectations and needs, and keep them informed and valued.

- Are you using a group as the only way of getting user feedback? Keep in mind that however hard you try, groups are rarely representative because of the commitment they require from participants. Additional forms of consultation might be useful to complement them.

- Do you have adequate resources? There can be considerable costs involved in running and maintaining a group.

- How do you avoid group fatigue? Have you designed an interesting programme? Think through how you can motivate and involve panel members without exhausting their interest.

- You could encourage a particular 'hard to engage' group of tenants by forming a monitoring group to look at a specific issue e.g. involving people who are house-bound.

Learn More

TPAS Cymru has years of experience in this type of tenant participation. Talk to us about our events, consultancy and advice on how we can help.

People coming together helps to improve a community and aid social inclusion, increasing the number of people involved in their community.

4. 'We Will Support You' Approach

Also known as: Tenant Participation via Community Needs

Community action via groups or projects is often a response to collective need. It maybe that they share the same interests or hobbies or that they want to address a particular local issue or concern. Community led action is fundamental to creating sustainable communities. People coming together helps to improve a community and aid social inclusion, it alleviates exclusion and increases the number of people directly involved in their community – all essential ingredients for any community striving to be sustainable.

Of course, community action is not only focused on fixing problems. Community action can also be proactive and build on positive aspects of society. This includes, for example, putting on community events, making the most of community assets, creating arts projects and running sports clubs.

Social landlords can also act as 'community anchor' organisations by playing a holistic role in supporting a community particularly where it can support involvement in longer term regeneration initiatives. This can be through assisting communities in a number of ways such as:

- Sourcing funding

- Developing business plans

- Providing a building

- Signposting to other organisations

- Marketing and promotion

- Encouraging staff to take part in community activities

- Advice on Health & Safety, risk assessments etc

Assets Based Community Development (ABCD) is concerned with how to link micro-assets to the macro-environment. The premise is that communities can identify and mobilise existing but often unrecognised assets. Asset based approaches means social landlords and tenants can consider how best to support communities. This approach can be an integral part of community development in the sense that it is concerned with facilitating tenants and communities to come together to achieve positive change using their own knowledge, skills and lived experience of the issues they encounter in their own community.

The key is that social landlords support but do not lead.

Examples of How This is Used

- Landlord provides space for a community meeting: offers to photocopy the fliers made by tenants; arranges and pays for refreshments.

- 'Give & Gain' activities within the community (Business in the Community's Give & Gain Day is a celebration of the incredible power of employee volunteering).

- Supporting the setting up of Community Food Coops.

- Landlords provide advice and support on topics including finance/managing budgets.

- Providing training and skills development which have been identified by the community as being needed.

- Personal development for tenants/residents who want to be involved in community action.

- Facilitating links with the wider community and other agencies.

- Helping a community to access funds to improve the local area.

- Enabling local debate and discussion in order to provoke further community-led action.

> Aid community spirit by encouraging tenants/residents to meet new people and learn new skills.

Advantages

- Empowers tenants and residents.

- Provides assistance to make things happen.

- Voluntary-led activity is a key source of provision in communities as not everything a community needs or wants can be provided by the public or private sector.

- Can aid community spirit by encouraging tenants/residents to meet new people, learn new skills and directly get involved with the local community.

- Recognises that positive health and social outcomes will not be achieved by maintaining a 'doing to' culture.

- Recognises and builds on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists within local communities.

Disadvantages

- Is this Tenant Participation within landlord housing services or just community development?

- Community action may not be representative of the wider community.

- Community action may not consider the equality and diversity of the community.

- Community activity may be focused on a minority of tenants and exclude others.

- Capacity of landlord may be stretched to support all initiatives.

- Is it improving the quality and value of landlord services?

Additional Points to Consider

- How to decide which initiatives to support, criteria may need to be agreed within the landlord organisation to ensure initiatives support the organisation's aims and business plan objectives.

- How to be clear with the community as to what the support relationship is, and how long it will last. It may be worth clarifying this in writing.

- If providing financial support to a community how will the community be accountable for how the money has been spent.

- Does the community led project duplicate other initiatives?

- Knowing when 'hands on' support becomes dependency, how does the landlord then deal with this? It is not always easy to step away.

