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Resident involvement
in social housing in the UK and Europe

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Executive Summary

Background

Resident involvement in social housing is about how tenants or others living nearby can influence a social landlord's activity. The remit of such influence may range from contributing to landlord decisions on local service delivery, at one end of spectrum, to bearing on an organisation's strategic policy, at the other. Irrespective of whether it incorporates governing body membership, resident involvement is an aspect of housing and urban governance. As recently declared by bodies regulating social housing in England, 'Involving tenants in running their homes is an accepted principle in social housing. Tenant involvement... is normal practice in a way it was not ten years ago'.[1]

This research was commissioned by Hyde Housing Group to inform further development of the Group's governance and accountability structures and procedures. As such, the fieldwork was targeted on other organisations believed to be leading exponents in this area and with other similarities to Hyde, especially in terms of scale, geographical dispersion and legal status. Beyond the UK, the study focused on practice in Belgium (Flanders), Denmark and the Netherlands. It is hoped that the report will be of interest to readers in these and other jurisdictions. However, the most intensive fieldwork was undertaken in England and our account is inevitably written from a UK perspective.

The nature and scope of resident involvement in social housing is importantly affected by a landlord organisation's legal and governance structure. For providers structured as co-operatives, or with tenant majority governing bodies, resident involvement is not optional but inherent. In this respect, the Danish sector, with its built-in 'tenants' democracy' and its decentralised ownership and accountability framework, contrasts sharply from the other countries in this study. While it is apparently somewhat less diverse, the Dutch housing association sector appears to have far more in common with its English counterpart in terms of typical organisational forms and ethics.

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[1]   p3 in: Tenant Services Authority & Audit Commission (2010) *Tenant Involvement: Assessing Landlords' Progress* http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20215

Research questions and methodology

The key questions addressed by the research were as follows:

- What specific models exist for resident empowerment, scrutiny and influence relevant to larger housing associations operating across large geographical areas?
- What is the potential of resident incentive and rewards schemes in increasing levels and quality of involvement?
- In what ways can social landlords effectively facilitate resident influence and participation in (a) decision-making in the delivery of local services; and (b) strategic decision making?
- How can social landlords best involve hard to reach groups and ensure representation from all the seven Equality strands?
- What is to be learned from the practices of leading social landlords in relation to the recording, monitoring and measuring resident engagement activities?

The study methodology involved four main elements:

1. Literature review
2. Consultation with key UK and international experts
3. Country profiles focusing on selected (non-UK) country reporters
4. Case studies focused on nine 'good practice' landlords in the four case study countries. In each case, these involved indepth interviews with both managers and resident representatives.

Resident involvement in social housing: officially recommended approaches

The promotion of resident involvement in social housing is an explicit official policy priority in all the case study countries covered in this research. Until recently, this objective was being strongly promoted in England via an intensive model of government regulation. Since 2007, and particularly since the change of government in 2010, however, there has been a dramatic shift away from both prescriptive requirements and rigorous scrutiny of their implementation. With the predominant 'localist' ethic implying enhanced resident influence on services, this poses a particular challenge for many large housing associations.

In Belgium, with its relatively small and emergent sector, active official commitment to enhancing resident involvement in social housing is a recent development. In the Netherlands, by contrast, the past decade has seen government tending to draw back from direct or prescriptive involvement in

this cause. This has been compensated over a number of years by a growing industry commitment to achieve such ends through self-regulation. Given the ingrained nature of England's centralised political and administrative culture it remains to be seen whether a similar trend will be triggered by the radical re-orientation of official regulation seen here in recent years.

Structures for involvement

Governing body resident membership is the main structural vehicle for resident involvement in Denmark, where resident-controlled housing is the norm. Minority resident representation on main boards of English and Dutch housing associations is also typical (although not universal in England). While a Dutch landlord must, by law, designate resident seats on its supervisory body, concerns over possible 'conflicts of interest' underlie the rule that nominees cannot be tenants of the association concerned.

As a crucial component within the broader architecture of resident involvement, case study landlords typically attached more significance to organisation-wide tenant councils, panels or advisory boards or customer services committees than to main board resident membership. Such forums, set up to input a resident perspective to corporate decision-making, were found in Belgium, England and the Netherlands.

All case study landlords in the low countries worked with organisation-wide panels established as freestanding resident forums to articulate resident views. Under a somewhat distinct approach found in England vehicles for resident views were more incorporated within the corporate governance structure. These took the form of governing body subcommittees with a service delivery remit and with residents not (necessarily) the only members.

In addition to organisation-wide resident meetings, the English case study landlords all involved residents through both regional and function-specific forums. This did not appear to be replicated in other case study countries where, below the organisational level, the main focus of resident involvement tended to be at the estate level.

Consumerist and citizenship models

Case study organisations in all four study countries have recently been going through a process of change reflecting wider social and political movements. In particular, consumerist thinking is influencing the ongoing evolution of governance structures and service delivery procedures. All of the case study landlords were moving toward a more individualised approach combining the rights of individuals and the consumer power of choice. In recognition of many residents' wish to limit their involvement, they were creating time- and

commitment-limited opportunities for involvement based on a consumerist style of operation.

Equally, however, landlords recognised the inherent limits within the individualised model of involvement. Consumerist approaches were, therefore, generally combined with structured, collective forms of involvement more in line with the citizenship model of participation and with the potential to deliver more power to residents. In responding to the challenge of localism for large organisations, case study landlords reported having employed both consumerist and citizenship-type approaches. However, while localism is arguably an ethic linked with the citizenship-style involvement, the provision of a standard social housing 'product' for all users regardless of location could be seen as epitomising a consumer-based approach.

Connected with the citizenship conception of resident involvement, a tenant input into landlord strategic priorities was a standard expectation among Dutch and English case study landlords. In this way, resident views could inform the policy context for specific managerial decisions on newly arising growth options. On specific merger proposals resident input was also seen as appropriate, although limited more to how rather than whether such transactions should proceed. Among English providers effective resident involvement was seen as having a bearing on growth via mergers mainly in terms of enhancing an organisation's attractiveness to prospective partner landlords and their tenants.

Landlords increasingly saw resident involvement on a consumer basis as consistent with their own business model, driven by a customer focused ethos. As social organisations provider organisations retained a belief that resident involvement is 'the right thing to do' and that it brings social benefits, but this is now augmented by an increasing understanding of its symbiosis with business efficiency and effectiveness in delivery.

Communicating with residents and stimulating involvement

All of our case study landlords reported a growing emphasis on widening the range of participating residents. The motivation was threefold: to create a more even balance of power between organisation and resident, to recognise the existence and specific interests of 'hard-to-reach groups'; and, in a practical way, to help shape and improve the services offered.

Most of the provider organisations recognised the need for a menu of involvement choices that included both informal and formal involvement; long and short term activities; and involvement channels or vehicles designed to cater for particular groups who were traditionally under-represented or whose

views tended to remain un-heard. In this way the menu of choices was seen by some landlords as crucial in translating their equalities commitments into action. Information exchange, with appropriate presentation of information, was seen as a key component of involvement activity.

Although there was increasing use of surveys and electronic contact, landlords still (and in some cases increasingly) favoured personal interaction to underpin their involvement work. This type of approach was also valued by residents.

Measurement of involvement activity and its outcomes appears to remain rather underdeveloped although some landlords have begun to develop sophisticated activity monitoring, and to use it to direct future action. Development of customer profiling is proceeding and likely to feature more strongly in future, in line with the shift to a more consumerist organisational culture.

Translating resident views and preferences into action

For residents in the study it was important that their views and suggestions about services were taken seriously and that, where feasible, such contributions resulted in real change to landlord operation. For them, such changes offered a concrete demonstration that organisational claims to an open, customer-focused culture held water. Crucial here are the ways that resident panels and the like interface with the wider governance and managerial structures of the organisation.

Landlords sought to be responsive to residents' expressed wishes in a variety of ways. These could be direct reactions to an individual consumer's request or complaint, they could be policy changes influenced by service user feedback research, or they could be more embedded policy changes originating with resident involvement forums. Some landlords had initiated contact with hard-to-reach groups, and then used the feedback from these interactions to develop appropriate ways for them to become involved.

Provider organisations in the study were continuing to develop their approaches on how best to handle tensions in the landlord-resident relationship resulting from a provider view that resident proposals were infeasible or complaints invalid. Both the mode of presentation and nature of information communicated were regarded as key elements in conveying managerial decisions that, while perhaps unwelcome, were understood and accepted. This was one aspect of a broadly recognised priority on publicising the outcomes of involvement. Such activity was seen to underpin the involvement structure and give residents confidence in it.

Embedding resident involvement

Lasting gains in resident involvement will be achieved only through the creation of a corporate ethos which is fully committed to this objective, and by securing staff buy-in at every level of the organisation. Managers therefore need to recognise the concept of organisational culture and the ways that this may be shaped in support of legitimate objectives. Given the origins and traditions of social housing in many countries, this often implies the need to complete a transition from a paternalistic mindset to a service user-oriented way of thinking. These concepts were generally well-recognised by case study landlord senior managers and had stimulated the development of productive managerial initiatives and techniques. As summed up by both managers and tenants of one English landlord, this is about developing an organisational instinct to do things *with* rather than *for* or *to* tenants.

Conclusions

Tenant controlled housing organisations remain the social housing norm in some European countries and operate as minority players in others. While resident involvement in corporate decision-making is inherent for such providers, it should not necessarily be assumed that a customer-focused organisational culture will prevail. Evidence from Belgium, England and the Netherlands suggests that among social landlords of other kinds an ethic of resident involvement has been increasingly accepted as an essential component of organisational governance over recent years. Arguably, this follows partly from landlord recognition of the need to legitimise operation at a growing scale and to justify retention of taxation and/or public funding benefits attached to not-for-profit provider status. There are significant parallels in the ways that resident involvement has been operationalised by larger social landlords in different countries, with a general acceptance that this calls for a diverse menu of engagement tools and vehicles embodying both consumerist and citizenship style approaches.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Resident involvement in social housing is about how tenants or others living nearby can influence a social landlord's activity. The remit of such influence may range from contributing to landlord decisions on local service delivery, at one end of spectrum, to bearing on an organisation's strategic policy, at the other. Irrespective of whether it incorporates governing body membership, resident involvement is an aspect of housing and urban governance. As recently declared by bodies regulating social housing in England, 'Involving tenants in running their homes is an accepted principle in social housing. Tenant involvement... is normal practice in a way it was not ten years ago'.[2]

In the UK, the promotion of tenant or resident involvement has been an important part of official policy at least since the 1980s. However, the ways that residents can take part in a landlord's decision-making process are closely related to its size, geography and legal form. The framing of this research has been influenced by a need to focus on organisations of a similar size and profile to the Hyde Group, as the commissioning agency. With 32,000 mainstream social rented homes within a total stock of 45,000, Hyde is one of the largest social landlords in Britain. Based in London and managing housing across some 70 local authorities and encompassing five distinct landlord subsidiaries, Hyde can be classed as a regional group organisation. As explained in greater detail below, these considerations influenced the targeting of the research fieldwork – both in terms of the selection of non-UK case study countries and in choosing case study social landlord organisations.

In commissioning the research Hyde Group's primary aim was to learn about resident involvement structures and practices operated by counterpart social landlords. Hence, the fieldwork was targeted on other organisations believed to be leading exponents in this area rather than on Hyde itself. As its title implies, this research looked at resident involvement activity in European countries beyond the UK. In particular, we investigated practice in Belgium (Flanders), Denmark and the Netherlands. It is hoped that the report will be of interest to readers in these and other jurisdictions. However, the most intensive fieldwork was undertaken in England and our account is inevitably written from a UK perspective.

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[2]   p3 in: Tenant Services Authority & Audit Commission (2010) *Tenant Involvement: Assessing Landlords' Progress*
http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20215

1.2 Policy context for the research

The research was commissioned at a time of substantial change in the policy context for social landlords in England. Following a period of intensive regulatory supervision, the 2007 Cave Review marked an important turning point for the sector. The concept of 'co-regulation' forms the cornerstone of the new, much less intrusive, and more outcome-focused approach which has subsequently unfolded. New national policy priorities resulting from the change of government at Westminster in 2010 have only compounded a direction of travel already well-established in the final years of the former administration.

Central to 'co-regulation' as defined by the post-2010 Coalition Government is the notion of a sector where 'landlords are accountable to their tenants, not to the regulator'.[3] Hence the statement from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 2010 Review Team that 'tenants must… have the information and opportunities they need to hold landlords to account and to shape service delivery'.[4]

Under the Coalition Government's ongoing reforms, 'tenant scrutiny' replaces regulator scrutiny as the main means of monitoring and improving landlord performance. So, for example, while landlords remain obliged to produce an annual performance report, this will be designed squarely for a tenant readership – submission to the regulator will be no longer legally required.[5] To support effective tenant scrutiny, there is to be 'a clear regulatory obligation on landlords to provide timely, useful performance information to tenants'. These objectives have been recently reconfirmed.[6] Regulatory guidance on resident involvement both in England and elsewhere in Europe is further discussed below and in Chapter 2.

1.3 Defining and conceptualising 'resident involvement'

There is a substantial policy and academic literature on how people living in homes provided by social landlords (or in neighbourhoods containing social housing) can influence housing management practice and/or the running of housing organisations. A variety of terminologies are used in this literature to describe this phenomenon. 'People who live in social housing are described as residents, tenants, customers and service users. The ways they interact with

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[3] See p7 in: DCLG (2010) *Review of Social Housing Regulation*; London: DCLG
[4] Ibid
[5] DCLG (2010) *Review of Social Housing Regulation*; London: DCLG
    http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/socialhousingregulation
[6] DCLG (2011) *Implementing Social Housing Reform: Directions to the Social Housing Regulator*; London: DCLG
    http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1936126.pdf

[social] landlords are described as involvement, empowerment, participation or engagement'.[7] These terms are sometimes used rather interchangeably. On occasions, for example, the term 'resident' may be used simply as a more respectful term than 'tenant'. Alternatively, choice of terminology may be more significant in conveying a distinct 'vision' of housing governance. For example, a landlord's citation of 'resident' rather than 'tenant' may suggest an ambition to reach out beyond social renters (the traditional 'client group') to others living in areas where they have an interest.

An established official definition of tenant involvement refers to '…tenants taking part in decision making processes and influencing decisions about housing policies; housing conditions; and housing (and related) services. It is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power'.[8] More recently, the former Housing Corporation defined such involvement as covering 'all of the activities and processes that a [social landlord] undertakes that help it to know what its residents and communities want… [and]… all of the activities that enable residents and communities to have more influence over decisions'.[9] On this view, 'involvement includes everything from a resident satisfaction survey or verbal complaint to a member of staff… through to the community ownership of assets'.[10] It may also be used to describe both input into decision-making on *building or estate design* at the local scale (e.g. in the context of an area regeneration project), and routine or ongoing contribution to a social landlord's decisions on housing management or strategic policy.

The Housing Corporation's wording as above is a broad interpretation of resident involvement. Importantly, it encompasses measures to facilitate both 'choice' and 'voice' on the part of ordinary people with an interest in social housing. That is, it covers both those things which help residents to exert influence individually as service users, and those which aim to empower communities, collectively. Similarly, tenant participation (as it was then termed) has been classed as including distinct 'consumerist' and 'citizenship' visions of involvement – see Table 1. Both of these approaches were distinguished from the 'traditional' model of social landlordism with its tendency towards bureaucracy and paternalism.

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7 Para 14 in: Tenant Services Authority & Audit Commission (2010) *Tenant Involvement: Assessing Landlords' Progress* http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20215
8 Scottish Office (1999) *Partners in Participation: A National Strategy for Tenant Participation*; Edinburgh: Scottish Office
9 p3 in: Housing Corporation (2007) *People first: Delivering Change Through Involvement*; London: Housing Corporation
10 Ibid

Table 1 – Styles of social landlordism – three ideal-types

	Traditional	**Consumerist**	**Citizenship**
Primary focus	Focus on producers, i.e. housing managers and councillors.	Focus on role of customer.	Focus on role of consumer and citizen.
View of tenants	Focus on needs of tenants as a whole.	Focus on individual tenant	Focus on tenants as individuals and as a collective.
	Paternalistic and authoritarian.	Emphasis on tenant choice	Tenants' rights and obligations.
Information flows	Reliance on political and professional judgements. Information transmitted through professional and formal political channels.	Market research	Dialogue
		Advertising	Two-way information flow through many channels.

Source – adapted from: Cairncross, L., Clapham, D. & Goodlad, R. (1997) Housing Management, Consumers and Citizens, London: Routledge – p27.