Learn More

TPAS Cymru believes we will see more of this type of tenant participation going forward. Talk to us about our events, consultancy and advice on how we can help you succeed.
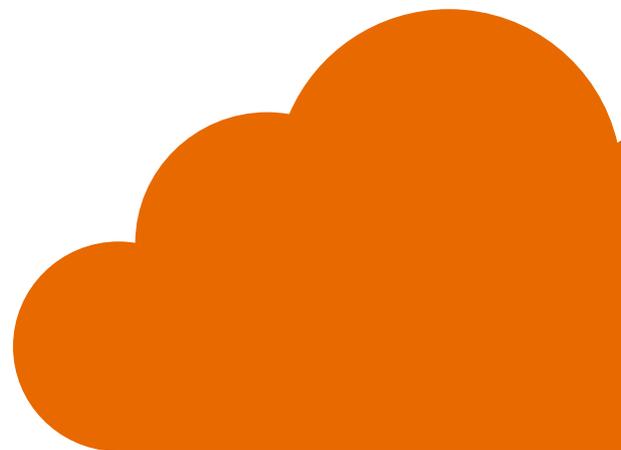
5. Job Creation & Social Enterprise

Also known as: Community Led Approach

What is a Social Enterprise? There is considerable debate about this subject with some people claiming that there is no definition or set structure which contributes to a social enterprise, rather, it is an organisational ethos or a 'state of mind'.

The Welsh Government's definition of a Social Enterprise is '*a business with primarily social objectives, whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or community rather than mainly being paid to shareholders or owner*'.

Many landlords actively recruit and train local people to work on investment programmes, maintenance and environmental works. They have led the way on what is called TR&T (Targeted Recruitment and Training) and have helped develop a range of resources – the Can Do Toolkits – to make this happen.

Social enterprises are high on everyone's agenda at the moment, and that is because they are being regarded as everything from the saviour of the economy, to the next level of financial inclusion and as a means of increased tenant empowerment from the social landlord's perspective.

This model of business can be used to engage more with tenants.

> Many landlords actively recruit and train local people to work on investment programmes, maintenance and environmental works.

Examples of How This is Used

There are some notable examples of successful Social Enterprises in the former coal field areas where there are sophisticated job creation programmes. North Wales also has some excellent examples such as CREST Co-operative and Cartrefi Conwy. Several social landlords in Wales have/are also successfully following this approach.

Advantages

- Can improve/develop skills and confidence of individual tenants.

- Can strengthen and develop pride in communities.

- Positive landlord perception.

- Can identify tenants with skills and values that can contribute to other activities.

- Can create jobs/work for tenants and others in community.

- Improves community net-worth and self value.

Disadvantages

- Does not necessarily improve housing services although evidence suggests that TR&T is successful at improving services.

- It doesn't contribute to the strategy of the organisation.

- Does not assist in accountability or openness of the landlord.

- Is job creation the role of a social landlord? Should landlords be focusing on their 'bread and butter' roles, such as repairs and maintenance, rent levels etc instead?

Additional Points to Consider

- Other organisations may be working in the area and carrying out similar tasks – it can be an opportunity for partnership working or it may risk duplicating or treading on toes.

- It is an opportunity to provide 'added value' for organisations' tenants and support them into employment or further training etc.

Learn More

Our communities need this support and participation. Talk to us about our events, consultancy and advice on how we can help you succeed.
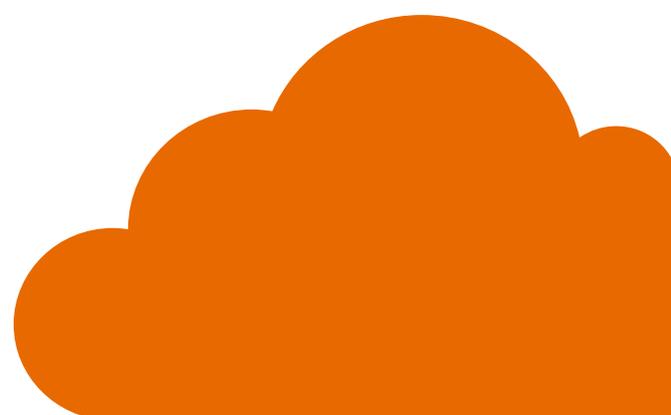
Digital participation can easily be adapted to incorporate a variety of quantitive and qualitative participation methods.

6. Digital Participation

Also known as: Digital Led or Digital First

This emerged from the perceived weaknesses of other models. At its heart is that:

- Digital participation can easily be adapted to incorporate a variety of quantitive and qualitative participation methods. Digital is just the platform; the tools and methods are up to you.

- Can seek people's participation 24:7. No need to turn up to formal meetings.

- Can segment audiences and track diversity to drill down insight from specific audiences and communities.

Examples of How This is Used

- Online Tenant Panels that are consulted on a variety of subjects e.g. service satisfaction, surveys on particular subjects, strategic or operational decisions.

- Discussion forums and specific chat rooms for tenants.

- Webchat and Webinars with key subject experts or senior managers.

- External Social Media tools like closed/open Facebook groups, landlord/ community content and discussions on 3rd party community platforms like Streetview.

- Creating options for tenants to use, create and share self-made video, use 'smart' technology to record issues and ideas.

- We are also seeing use of new virtual reality techniques being used as an engagement tool in other sectors. This is exciting for housing.

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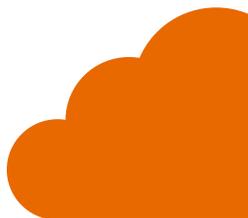
Advantages

- Digital can be inclusive - tenants can contribute from the comfort of their home or on the move with their smartphone. It can take place at any time of day. No meetings held whilst you are at work, no need to arrange childcare, no inaccessible venues or reams of committee paper to print.

- Digital can also be inclusive for people with disabilities, health issues or limited language skills. Tenants can contribute when they feel comfortable and when it suits them.

- There are a wonderful variety of tools to create tenant engagement and participation. At TPAS Cymru we see some brilliant examples. In addition, the big social media channels all have low cost targeting tools to boost your message and reach your target audiences.

- Recent years have seen major improvements in translation tools and apps. Whilst they're not perfect, they allow people with limited English or Welsh understanding to translate digital participation tools into other languages they are more comfortable with.

- Reach tenants not currently engaged – most social media channels have developed fantastic message targeting tools to target a specific location or interest group. TPAS Cymru has case studies it can share on how to reach your tenants and other stakeholders.

Disadvantages

Digital participation can exclude in a number of ways:

- Not all of society is online or comfortable using new technologies. A digital only approach at this stage will exclude parts of society.

- Also not all digital tools and platforms are accessible to assistive technology like screen readers or audio caption. Even correct mobile rendering and mobile/tablet functionality is missing from too many digital solutions.

- Trolls – TPAS Cymru loves constructive criticism – but there's a way to express it. Unfortunately, there are people out there coming from a place of anger and resentment, rather than genuinely wanting to input on an issue in a measured way. Need to monitor, manage and protect others in the digital community where people can participate and input without fear of harrassment.

Additional Points to Consider

Does the community you are looking to reach have prominent community bloggers you can approach about key messages or consultations? Use their profile to get messages out.

Need to always be open to new approaches and technical solutions. Just because one tactic didn't get the engagement you wanted doesn't mean a different approach will not. Virtual reality will soon open up new opportunities to transform participation.

Learn More

Talk to TPAS Cymru about digital best practice. Our website has plenty of tips, advice and best practice guides. It is ever changing. Please note: some content is restricted to members-only.

Digital can also be inclusive for people with disabilities, health issues or limited language skills. Tenants can contribute when they feel comfortable and when it suits them.
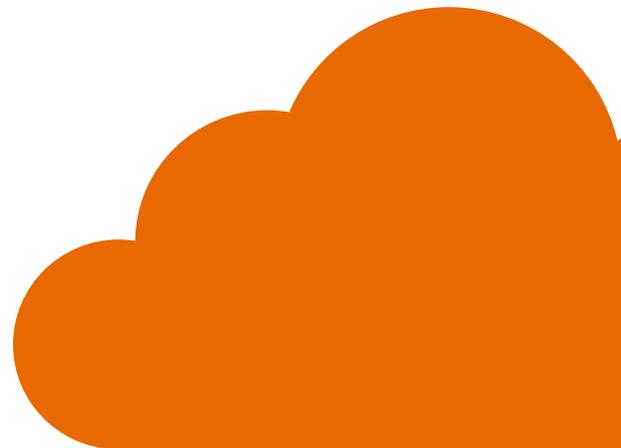
7. Focus Groups

Also known as: Qualitative Approach

Focus groups can provide insightful understanding of services, complex issues and situations which cannot be gathered from standard multiple choice type surveys, such as STAR satisfaction surveys, or large public meetings. Focus groups can provide an opportunity for individuals to express their views in detail, to hear the opinions of others and to collectively develop solutions to problems.

Detailed and anecdotal information can be presented and discussed which can lead to better understanding of tenants/residents' views, priorities or aspirations. Since focus groups are based on open communication and discussion they can also lead to improved community/landlord relations, trust and a sense of ownership in the process and outcome. The ideal number of participants per focus group is between five and 15 individuals.

An opportunity for individuals to express their views in detail, to hear others opinions and collectively develop solutions.