At least in the UK, the growing importance accorded to resident involvement in social housing seen since the 1970s resulted from criticism of welfare state agencies as over-centralised and undemocratic. At least on the face of it, measures to facilitate resident involvement on the citizenship model are inspired by an ethic of participative democracy. Thus, involvement in organisational or neighbourhood governance is often described using the terms of Arnstein's 'ladder of participation' where greater responsibility and control is delegated to the service user or citizen associated with progression through a hierarchy of involvement from being simply provided with information, at the bottom, through to citizen control at the top.[11]

However, whether structures or processes apparently devolving influence to service users actually have this effect cannot be taken for granted. Some researchers have argued that, while managers might speak the language of 'empowerment', there is a potent dynamic among social landlords to retain power for staff and governing bodies.[12] Similarly, a recent regulatory assessment of social landlords in England argued that recent improvements in 'the degree and quality of tenant involvement' have been driven primarily by the desire for compliance with official standards rather than necessarily reflecting underlying

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[11] Arnstein, S.R. (1969) *A Ladder of Participation, American Institute of Planners Journal*, Vol.35, No.4, p216-224
[12] Hickman, P. (2006) Approaches to Tenant Participation in the English Local Authority Sector; *Housing Studies*. Vol.21 (2), p209-225

landlord enthusiasm for such moves.[13] It is, therefore, particularly important to ask not only whether landlords have recommended structures and techniques in place, but also to what extent resident views and preferences voiced through such channels in fact influence landlords' decision making and operational practice.

Increasingly, regulatory literature in the UK equates resident involvement with 'empowerment'. This can be defined as a process which increases people's control over their lives. Empowering people is considerably more ambitious than simply consulting them or collecting their feedback on service delivery. If achieved, empowerment would most straightforwardly be seen as a means of promoting citizenship and democracy. However, a more critical perspective interprets 'tenant involvement' as 'incorporation of tenant activity by the state'[14] and it has also been argued that empowerment is, itself a means of 'regulating tenant behaviour' as a form of control.[15] This is linked to the simple idea that with power comes responsibility. According to this critique, therefore, empowerment may have both 'liberatory' and 'regulatory' aspects.

1.4 Social housing context for resident involvement

As mentioned above, a social landlord's interpretation of 'resident involvement' will necessarily relate to the organisation's origins and characteristics. The ways that resident involvement is seen by both provider organisations and governments will also depend on the history of social housing in the relevant country, as well as on contemporary official policy priorities. Even within the UK, for example, there is a notable distinction between the more 'consumerist' tradition of social housing in England, and the traditionally greater emphasis on 'voice' in Scotland.[16] As further discussed in Chapter 2, a housing provider's legal form is crucially important in framing the remit and style of resident involvement appropriate for that organisation.

As noted earlier, the framing of the agenda for this study reflects Hyde Housing Group's status as a large housing association group managing a relatively dispersed housing stock. Hyde is structured neither as a co-operative nor a housing company. The research questions – see below – are also influenced by

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[13] p23 in: Tenant Services Authority & Audit Commission (2010) *Tenant Involvement: Assessing Landlords' Progress* http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20215

[14] p239-240 in: Riseborough, M. (1998) More control and choice for users? Involving tenants in social housing management; in Marsh, A. & Mullins, D. (eds.) *Housing and Public Policy: Citizenship, Choice and Control* p221-245; Buckingham: Oxford University Press

[15] p133 in: McKee, K. and Cooper, V. (2008) The Paradox of Tenant Empowerment: Regulatory and Liberatory Possibilities; *Housing, Theory and Society*, Vol.25(2), pp132-146

[16] McKee, K. (2010) The future of community housing in Scotland: some thoughts and reflections; *People, Place & Policy Online*, Vol.4(3), p103-110

the origins and traditions of social housing in England. Here, provision was traditionally dominated by relatively large municipal landlords and central government has retained a relatively active role in guiding and shaping social landlord activity, even in recent decades when (legally independent) housing associations have overhauled local authorities as majority providers. As further discussed in Chapter 2, England's social housing landscape is quite unusual, internationally, in this respect.

1.5 Research questions

The main questions specified by the research brief for this study were as follows:

- What specific models exist for resident empowerment, scrutiny and influence relevant to larger housing associations operating across large geographical areas?
- What is the potential of resident incentive and rewards schemes in increasing levels and quality of involvement?
- In what ways can social landlords effectively facilitate resident influence and participation in (a) decision-making in the delivery of local services; and (b) strategic decision-making?
- How can social landlords best involve hard to reach groups and ensure representation from all the seven Equality strands?
- What is to be learned from the practices of leading social landlords in relation to the recording, monitoring and measuring resident engagement activities?

1.6 Research methodology

Undertaken in summer 2011, the research had four main elements:

1. Literature review
2. Consultation with key UK and international experts
3. Country profiles focusing on selected (non-UK) country reporters
4. Case studies focused on 'good practice' landlords.

The literature review focused on good practice guidance and policy expectations of social landlords as regards resident involvement, both in the UK and other European countries. It also encompassed academic and other research findings on resident involvement practice.

Consultation with UK and international experts helped the research team to identify relevant literature and the non-UK countries potentially appropriate for

inclusion in our original fieldwork. Respondent views also fed into decisions on case study landlord selection. This process involved industry bodies and academics. The former included the National Housing Federation, CECODHAS, the European Liaison Committee for Social Housing, International Union of Tenants. Among contributing academic colleagues we are particularly indebted to Professor Mark Stephens (University of Glasgow), Tim Brown (De Montfort University), Gerard van Bortel (OTB, Delft University) and Lars Engberg (Danish Building Institute).

Both Gerard van Bortel and Lars Engberg also played active roles in the research fieldwork by drafting country reports and by undertaking interviews with case study landlord and tenant representatives. The three country overviews, relating to Belgium (Flanders), Denmark and the Netherlands, provided a profile of the social rented sector in each jurisdiction, summarised the relevant legal and regulatory obligations applicable to social landlords, and outlined the range of 'resident involvement' models operated in that country.

Especially given the relatively modest scale of the research it was necessary to focus the fieldwork on a limited range of countries. Similarity to England was crucial here. Important considerations were the scale and role of social housing in each potential case study country, and the profile of the country's social housing sector – including the existence of relatively large landlords configured as not-for-profit agencies rather than state providers. Also critical was the extent to which – in the view of expert informants – resident involvement practice in each country might be considered as potentially providing relevant lessons for social landlords in England. On this basis, as mentioned above, it was decided to focus on Belgium (Flanders), Denmark and the Netherlands.

The scale of the research also constrained both the extent and depth of the case study fieldwork. Firstly, we needed to limit the number of case study organisations to three in the UK and six elsewhere (two per non-UK country). Secondly, while the UK fieldwork involved face to face interviews with local stakeholders, case study contacts in the other countries needed to be undertaken by telephone.

Selection of case study organisations was influenced primarily by the need to involve not-for-profit providers operating at a similar (large) scale to Hyde Group. Equally, the fieldwork needed to focus on organisations considered as potentially exemplifying 'best practice' in resident involvement within each jurisdiction.

Given the necessarily limited number of UK case studies it was decided to concentrate specifically on England; in particular, the 26 housing associations/ groups with more than 20,000 homes. Within this, given the preference for case

study landlords to be comparable with Hyde, the six of these organisations originating from local authority 'stock transfer' were excluded because of their distinct portfolio geography and municipal heritage.

In judging which of the 20 potential case study landlords might be exemplars of good practice we referred to official regulatory judgements in the form of post-2009 short notice inspection reports covering resident involvement. Here, we focused on those organisations subject to such inspections and judged by the Audit Commission as having 'strengths outweighing weaknesses'. Another signifier of potential good practice was designation as a pilot organisation to test out the new 'localist' form of stakeholder accountability embodied in the Tenant Services Authority's Local Offers framework.[17]

Selection of the six non-UK case study landlords was informed more centrally by international expert recommendations (see above). In the Dutch case, however, identification of organisations well-rated on resident involvement was possible through reference to the quasi-regulatory judgements made under the KWH quality rented housing framework.[18] Especially for the Netherlands, therefore, there was a strong basis for choice of organisations potentially exemplifying 'good practice'.

Whether undertaken on site or remotely, case study work involved semi-structured interviews with key senior managers and/or resident involvement specialists in each organisation. In each case study, resident representatives were also interviewed. The 'master topic guide' used to structure these discussions was developed on the basis of the specified research questions (see above). For the UK case studies, interview testimony was also backed up by the collection of relevant documents, e.g. extract from inspection submission, inspection report, self-assessment, service review.