Examples of How This is Used

- Special interest groups
- Customer Journey mapping sessions
- STAR survey follow up sessions
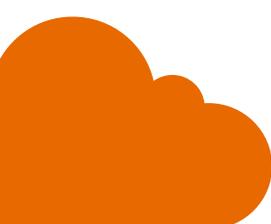
Advantages

- Focus groups, which follow other research techniques using multiple choice or open-ended surveys directed to a larger sample of tenants, are an excellent follow-up method to enable you to drill down into the results.

- Bringing together a group of tenants/residents to discuss a particular service or topic provides a more natural setting than one-to-one interviews.

- Can be used to test proposals for new services or community project ideas.

- Can help better understand tenants' priorities and what they 'value' from landlord and community services.

- Can generate rich qualitative data in a less resource intensive manner than individual interviewing.

- Can be used to help verify or clarify the results from surveys.

- Can help inform decision-making, business/strategic planning and resource allocation.

- Can add a human dimension to sometimes impersonal quantitative data.

- Can assist in demonstrating co-decision making.

Disadvantages

- As focus groups involve such a small number of participants, it is often difficult to generalise the findings to the larger tenant/resident population.

- Can require a great deal of time and other resources in preparation, information processing and reporting.

- Selection of the participants, creation of the discussion guide and choice of an effective facilitator can be significant challenges.

- Findings can often be difficult to capture, analyse or accurately summarise.

Additional Points to Consider

- **Clearly define the purpose** - Having clarity of purpose, goals and objectives directly affects the quality of the focus group process and outcome.

- **Identify and clarify the role of the facilitator** - An effective facilitator is critical to the success of the focus group.

- **Develop a discussion guide** - Prior to convening the focus group think about creating a discussion guide with a specific introduction (explaining the purpose), body (main questions to be addressed) and conclusion (target date for reporting back to the group and community.

- **Identify and recruit participants** - Involve all relevant tenants/residents in the focus group process and consider conducting several separate focus groups that may represent different viewpoints.

- **Prepare for the meeting** - Plan the meeting at a time that is agreeable to all and if necessary at a neutral meeting place.

- **Facilitating the focus group** - Make sure that every participant has an opportunity to speak and respond. Agree on ground rules and an agenda.

- **Analysing data** - Review the notes, audio, and video from the meeting. Pick out all important key words, quotes and ideas and group them into categories or central themes.

- **Reporting the findings** - Structure the report with a background of the project or issue, a description of the process the group followed to develop the focus group and a summary of the findings.

> Having clarity of purpose, goals and objectives directly affects the quality of the focus group.

Learn More

TPAS Cymru believes this type of tenant participation can bring out great ideas and insight from tenants in improving the issues that matter to them. Talk to us about our events, consultancy and advice on how you can get the best from Focus Groups.

TPAS Cymru believes this type of tenant participation can bring out great ideas and insight from tenants improving issues that matter to them.

8. Co-operative/Mutual Approach

A co-operative model is a comprehensive and meaningful model to tenant participation because the tenant (or member) makes all the decisions about the services that affect them. The co-operative approach is community led (and in some cases owned) and follows co-operative principles which include the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality and autonomy and independence for tenants in decision making. It is different from other forms of tenant involvement because it is about encouraging and supporting local community control over housing and neighbourhoods. Its principles can be applied in many different ways to meet the needs of different stakeholders.

Examples of How This is Used

Although the principles of this approach are transferable, it is an approach most often seen in a housing co-op otherwise known as a housing mutual (mutually owned by its members) that is managed either entirely, or mainly by tenants. If the housing organisation is 'Fully Mutual' only tenants or prospective tenants are allowed to be 'members' and control/manage its affairs, which involves a democratic community membership body being involved in decision making about their homes.

More recently the first tenant / worker mutual has been established and a number of new development housing co-ops have been formed, supported by individual housing associations, local authorities and the Wales Co-operative Centre.

Encouraging and supporting locol community control over housing and neighbourhoods.

Advantages

- This approach recognises the importance of tenants (and in some cases employees) in the dynamic of creating an excellent organisation that serves the public.

- It gives local communities the opportunity to make decisions about their own homes which makes a positive difference by strengthening community bonds and pride.

- It breaks down the outdated model of public services being "delivered" to consumers and the barriers created by the separate roles of landlord/tenant and employee/employer.

- It allows tenants/members to reclaim aspects of their lives and distance themselves from the hierarchical structures/relationships involved with being a customer.

- It gives tenants a real stake in the organisation, its future and the management of its services.

- Tenants/members feel a greater sense of control in their homes in terms of security of tenure, sharing in decision making and financial stability.

Disadvantages

- Although the principles of a co-operative can be partially adopted within an organisation, for them to be fully realised an organisation would need to become a co-operative/mutual organisation. This can be very complicated and involve a lot of effort, expertise and resources.