While the case study organisations remain anonymous, they are referred to as E1-E3 for those operating in England, B1-B2 for Belgium, D1-D2 for Denmark and N1-N2 for the Netherlands.

1.7 Structure of this report

The main body of the report is structured as follows. Drawing on the literature review and the case study country reports, Chapter 2 discusses the evolution of

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[17] Tenant Services Authority (2010) Local Offers Toolkit; London: TSA
http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/upload/pdf/Local_offers_toolkit_20100618100432.pdf
[18] See: Perry, J. & Lupton, M. (2009) *What Tenants Want – Globally!* Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing –
KWH website (in Dutch) at: http://www.kwh.nl/

regulatory and good practice guidance on resident participation in England, as well as outlining the expectations placed on social landlords in this respect elsewhere in Europe.

Chapters 3-7 are based largely on our research fieldwork. Findings from UK and non-UK case studies are integrated within a thematic structure. First, in Chapter 3, we focus on structures developed to involve residents in formal or semi-formal ways ranging from governing body membership to participation in service-specific working groups. Chapter 4 then looks at the ways landlords are moving toward a more consumerist outlook, seeking to inform their understanding of resident views as service users through feedback surveys and other forms of market research.

In Chapter 5 we consider the ways that landlords communicate with and inform residents about their services, and how they attempt to stimulate involvement and build capacity. Next, in Chapter 6 we look at the ways that landlords try to ensure that resident views and preferences are translated into action, and at how resident involvement activity and outcomes can be quantified. In the penultimate chapter we look at the perceived importance of an organisational culture which welcomes and encourages resident involvement and the ways that senior managers attempt to promote such culture. In our final chapter we attempt to draw together conclusions by revisiting the key questions posed at the outset.

2. Recommended Practice

2.1 Chapter scope and structure

Chapter 1 touched on some recent developments in social housing regulation in England which have a clear bearing on resident involvement. As well as building on that discussion, this chapter outlines the administrative and policy context for resident involvement in social housing in our non-UK case study countries, Belgium (Flanders), Denmark and the Netherlands.

2.2 Housing provider legal forms in case study countries

Crucial in framing the form and scope of resident involvement in a social landlord's activities is the organisation's legal status and structure. At one end of the spectrum, for example, are landlords established as co-operatives where all tenants are formally association members and where association membership is restricted to tenants. The co-operative principle has recently been incorporated within the 'community gateway' (or community mutual) model adopted by some housing associations newly-established to receive local authority stock transfers in both England and Wales.[19] For an organisation structured in this way, a participative style of operation is inherent, rather than optional.

More commonly in the UK, housing associations are set up as industrial and provident societies where membership is not restricted to (nor obligatory among) tenants. As under the co-operative model, ultimate control is vested in the organisation's 'shareholding membership' – exercised through the association's Annual General Meeting. However, the membership is usually a relatively small number of individuals which includes (but is not restricted to) tenants of the organisation. A third UK variant is the local housing company (LHC) model format which has been commonly used for stock transfer housing associations in England. Under the LHC 'stakeholder governance' format an organisation's formal members are limited to its board members only – usually drawn in equal numbers from three distinct 'constituencies' – tenants, local authority nominees and 'independents'. This model has also been utilised for the 60+ Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) set up to manage local authority owned housing since 2002.[20] Within the housing association

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[19] Pawson, H. & Mullins, D. (2010) After Council Housing: Britain's New Social Landlords; Basingstoke: Palgrave
[20] Ibid

sector, however, ongoing merger activity is eroding the representation of organisations configured in this way.[21]

While mutual-style housing associations exist in the UK, they are uncommon. In some other countries, by contrast, this type of legal form is predominant. In Denmark, where all social housing is provided by non-profit housing associations, the sector is governed by a system of tenants' democracy. As well as having the ruling majority on landlord governing boards, tenants govern local section boards ('afdelingsbestyrelser') at estate level. The primary decision-making unit here is the tenants' assembly ('beboermødet') where all tenants residing in an estate have the ultimate say on estate budgets, renewal activities and estate management matters.

Table 2.1 – Social housing sector size and characteristics in case study countries

| | Size of social housing sector | Structure of provision | | Recent restructuring |
		Provider form	Provider scale	
Belgium (Flanders)	140,000 homes (6% of national dwelling stock)	Mainly third sector not-for-profit landlords but with local authority majority shareholders	Average stockholding: 1,300. Largest landlord has 18,000 homes but only 12 own more than 3,000 homes	Limited incidence of mergers
Denmark	550,000 homes (21% of national dwelling stock)	Not-for-profit third sector landlords governed by tenant-majority boards. Some management contracted out to non-stockholding organisations	Average stockholding: 900. Largest landlord manages 50,000 homes but only 4 manage more than 5,000.	Limited incidence of mergers – only enacted to rescue financially stressed organisations
England	4 million homes (18% of national dwelling stock)	55% owned by not-for-profit third sector landlords (housing associations – HAs); 45% by municipal authorities	Average HA stockholding: 1,800. But 4 HAs own more than 50,000 homes each. Largest 20 landlords own 30% of total HA dwelling stock.	Large wave of merger activity over past 10 years has contributed to doubling avg HA size, 2002-10.
Netherlands	2.4 million homes (32% of national dwelling stock)	Not-for-profit third sector landlords	Average stockholding: 6,500. Largest landlord owns 80,000 homes	Merger activity 1994-2009 contributed to doubling avg size of HA

[21] Pawson, H. & Sosenko, F. (2011) *The Supply-side Modernisation of Social housing in England: analysing mechanics, Trends and Consequences*; Paper Presented at the Housing Studies Association Conference, York, 13-15 April.

At the corporate level, tenants form the ruling body of each Danish housing association, the Housing Council. The Council nominates an executive board of directors ('organisationsbestyrelsen') and the board nominates the social housing director. The council is assembled once a year (akin to the Annual General Meeting of an industrial and provident-style UK housing association), while the board typically meets with the director on a monthly basis. Tenants constitute the majority in the board, but depending on statutes, other members can for instance represent local government.

An absolute majority of tenants at 'beboermødet' (estate tenants assembly) has to sanction decisions on both refurbishment and large-scale renovations, locally. Beyond this, tenants typically influence technical standards, design choices, environmental criteria, costs etc. in building committees and the like. While recent legislative changes have introduced the option that the 'organisationsbestyrelsen' (housing board) can overrule a tenant veto at estate level it is believed unlikely that this option will be frequently used because the system is based on a consensus-model.

Also important within the structure of social housing in Denmark is the partial separation between ownership and management. Large landlord organisations such as our two Danish case study bodies are, in fact, management agencies providing landlord services to local ownership entities. Case study landlord DE2, for example, provides this function for 150 separate owner bodies with an average owned stock of some 270 dwellings per ownership unit. Each such unit is formally independent and has the final say over how its estates are managed – including the decision of whether to provide landlord services directly or to outsource this role.

Especially as it has been restructured over the past 10-20 years, the Dutch housing association sector contrasts strongly with the status quo in Denmark, as outlined above. Not for profit housing providers in the Netherlands are of two legal forms: 'foundations' (stichtingen) and 'associations' (verenigingen). Historically, many social landlords were configured as 'associations', similar to industrial and provident-style housing associations as in the UK, where the organisation is formally accountable to its members (including tenant members). Through Annual General Meetings (AGMs), association members could exert influence on the organisation's decisions including via the election of the supervisory board members responsible for hiring the executive management board. Management boards may have only one member, but in larger housing associations the number is usually larger. The management board has a strong position and is not only responsible for daily operations but also the strategic policy of the housing association.

Since the 1990s almost all associations have been transformed into 'foundations'; legal entities that have no members. The foundation structure entails a supervisory board of usually five to seven members recruited via co-option. Co-optees normally include tenant members – see below. This transformation to foundation status reflects housing association managerial aspirations to develop a more business-like operational model where the relationship between landlord and tenant is reshaped akin to a service-provider/consumer liaison. The rights of individual tenants are well protected in different forms of legislation (see below), but the more 'collective' powers of tenants have been hollowed-out by the rise of the foundation as the dominant legal entity for social landlords.

As shown in Table 2.1 the Belgian social housing sector is comparatively small and most such providers – called '*Sociale Huisvestingsmaatschappijen*' – *SHMs* operate at a relatively small scale. Established as (Public) Limited Companies, these organisations are governed by management boards where voting power is nominally distributed according to share ownership. However, although local authorities are the main shareholders, voting rights are of mainly symbolic value.