- What about non-members? They can become unintentionally isolated or excluded from tenant participation just because they chose not to become a member.

- It can be hard to relay the message to tenants about what their roles and responsibility are as part of a housing co-op and consequently to recruit new members so that it is fulfilling its purpose. It can take a long time therefore to run independently.

- In a housing co-op, members can exercise considerable influence and will have the power to appoint and dismiss the Board of Directors; they will set the values and the budgets and will approve the accounts and audit report. These duties mean that members need to have the skills to fulfil these duties and therefore a period of up skilling is likely to be needed.

Additional Points to Consider

As highlighted in the above section this is not a simple approach and may not be suitable or achievable for all. This is a long-term approach that needs full support of all staff and the senior management team. For it to be fully effective and meet the co-operative principles it needs to be agreed with tenants and be part of the landlord's strategy. However once this has been done it is an effective and comprehensive model to tenant participation and involvement.

Learn More

TPAS Cymru believes we will see more of this type of tenant participation going forward. Talk to us about how we can help you achieve great cooperative participation.

A long term approach that needs full support of all staff and the senior management team.

9. Co-Production

Co-production is an exciting approach that enables tenants and housing professionals to share power and work together in partnership, to design and create solutions, policies and opportunities which work for them all. In fact, all stakeholders whether tenants, people who use services, family carers and service providers can all work together to unlock the wide range of assets in our communities. The approach is value driven and built on the principle that those who use a service are best placed to help design it. Everyone has a say and everyone is valued. The objective is to move away from offer lead services to demand led services.

Co-Production Principles to Solve our Problems Together

•   Valuing people as Assets

•   Building on people's strengths

•   Personal outcomes focused

•   Peer support networks

•   Trust, Equality and Partnerships

•   Catalysts for change

Examples of How This is Used

Co-production is not consultation. It values people and means co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery, and co-evaluation. Neighbourhood Watch is often quoted as early co-production. We saw communities working together supported by professionals like police, landlords and community organisations, increasingly we see tenants and landlords working together on asset based community development supported by time credits to reward and value tenant and community involvement. Health and Social Care have already developed new, exciting co-production approaches.

Advantages

- Majority of examples where co-production is being successfully practised take place at a local scale. Co-production also suits smaller organisations (traditionally those in the third sector) that are more used to working in less structured and hierarchical ways.

- Co-production increases community buy in and finds new approaches and solutions to the challenges we face. Co-production is a very positive model for tenant participation as it values and saves power and decision making.

- Solutions are local and are values based.

Disadvantages

- It makes additional demands of people who use and rely on housing services.

- Can be viewed as a cover for the withdrawal of professionally delivered services.

- Co-produced services could lead to a postcode lottery in terms of service provision and inconsistent approaches which can diminish economies of scale.

- Decision making – sometimes decisions or action is needed quickly which provides a challenge for new co-production environments.

Additional Points to Consider

- Service providers need to accept change in power as solutions are co-produced.

- There also sometimes needs to be clear roles and responsibilities and some limits so that the energy and assets that exist together can focus on the challenge.

- People can be valued and there are many ways to value commitment.

Learn More

One of the major factors to success across all co-production projects is the development of peer support networks. Fortunately, Wales has a real commitment to these and there are support resources to help unlock the assets that are within your community. TPAS Cymru's website has more information and links to external resources that are of value. There is also a Co-Production Network for Wales who are committed to supporting the co-production community.

10. Special Interest Groups

Also known as: Task and Finish Groups / Creative Groups / Equality Group

There are a variety of different types of special interest groups. These might be set up as one off groups or a longer-term tenant group. Special interest groups can focus on specific areas of housing services and how it can be improved. The basic principle is gathering tenants together to focus on an aspect of housing that matters to them. This could be around areas such as maintenance and repairs, anti-social behaviour or older people's accommodation.

Some tenants' groups are not focused on directly improving services but are created on the basis of a shared mutual interest. These groups are often known as tenants lead groups and are wide ranging. Groups such as gardening groups, knitting groups and craft groups are common examples of this. They can be a way of getting insight without labeling them as tenant participation.

Examples of How This is Used

Examples of these types of groups are broad (see some examples below). How these are used can vary depending on the purpose and objectives of the groups.

Service improvement groups:

- Editorial groups

- Environmental groups

- ASB groups

- Task and Finish Groups

Equality and diversity groups:

- Disability groups

- BME groups

- LGBT groups

Social groups:

- Craft groups

- Gardening groups

Advantages

Involvement in a special interest group, whether it is for service improvement or not, can be really beneficial to individuals, the community and the landlord organisation. Some of the key advantages include:

- Special interest groups are a great way to carry out consultations and get tenants input into addressing the issue that matter to them.