Comparing social housing profiles in the non-UK case study countries with England's housing association sector, the strongest similarities are found in the Netherlands. In both countries, partly thanks to mergers, typical provider scale has increased substantially in recent years. The growing emphasis on a consumerist model of provision and the associated switch to foundation status also parallels trends dominant in England. It therefore seems likely that experience of particular direct relevance to England's larger housing associations is most likely to be found in the Netherlands. At the same time, however, it is also anticipated that landlord practices in Belgium and Denmark will also be germane.

2.3 Legal and regulatory requirements

In England, as noted in Chapter 1, the promotion of tenant or resident involvement has been an important part of Government policy on social housing for more than 20 years. From the late 1990s, this was promoted through the Best Value framework which encompassed a more general expectation in favour of customer involvement in public services. Official expectations of social landlords in this area were codified in detail in the Audit Commission's housing management inspection criteria (or Key Lines of Enquiry – KLoEs). Under the relevant KLoE, the Commission indicated that an 'excellent' landlord would be an organisation which, among other things:

- has staff who all demonstrate user focus and a commitment to resident involvement in their work, and who treat people with respect at all times.
- has a range of mechanisms in place that allow service users to participate effectively
- actively canvasses the views of service users and uses them to review or improve services.
- treats resident involvement as an integral element of the service, designed for the convenience of the service user and not the organisation.
- inspires service user confidence that their input will be valued and acted upon and has delivered consequential service improvements
- makes available adequate resources for resident involvement, including resident training
- produces, and circulates to service users, information explaining management decisions.

[adapted from Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry for Resident Involvement[22]]

The above standards drew on a wide range of pre-existing UK regulatory and good practice advice, including requirements specific to housing associations such as the expectation that all such organisations 'should have at least one resident board member on each board or committee with a service delivery remit'.[23] The KLoE standards also encapsulate ideas elaborated elsewhere by the Commission itself such as the priority on developing a 'menu of involvement' – a diverse range of participation vehicles to draw in the widest possible range of service user groups.[24]

The Commission's standards (and earlier versions of these) were used as key benchmark criteria in the large-scale social housing inspection programme operated in England in the 2000-2009 period. Consequently, they have been highly influential. However, under the much less prescriptive style of regulation which has subsequently emerged, official requirements on resident involvement in England have been re-stated in broader terms. Recommended landlord practice in this respect is encompassed within one of the six new outcome-focused standards. Specifically, providers are obliged:

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[22] Audit Commission (2007) *Housing Inspectorate Key Lines of Enquiry – Landlord Services: Resident involvement*; http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/inspection/Keylinesofenquiry/Pages/ResidentinvolvementKLOE.aspx

[23] Housing Corporation (2007) P*eople First: Delivering Change Through Involvement*; London: Housing Corporation http://www.rudi.net/node/17514

[24] Audit Commission (2004) *Housing: Improving services through resident involvement (Management handbook)*; London: Audit Commission; http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/AuditCommissionReports/NationalStudies/Resident_involvement_Handbook.pdf

- to offer a wide range of opportunities for resident involvement, including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formulation of housing-related policies and the delivery of housing-related services
- through consultation, to provide tenants with opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery
- to provide tenants with a range of opportunities to influence how the landlord meets national standards and to scrutinise their performance
- to support tenant capacity building.

[adapted from National Standard for Tenant Involvement and Empowerment[25]]

While this is generally much more open than the detailed requirements of the KLoE regime, the 'local offers' obligation is particularly challenging for larger housing associations with spatially dispersed stockholdings.[26]

The Coalition Government's vision for social housing invests great importance in tenant panels.[27] These will contribute to settling unresolved complaints about landlord services. In exercising its scrutiny or complaint-handling role, it is expected that a panel might trigger intervention from the regulator by reporting a landlord's 'serious service failure'.[28] More broadly, such panels are seen as the main way of overseeing landlord performance under the new resident-scrutiny-oriented framework. Landlords will need to develop information systems relevant to the area covered by the tenant panel. However, consistent with the general ethic of an outcome-focused regime, there has been no central guidance on panel size, form and competence: this is for landlords and tenants to decide.

Legal and regulatory frameworks for social housing in our other case study countries are highly distinctive. At one end of the spectrum, there is the Danish model where formal tenant control of social housing means that there is perceived to be little need for resident involvement to be officially specified or policed through regulation as familiar in the UK. However, recent Government pronouncements have placed increased emphasis on collaboration between social landlords and local government. From 2010, municipal authorities and housing providers have been required to set up a formal 'management dialogue'. Given their supreme position in the governance of social housing, this

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[25] Tenant Services Authority (2009) The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2010; London: TSA
[26] Tenant Services Authority (2010) *Local Offers Toolkit*; London: TSA
[27] DCLG (2010) *Review of Social Housing Regulation*; London: DCLG
http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/socialhousingregulation
[28] Ibid (p15)

is expected to result in housing association tenant representatives becoming more involved in strategic decision-making at city level.

Again contrasting sharply with the Danish regulatory context is the Dutch framework, associated with a social housing ownership structure more akin to that of England (see above). Here, the legal transformation of providers to 'foundation' status during the 1990s was paralleled by the 1993 establishment of a Social Housing Management Order ('BBSH'). This strengthened the position of tenants in several ways:

- Tenant organisations were enabled to claim financial support from their landlord for the operation of participation mechanisms. Funding includes budgets to facilitate the operational costs such as printing, secretarial support, training and external advice.
- Housing associations were required to produce an annual report presenting their performance in six fields, including tenant participation – to include the impact of tenant involvement on the policy and management of the organisation.
- Housing associations were required to designate at least two resident governing body (Supervisory Board) members. At the same time, however, concerns over possible conflicts of interest mean that a tenant may not serve as a board member of his/her own landlord. Likewise, resident board members nominated by tenant organisations are required to act independently in this role rather than being directly accountable to the nominating body.

The more recently legislated Tenant Participation Act (Overlegwet Huurders/ Verhuurders) provides tenants with additional possibilities to influence the policies and actions of their social landlord.[29] Providers are required to establish a co-ordinating Tenants Board that consults with the management of the housing association about policy issues, such as rent policy, maintenance policy and demolition and sales policy. The law mainly grants tenants an advisory role and compels social landlords to take that advice seriously. Most housing associations have formalised the provisions of the Tenant Participation Act into participation covenants with their tenant board. These may incorporate forms of involvement extending beyond those legally required.

In contrast with England, there is no recent tradition of centralised regulation in Dutch social housing. Instead, implementation of the provisions outlined above is assured mainly through industry self-regulation. Sector codes developed by

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[29] CECODHAS (2011) *Exchange: The Place of Inhabitants – Residents' Participation in Creating Sustainable Housing and Neighbourhoods*; http://www.housingeurope.eu/issue/1890

AEDES, the trade body for Dutch social landlords, were introduced in 2007. These emphasise the important position of service users and state that social landlords seek to actively involve residents 'in working to create vital communities and neighbourhoods and in the development of our products and services' (AEDES code, 2007).

Another related aspect of industry self-regulation in the Netherlands is the service quality 'kitemarking' framework 'KWH', a partnership set up in 1994 and now involving more than 200 housing associations.[30] The system prescribes quality standards for a wide range of landlord activities including governance, social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability.

KWH kitemarks include a specific designation or 'label' for Tenant Participation *(KWH Participatielabel)*. The associated criteria specify requirements for meaningful tenant involvement under four headings: (a) clear vision on tenant participation, (b) adequate conditions to support tenant participation, (c) accessible and cooperative landlord, and (d) tenant participation has a positive impact on landlord policy and activities. Providers applying for the Tenant Participation Label are assessed by an independent audit committee which makes reference to consumer survey data as well as evidence from face-to-face interviews with staff members and tenant representatives.

Apparently taking some inspiration from the Dutch system, the Flemish government has recently begun to develop a legislative basis for resident involvement in social housing in this part of Belgium. Under the terms of the 2005 Flemish Housing Code (*Vlaamse Wooncode)* social landlords are obliged to:

- organise meetings with tenants and provide opportunities to discuss their (housing) problems and expectations and develop adequate solutions in collaboration with stakeholders;
- organise meetings to inform tenants and involve them in relocation processes connected to refurbisments or other substantial changes to the housing stock;
- take initiatives to inform and communicate with tenants.