- They are a cost-effective option and relatively easy to set up. Some groups may be set up temporarily to address a specific issue or be ongoing.

- Many groups will quickly run themselves with very little intervention needed.

- Informal groups in particular are more accessible and inclusive for the wider tenant population.

- Tenant groups can help address social isolation and be a place for tenants to offer mutual support to one another, share common interests and make friends as well as gaining important new skills and confidence.

- The groups offer a level of flexibility not available in other approaches such as TRAs. For example, groups can even exist in the virtual domain and don't necessarily have to involve formal meetings and constitutions.

A cost effective option and relatively easy to set up. Many groups will quickly run themselves with very little intervention needed.

Disadvantages

- As with other approaches to Tenant Participation, special interest groups are also limited in their diversity and cannot always be representative of the wider tenant population.

- For some groups less focused on service improvement and more on the social aspect, it might be argued that these groups don't count as tenant participation because they are not contributing towards service improvement.

- One of the great advantages of special interest groups is that they can be run independently by tenants with little interference from the organisation which can give tenants involved a greater sense of pride and autonomy.

- However, it is important to ensure that the support needs of the group are recognised and met. For example, tenants may need initial support at the start to get the group on its feet and then intermittent support as the group grows and develops.

- It is also important that involved tenants are given any necessary training they need to help them maintain the group and create sustainability.

- With the right level of support running and being part of a special interest group can be very empowering for tenants involved.

Learn More

TPAS Cymru has helped set up many special interest groups and tenant lead groups across Wales. We deliver training about how this type of participation can work and be implemented correctly. Find out more on our website.

11. Critical Friend Model

The Critical Friend Model is a high challenge and high support approach to involvement. It requires transparency and openness and a commitment to a partnership approach by both landlord and tenants.

Examples of How This is Used

Included in this type of model would be a Scrutiny Panel approach which operates at a strategic level often scrutinising Board and senior director decisions in a constructive way. Scrutiny is a process which requires the collection of information/evidence from other sources e.g. Tenant Auditors; the Scrutiny Panel uses data and details supplied to them rather than gathering the details themselves. Scrutiny is a method of involving tenants which is recognised as being an important way of a landlord showing they are open and transparent.

Another example of the Critical Friend Model would be Tenant Auditors/Inspectors who monitor the standard of services provided by the landlord. Tenant Auditors report the good as well as the 'less good' aspects of a service. Their focus is to work with the landlord in a constructive/high challenge/high support way by making recommendations for service improvement whilst not naming individuals or apportioning blame. (Some Auditors/Inspectors are given additional training by their landlords to check the quality of work carried out but this method of inspecting is not as common and requires additional health and safety considerations)

Mystery Shoppers are tenants who test the quality of a front-line service by for example visiting/ringing/emailing head office for information about a particular aspect of customer service. An example of this might be a tenant Mystery Shopper visiting the main office/reception area of a Landlord to assess its accessibility for wheelchair users.

> The Critical Friend Model is a challenge requiring transparency and openness.

Advantages

- Scrutiny panels have real power and remit.

- Can improve the standard of services offered to tenants for the benefit of everyone.

- Can improve and evidence Value for Money.

- The implementation of a Critical Friend Model can help build trust and develop relationships between tenants and staff.

- Can help provide skills, knowledge, training opportunities and experience for tenants who get involved in the projects.

- Can add real value to improving services.

Disadvantages

- It can take time for staff/contractors to feel confident and comfortable with the concept of tenants being involved in scrutinising or inspecting.

- Building a partnership approach requires patience and commitment from senior managers and the board and can be a lengthy process.

- Can be seen by some tenants as a way of dealing with 'their own' issues and therefore they may not be as objective as they should be.

- Can be seen as a 'tick box' exercise if not implemented properly.

- All stakeholders need to buy in to concept of co-decision making in implementing improvements.
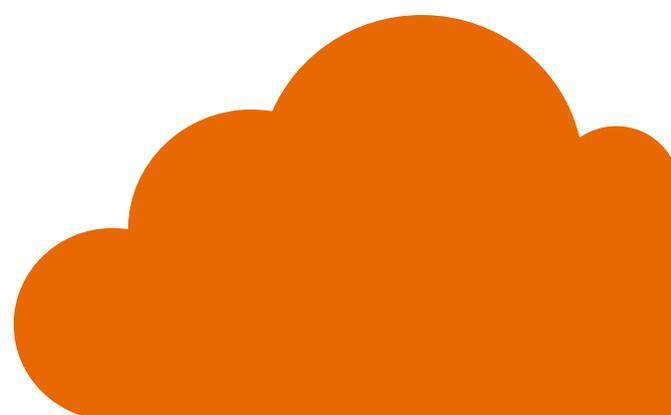
Further Information

For further information ask TPAS Cymru how tenants
can get the best from this approach.
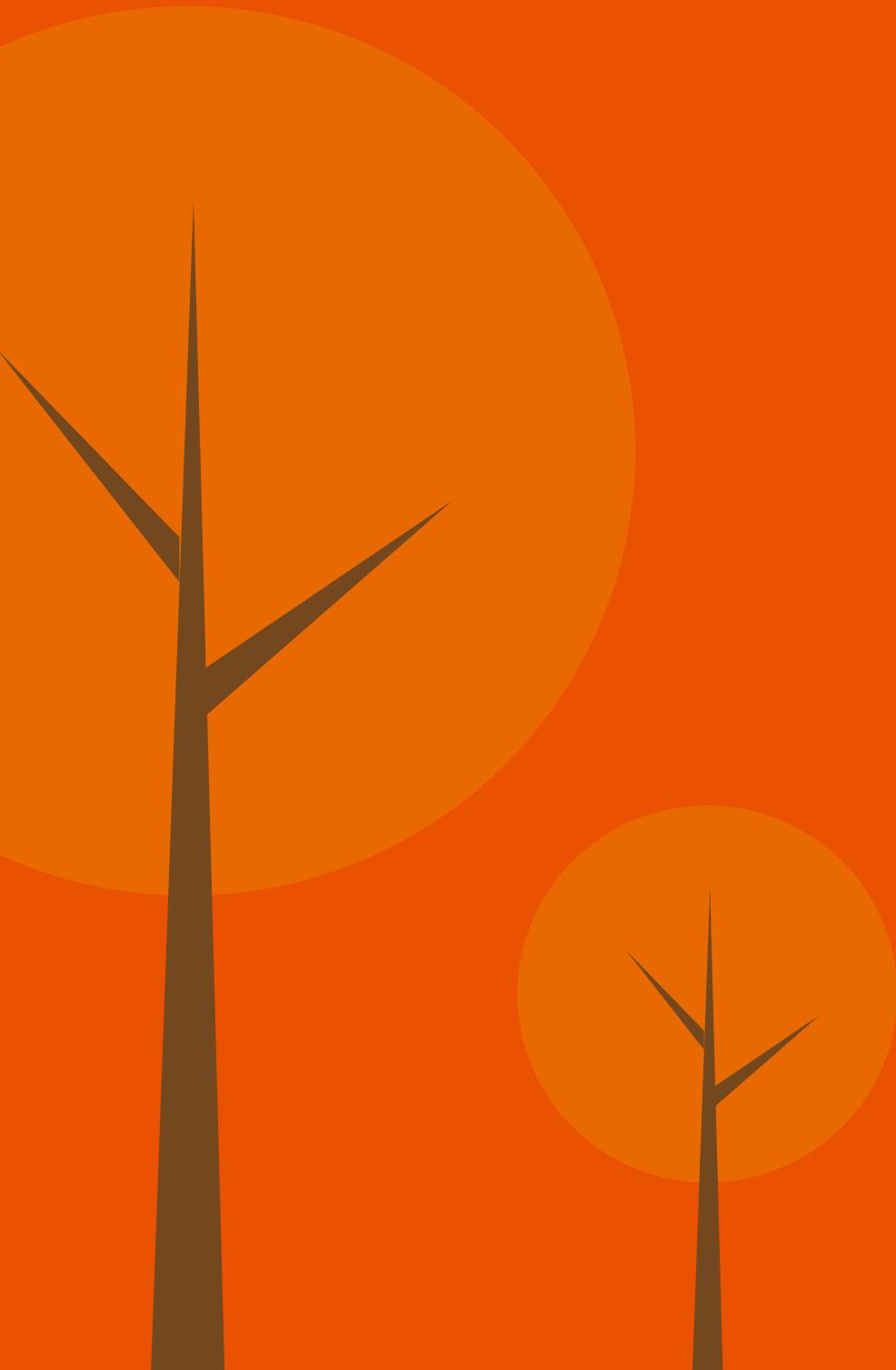
Key Points to Consider When Deciding on a Model

Most landlords and tenants use a mixture of models. Being aware of the different methods of participation and their pros and cons is only part of the equation in terms of successful engagement. However, there are other factors landlords (and tenants) need to consider.