A system for social landlord accreditation, as outlined in 2010, will include a four-yearly assessment of organisational performance – including performance on resident involvement.

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[30] http://www.kwh.nl/

2.4 Chapter summary

The nature and scope of resident involvement in social housing is importantly affected by a landlord organisation's legal and governance structure. For providers structured as co-operatives, or with tenant majority governing bodies, resident involvement is not optional but inherent. In this respect, the Danish sector, with its built-in 'tenants' democracy' and its decentralised administrative framework, contrasts sharply from the other countries in this study. While it is apparently somewhat less diverse, the Dutch housing association sector appears to have far more in common with its English counterpart in terms of typical organisational forms and ethics.

The promotion of resident involvement in social housing is an official policy priority in all the case study countries covered in this research. Until recently, this objective was being strongly promoted in England via an intensive model of government regulation. Since 2007, and particularly since the change of government in 2010, however, there has been a dramatic shift away from both prescriptive requirements and rigorous scrutiny of their implementation. With the predominant 'localist' ethic implying enhanced resident influence on services, this poses a particular challenge for many large housing associations.

In Belgium, with its relatively small and emergent sector, active official commitment to enhancing resident involvement in social housing is a recent development. In the Netherlands, however, the past decade has seen government tending to draw back from direct or prescriptive involvement in this cause. This has been paralleled over a number of years by a growing industry commitment to achieve such ends through self-regulation. Given the ingrained nature of England's centralised political and administrative culture it remains to be seen whether a similar trend will be triggered by the radical re-orientation of official regulation seen here in recent years.

3. Structures for Involvement

3.1 Chapter scope

This chapter focuses on the ways that social landlords involve residents in governance structures. Most straightforwardly, this includes the reservation of tenant or resident member seats on the organisation's legally constituted governing body. However, our fieldwork confirms evidence from earlier studies[31] illustrating that larger housing associations – at least in England – typically to operate a range of other formal or semi-formal governance structures to facilitate resident involvement. Drawing primarily on case study evidence, the chapter looks as the nature and remit of such structures both in England and in the other three case study countries.

3.2 Tenant/Resident involvement at the organisational scale

Main board resident membership

In England, as also noted in Chapter 2, main board resident membership has been strongly encouraged by regulation. However, the importance and appropriateness of such representation has been hotly debated within the sector. As a director of an independent not-for-profit business, a governing body member has an obligation to prioritise the interests of the organisation rather than acting as an agent of his/her constituency (e.g. the tenant body). Nevertheless, particularly where a resident board member is recruited via election – or even by nomination from a resident or tenant group – there is an implication that the board member role is 'representative'.

In combination, the messages outlined above have been described as creating 'representatives without the means to represent'.[32] Proposed solutions to associated tensions have included (a) wholesale rejection of tenant board membership as incompatible with efficient business operations[33], and (b) Involving tenants as directors only with respect to organisations with a direct

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[31] Pawson, H., Davidson, E., Smith, R. & Edwards, R. (2009) *The Impacts of Housing Stock Transfer in Urban Britain*; Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing
http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/impacts-housing-stock-transfers-urban-britain
Tenant Services Authority & Audit Commission (2010) *Tenant Involvement: Assessing Landlords' Progress*
http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20215

[32] p547 in: Clapham, D. & Kintrea, K. (2000) Community-based housing organisations and the local governance debate; *Housing Studies,* Vol.15(4), p533-559

[33] Appleyard, R. (2006) *Growing up: A report of the Future of the Sector Commission*; London: L&Q Group

service delivery remit rather than those with a strategic role (for example, reserving resident seats only on the boards of service provider subsidiaries, rather than on a 'group parent' board).[34] Another important aspect of the context for this discussion is the tendency towards smaller, more professionalised main boards as encouraged by regulators and industry bodies in recent years, at least in England.

Most of the nine case study landlords had governing bodies with one or more places reserved for tenants or residents. As noted in Chapter 2, under Denmark's 'tenants democracy' model, tenant majority boards are the norm. At DE1, for example, the 30 local housing organisations who buy in their estate services from the housing management company each sent representatives to an overarching tenants' assembly, with the assembly nominating members to the company's main board.

Dutch landlords, by law, must include at least two residents on their supervisory board, although these cannot be tenants of the organisation concerned (see previous chapter). In common with E2, at both of the Dutch case study landlords main board resident members were nominated by the organisation-wide resident representative body – see below. The Belgian case study landlords had no resident representation on their main governing bodies.

Generally speaking, the English and Dutch landlords which had resident board members in a minority role did not seem to regard this as a critically important element within their overall approach to resident involvement. And at E1 where there were no reserved seats for resident board members, it was argued (by both staff and tenants) that such 'representation' can amount to little more than tokenism. In a similar vein, a main board member interviewee at E3 commented that it is a particular challenge for main board resident members to be sufficiently well-informed about the range of issues covered in the board's discussions. An alternative to the model where there are two main board seats reserved for residents could be for two resident representatives to have a regular slot at the board meeting to participate in and inform discussions about matters with a direct service delivery implication.

Organisation-wide resident forums

As one interviewee commented, 'the simple presence of residents in the board room is influential'. However, case study landlords typically attached more significance to organisation-wide tenant councils, panels or advisory boards than to main board resident membership. Such forums existed to articulate a

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[34] Elton, L. (2006) *Review of regulatory and compliance requirements for RSLs – A report to the Housing Corporation by a review group chaired by Sir Les Elton*; London: Housing Corporation

resident perspective on corporate decision-making. Bodies of this kind were in existence in all of the case study landlords other than tenant-controlled organisations operating in Denmark.

At the five case study landlords where there were freestanding organisation-wide panels or councils, recruitment to the relevant forums contained a democratic or representative element. At E2, for example, the panel body was in fact a traditional Federation of tenants' and residents' groups with a quasi-representative structure. Nomination of such panel members by local representative bodies was also normal in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Framing a panel's remit, there was typically a detailed agreement between landlord body and the respective panel defining both the subjects on which the panel could pronounce, and the organisation's responsibilities in terms of responding to such views as expressed. At N2, for example, it was explained that the panel could advise on a wide range of policy matters; not only those issues where residents were directly affected (e.g. rents, services and costs), but also on strategic matters such as a proposed merger. Formally, the panel's powers here were limited to 'advising' the main board. For example, opposition to a suggested merger would be non-binding. Perhaps significantly, however, a senior management view was that such advice would constitute an effective 'veto' power. In England, a 'constitutional change' proposal of this kind would require majority membership endorsement from a special general meeting.

Somewhat in contrast, at N1 the residents' council's sphere of activity was constrained to matters of direct concern to tenants (e.g. rent levels) and did not encompass strategic issues such as new development. At B1, the Tenant Advisory Group was entitled to receive a managerial response to any proposal or query within six weeks. While decision-making powers remain with the board, a management view was that the structure 'ensures a strong voice for tenants'.

A related but partially distinct approach to formal resident involvement at the organisational level was the Customer Services Committee (CSC) structure in place at E1 and E3. Rather than being exclusively composed of residents, up to half of CSC members were (non-resident) main board members. Established as a sub-committee of the main board, the CSC remit was to scrutinise the quality of landlord services and to advise the board on all service-related decisions. Whereas a distinction is often drawn between 'operational' and 'strategic' matters, it was suggested by one interviewee a CSC remit should properly be to take a strategic view of operational issues. A limitation on CSC remit as noted at E1 followed from loan covenant conditions that only the main board could pass decisions with implications for organisational financial risk.

CSC resident members were recruited through nomination from regional forums. At E1, these were termed Regional Service Panels (RSPs). However, they were discouraged from seeing their role as strictly 'representative'. For example, in its guidance literature, E3 advised resident participants that: 'The only views we expect you to bring [to CSC/RSP meetings] are your own'. This reflects a broader line of thinking which sees resident participation in forums at the organisational level as valuable mainly through the customer perspective it contributes to policymaking, rather than as a channel for negotiation between residents and management.

Organisation-wide panels or CSCs existed to feed resident perspectives and proposals into official decision-making systems. Their incorporation at a high level within official governance structures was also portrayed as embodying a commitment to a 'partnership' style of decision-making. CSC influence on corporate policymaking typically involved inputting views to the main board through nominated main board members whose role was to articulate such views and preferences within that forum. At E1, for example, this included a routine procedure whereby the CSC chair (a resident) presented a report to the main board after each meeting. Perhaps signifying a slightly paternalistic ethic, the CSC chair at E3 was a main board member appointed as CSC chair by that board, rather than by fellow-CSC members. The postholder was, nonetheless, expected to represent and champion resident perspectives at the main board.