1. Outcomes: clear, intended outcomes are crucial to successful participation.

Whether it's a one-off event, a focus group or a Tenants and Residents Association it's essential that the 'purpose' of the 'engagement' is agreed and advertised so that the common goal is familiar to everyone.

Outcomes relate to what's changed or the 'difference made' e.g. improvement in service delivery; increased feelings of community spirit; reduction in incidents of ASB etc. Outcomes are qualitative rather than quantitative so, rather than focusing on the number of people who attend a fun day, the outcomes will focus on the changes that occur as a result of the fun day e.g. 1.) Tenants attending the fun day will get to know staff that work for the organisation. 2) Barriers between staff and tenants will be broken down.

Recording outcomes is not as easy as recording quantitative results e.g. 200 people attended the fun day is easy to record, recording whether delegates feel they have got to know the staff of the organisation is trickier, BUT it is achievable. Recording and monitoring outcomes requires preparation and of course baseline data. More information about recording and monitoring outcomes can be obtained from TPAS Cymru.

Most landlords and tenants use a mixture of models, taking note of the pros and cons of each.

2. Feedback – lack of feedback is one reason given by tenants for no longer getting involved.

Feedback is often overlooked by landlords: whenever tenants/residents give their opinions, views and comments, it is essential that feedback is given in return. Feedback doesn't have to be given individually but it does need to be offered in a variety of suitable formats to as many people as possible to demonstrate to those that participated and to the wider population, that landlords listen and take notice of what is said.

It is easy to give feedback when you've been able to implement or carry out the suggestions or wishes of the tenants. 'You said.....so we did' is an excellent way of sharing positive feedback but it is equally important to feedback when you're not able to move ahead with suggestions made. 'You said.... we can't because......' demonstrates that notice has been taken of tenants' comments but can't be put into action because of other issues e.g. lack of budget, not the remit/responsibility of the landlord or it's not reasonable or practical etc.

If we want to encourage tenants to participate, we need to assure them that we've paid attention to what they've said and show them what's changed (or hasn't) as a result of their engagement.

3. Looking after tenants - Our tenants volunteer their time and effort to us and we expect a lot from them: looking after them is essential

Recruiting, developing and retaining tenants to volunteer in TP is an ongoing challenge for landlords. An awareness of why tenants do or don't get involved is important and can help us understand how to attract more individuals to volunteer their time and energy and break-down the barriers which prevent others from engaging.

Generally, when considering looking after tenant volunteers, landlords need to think about the following:

- Planning - Aims and objectives. The purpose of volunteer involvement?

- Recruitment - Promotion, role and responsibilities, advertising.

- Induction - Health and Safety, code of conduct, policies and procedures.

- Training and development - Skills audit, regular support and supervision.

- Reviewing - Achievements, monitoring and evaluation of projects.

4. Support for staff

Front line staff are an excellent resource to raise awareness of Tenant Participation within the organisation. They can highlight its benefits, outcomes and the different methods of involvement available to tenants. However, for them to be confident doing this, they need to be clear about the benefits and advantages of Tenant Participation and be aware of the different ways that tenants can participate within their organisation.

One option is to ensure that all inductions for new staff includes an Introduction to TP. This will enable staff to understand the importance of tenant involvement and the outcomes achieved by the organisation as a result of participation activities. This insight will help staff to promote TP to the tenants they deal with on a daily basis. It's an opportunity to encourage communication and understanding of the opportunities for tenants to be involved in improving services in a pro-active and positive way. On-going TP training for staff is an example of how investment can reap Value for Money benefits in the longer term.

5. Talk to TPAS Cymru

We have a wealth of experience and are always looking at different approaches not just in Wales but also in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England. We also keep an eye on developments in Europe and on other methods used across the world.

We can help you navigate the different approaches and provide you with case studies and examples of best practice to help you avoid the pitfalls others have experienced. We are dedicated to successful Tenant Participation in Wales. We do not advocate any single approach but believe in getting the right solution for each individual community.

It's your turn... 4 questions to ask yourself!

1. Do you recognise which participation models you are involved in?

2. Do you understand the benefits/limitations of the current models you use?

3. Do you see the advantage of adopting other models?

4. Do you want some help or advice from TPAS Cymru?

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Social Media: We can be found on Twitter, Facebook, Linkedin and Instagram

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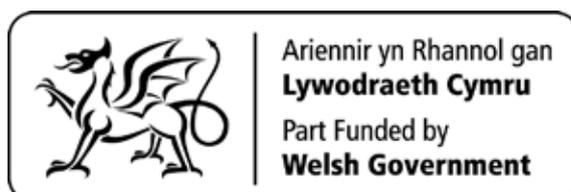
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