Beyond this, as found in Belgium and the Netherlands, resident forums of some case study landlords interfaced directly with senior managers. At N1, for example, the residents' council held a monthly meeting with the chief executive. Meetings with the main board were less frequent.

3.3 Structures for involvement at the sub-organisational scale

In addition to main board resident membership and organisation-wide forums, all of the English case study organisations had established formal structures for resident involvement at both a regional and function-specific level. These involved regional resident panels to scrutinise and monitor local service delivery.

E3's five regional service panels (RSPs) were groups of up to 12 residents, meeting quarterly. Their role was to 'bring a resident's perspective on services to our managers'. Recruited through open advertising to the tenant population, appointment was for a three year term. As well as playing a pivotal role in the process of defining 'local offers' (see Chapter 1) RSPs were seen as crucial in enabling compliance with the TSA's co-regulation requirements. However, it

was recognised that this required that Panel members 'feel ...able to ask important and possibly challenging questions [of staff]'. Training and coaching were made available to develop this capacity. RSPs meet quarterly. RSPs were also seen as a key interface between residents in a given area and the organisation's relevant Regional Manager.

At E2, popular involvement in regional decision-making was also facilitated by resident membership of Divisional Boards descended from the governing bodies of the organisations from which the group had been assembled and which formerly existed as autonomous subsidiaries.

Resident involvement structures at all three English case study organisations also included function-specific working groups or panels. At E1, for example, there were six group-wide service improvement groups (SIGs) of residents. These covered estate services, property services, leasehold services, customer services, supported housing, and anti-social behaviour. At the same level were two other resident groups, the diversity panel covering the six main equalities strands, and the disability forum. Under E2's slightly different model, resident-chaired Issues and Business Groups existed as sub-committees of the overall tenants' and residents' federation. These brought together managerial staff and residents to inform the federation's thinking on matters such as repairs, customer services and service quality.

In the other case study countries, resident involvement at sub-organisational level mainly revolved around local housing organisation boards (in Denmark) and estate-level residents associations (in Belgium and the Netherlands).

3.4 Chapter summary

Governing body resident membership is the main structural vehicle for resident involvement in Denmark, where resident-controlled housing is the norm. Minority resident representation on main boards of English and Dutch housing associations is also typical (although not universal in England). While a Dutch landlord must, by law, designate resident seats on its supervisory board nominees cannot be tenants of the association concerned.

As a crucial component within the broader architecture of resident involvement, case study landlords typically attached more significance to organisation-wide tenant councils, panels or advisory boards or customer services committees than to main board resident membership. Such forums, set up to input a resident perspective to corporate decision-making, were found in Belgium, England and the Netherlands.

All case study landlords in the low countries worked with organisation-wide panels established as freestanding resident forums to articulate resident views. Under a somewhat distinct approach found in England vehicles for resident views were more incorporated within the corporate governance structure. These took the form of governing body subcommittees with a service delivery remit and with residents not (necessarily) the only members.

In addition to organisation-wide resident meetings, the English case study landlords all involved resident participants through both regional and function-specific forums. This did not appear to be replicated in other case study countries where, below the organisational level, the main focus of resident involvement was at the estate level.

4. Consumerist and Citizenship Models

4.1 Chapter scope and structure

The introduction to this report noted that, in their approaches to resident involvement, UK social landlords have developed two distinct new strands, 'consumerist' and 'citizenship', that move away from the traditional style of social landlordism. The resulting innovations can be seen as a reflection of and response to wider changes in society. These wider changes have variously been characterised as a rise in individualism, with accompanying breakdown of collective, democratically accountable, social institutions.[35] At the same time there has been a growing political focus in the UK on citizens' rights and responsibilities[36], and debate on globalisation with its pressures away from local and social organisation.[37]

This chapter considers the findings on how study landlords have incorporated consumerism and citizenship as models for resident involvement, against the background of wider changes in society. The chapter begins with a commentary on the background of societal and housing sector change that is in progress. Next, we examine ways in which study landlords are responding to that change by developing consumerist involvement opportunities. The following section considers activities that are more in line with the 'citizenship' approach, or incorporate both types of action. Finally, operational and business issues arising from the new types of approach are considered.

4.2 The background to change

It is apparent that associations in all four countries covered in the study have gone through significant change in their structure in recent years, sometimes at the behest of government. Perhaps more significant in the long run will be the change in attitudes and what might be called the social ambience that is prompting change.

Perhaps the clearest indication of a shift in society comes from Denmark. Here, housing associations derive much of their ethos from the collective, grassroots

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[35] See for example Bauman, Z., (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press
[36] See Blair, T., (1998). *The Third Way: politics for a new century*. London: Fabian Society.
[37] See Hutton, W., and Giddens, A., (2000). *On the edge: living with global capitalism*. London: Jonathan Cape

origins of the labour movement of the twentieth century and the co-operative ideas of the 1960s. Still today, many housing professionals retain this ethos of social justice and cooperation. However, recent years have seen changes that challenge this view and bring practical difficulties to social landlords.

One change is in the country's political leadership, with a right-leaning government that participants said questions the value for money of housing associations. This has coincided with maturity of many associations' long term debts, suggesting that they will in future have healthy balance sheets and funds to re-invest in their stock and neighbourhoods. This, in turn, has led to pressure on the associations to demonstrate their financial and social value, and to an internal drive to ensure they have credible investment strategies.

A parallel change has been taking place in society, with a less liberal social attitude taking root than in the past. Participants report that Danish social housing tenants are becoming (in general terms) less tolerant of neighbourhood nuisance and similar problems, and have been pressing their landlords for action against perpetrators. At the same time, tenants have begun to see social housing as a stepping stone to their ultimate goal of home ownership, so the average tenancy in the study cases has been reduced to about seven years. This, in turn, challenges the commitment to long term, collective decision making that has characterised the Danish model, and requires new thinking from landlords.

'It's like being in a train station.' [Resident, D2]

The scenario is a familiar one from the UK, where issues of collective action, tolerance of anti-social behaviour and the perceived weaknesses of tenant involvement have also been debated extensively over the past 10-20 years. As outlined in Chapter 1, consumerism has been codified in recent policy and regulatory changes in England that place organisations' accountability to their tenants as the first priority (called co-regulation).

One case study organisation, E3, has developed its involvement approach in line with the 'systems thinking' ethic that has also influenced its organisational development. Systems thinking originated with the Toyota car manufacturer and seeks to create the shortest distance, in organisational terms, between the customer and the product. An E3 board member commented that recent change blends 'a business model of consumerism' with traditional tenant participation.

These developments parallel the organisational changes in the Netherlands where most housing associations have switched to a 'foundation' structure of legal bodies without members (see Chapter 2).

4.3 The creation of consumerist opportunities

A response to social and legislative change in all four countries has been to construct consumerist opportunities that allow residents to take their involvement in bite-sized pieces. There is a strong recognition that not everyone is prepared or able to become a committee or board member, and that many residents want their involvement to come without any future obligations. In line with consumerist societies across western Europe, residents also want choice and, as noted in Chapter 1, there has been a political and organisational drive in recent years for the social housing sector to facilitate this. Examples cited in the fieldwork that landlords had specifically designed to give a choice of time- or commitment-limited involvement included:

- E3 had a readers' panel targeted at residents interested in helping to influence service delivery but not wishing to attend meetings or events. The panel was used to consult on proposed policy or procedure documents or publicity material.
- D1 had initiated short term involvement on regeneration projects to give residents 'a glimpse of the process' with the landlord taking on much of the professional burden that tenants did not want to shoulder themselves.
- N1 had initiated 'top and tail' actions or projects that had a clear start and finish, and could be treated as a one-off. This draws in many people who might not otherwise have participated.

In Belgium (Flanders) the social housing movement is nurturing resident involvement from scratch and so naturally takes account of current social and political realities. A handbook on tenant participation models has been published with support of the Flemish government[38] and some evidence of consumerist approaches is emerging. Examples of this type of approach include:

Increasing numbers of housing associations conduct tenant satisfaction surveys, sometimes supported by local authorities or provinces. In the West-Flanders province for example, 10 housing associations combined to conduct a joint survey among customers with support of the province.

A project, commencing 2011, to develop a modular system of tenant satisfaction surveys to be made available to all Flemish housing associations.

Some housing associations with stock in deprived areas have developed structures to increase the informal presence of staff in these neighbourhoods. Individual tenants can contact staff members and discuss problems.

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[38] Debusschere, E., Vandekerckhove, B., and Van Bortel, G. (2009) *Praktisch Handboek: Huurdersparticipatie in de sociale huisvesting*. Leuven: Vlaams Steunpunt Ruimte en Wonen

From the landlord perspective, consumer attitudes could be regarded as complementary to their own business ethos. Several case study participants said they believed using residents' responses to help to shape services made good business sense. This could be a straightforward matter of those involved in development for sale using feedback to ensure the product was what buyers wanted. More generally it was linked to value for money in avoiding remedial action, or efficiency in delivery of services because they were tailored to the customer.

The involvement choices detailed above tend to concern what landlords call operational matters, and therefore make a direct consumerist link between the services provided and the individual recipient of the services (see Chapter 2). Thus, the thinking is that if a resident believes they will be able to achieve improvements that benefit themselves, they will be more likely to take part in a survey, attend a focus group or turn up for a meeting.

Some managers and residents feel there will always be a (hopefully constructive) tension between the interests of residents and those of business operation, while others have moved to a position of seeing them as complementary.

> *'Apple don't just launch the iPod and say buy it please. They road test it, send it out to people to pick over it, they want to know what works, what they like, what they could do better. And they act on those things.' [Resident, E1]*

A benefit of involvement from landlords' perspective is that they hope to gain consumer information. Just as a private sector firm carries out market research to drive investment in new products that meet consumers' wishes, landlords are seeking information that will help them tailor their services to current and future resident demands. Activities to support this approach are detailed in the next chapter.

4.4 Consumer and citizen

Consumerist approaches have their limits, and this is recognised by landlords and involved residents alike. If the approach is in line with a move to individualism in society, it also has a tendency to promote the negatives of that shift, such as short-term thinking and an absence of community spirit. Consumer approaches on an individual basis may also lack the power to achieve change, particularly in situations of supply shortage. This has long been recognised through the establishment of the various national regulatory

systems designed to protect tenants' rights and assure acceptable standards of service provision.[39]

All of the landlords covered by this study had therefore sought to temper both the traditional paternalism and the newer consumerist approaches with forms of collective power for residents. This blend of approaches, amounting to the 'menu of involvement' outlined in Chapter 1 of this report, and how it is used, are discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

A further, rather paradoxical aspect of consumerism emerges in the question of localism versus 'one size fits all'. The latter might be seen as an aspect of traditional management styles, with an authoritarian outlook and the focus on producers. Alternatively, the provision of a standard social housing 'product' that is reliably equal for all users regardless of location could be seen as epitomising a consumer-based approach. Localism, in contrast, has the capacity to produce differences according to the circumstances of the place and people, their history and their future possibilities. It can be seen as an ethic linked with the 'citizenship' style of landlordism. Examples of both policy approaches were found in the study.

All of the case study organisations had grown in recent years, some significantly via mergers or by smaller organisations joining the group. The question immediately arises as to the importance of preserving the distinct cultures and organisational identities of each member body within a larger conglomerate. In Denmark this is a requisite, since the joining organisation is almost always doing so by contractual means to gain the benefits of the service management organisation (rather than transferring ownership of its housing and other assets). In other countries this is not necessarily so but retention of local distinctiveness would appear to fit the shift to consumer-and-citizen models where residents' individual and collective wishes are paramount. Such a priority might be in tension with realising the scale economies often cited as a key merger driver.

E3, for example, has settled on a policy of 'tailored inconsistency' in relation to different geographical areas, organisations within the group, and the complex structures for involvement. This reflects the fact that the organisational entity, as now configured, is an amalgam which has brought together numerous previously freestanding provider bodies. The 'tailored inconsistency' model means that inherited organisational and local cultures can be accommodated within what is now a very large organisation. It had, however, introduced a 'tenant participation tracker' whereby each division was responsible for

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[39] See, for example, the Cave Report – Cave, M. (2007) *Every tenant matters: a review of social housing regulation;* London: DCLG

recording its local activity. This was used to aid consistency and awareness across a large, diverse group.

An example of a different ethos comes from E1, which had recently restructured after a series of mergers. It considered the idea of locally differing services at the behest of government (see Chapter 2) but firmly rejected it on the advice of residents. Here, the consumerist idea of a standard product that residents 'buy into' on the same terms wherever they are has taken root. Involved residents interviewed for this study were emphatic in their support for this approach: to do otherwise would in their eyes be unfair and unacceptable. In acting on this line of thinking, the only instance treated by E1 as 'exceptional' was a multi-landlord, multi-tenure estate where residents were part of a larger involvement scheme specific to the circumstances of that place.

4.5 Resident involvement and organisational growth

Especially conceptualised as citizens, a specific question about the remit of residents' influence relates to decisions on organisational growth. Such decisions have a fundamentally 'strategic' rather than 'operational' character, whether they concern 'incremental' growth via new development or 'en bloc' expansion via merger. An associated policy area relevant to many housing associations in England concerns 'stock rationalisation' – that is, reconfiguration of an organisation's portfolio to reduce spatial dispersion and involving selective stock transfers to other providers.

In England, the 2011 introduction of the 'affordable rent' funding system means that decisions on new development have taken on added significance for the tenant body. This is partly because the new framework involves newly built properties being let on an 'affordable rent' basis – i.e. with rents at up to 80% of market levels; considerably higher than as set under traditional arrangements. More importantly, the 'affordable rent' framework explicitly departs from the traditional model whereby scheme financing was ring-fenced within the new scheme itself. Reduced government grant per dwelling means that development can now proceed only where an organisation opts to 'cross-subsidise' ongoing revenue costs of associated private finance by rent pooling. That is, contributing to the ongoing revenue costs of a new scheme via rental income derived from existing properties (in addition to those in the scheme itself). This is to be operationalised through 'converting to affordable rent' a proportion of existing homes being re-let. It has been estimated that for each dwelling newly built under this system, five existing properties will have to be re-let on an 'affordable rent' basis. This does not directly impact on existing tenants. Over time, however, the rental charge consequences of new

development will fairly quickly come to encompass a significant proportion of a developing housing association's tenant population.

As noted in Chapter 3, under the UK legal framework, a housing association constituted as an industrial and provident society can proceed with growth via merger only where authorised by the organisation's shareholding membership (through a majority vote at a special general meeting). Similarly, for a provider established as a company limited by guarantee, the company members must approve such a proposal. While these constituencies will usually include a certain proportion of residents, those concerned will represent only a small fraction of all tenants. Also, in expressing their views on a proposed merger these residents will be acting entirely as individuals and not as representatives of the broader tenant body.

Our research sought to probe how residents were afforded a say in decisions on organisational growth or stock rationalisation. At one end of the spectrum here lay the Danish case study landlords. Given their tenant-controlled status, decisions on growth matters were inherently governed by resident views. Reportedly, there is a dynamic favouring expansion through new development mainly because of board member recognition that 'being larger gives much greater financial stability and less vulnerability to "fluctuations"' [Manager, D2]. In other words, by expanding its stock/tenant base an organisation strengthens its insurance against risk – because the cost of any un-budgeted eventuality can be spread across a larger portfolio. Also, boards can take a relaxed view of a development proposal because the financing of this remains ring-fenced to the new scheme itself (see above); there is no need to underpin costs via rent pooling and therefore no explicit cost to existing tenants.

For most of the Dutch and English case study landlords, organisation-wide residents' forums or panels were seen as the crucial vehicle for giving residents a collective say on decisions about organisational growth. In the Netherlands, such bodies are technically 'advisory'. However, as noted in Chapter 3, a senior manager view from one Dutch case study provider was that resident panel opposition to a proposed merger would constitute an effective veto.

At E1 and E2 organisation-wide resident panels were involved in decision making on organisational growth to the extent that they contributed to annual discussions on corporate strategy which provided the context for managerial thinking about the priority to be attached to growth of different forms. Panel remit on specific merger proposals would be more to influence how such a transaction might be managed rather than whether a proposal should be progressed. At E1, for example, resident representatives had helped develop a plan for the service enhancements a proposed merger should be

expected to deliver – including a group-wide transfer scheme and improved customer services.

'It is fair to say that our tenant engagement here is more about how and when, rather than whether and why.' [Senior manager, E2]

At E3, however, the (part-resident) Customer Services Committee was seen as having a narrower, service-specific agenda. As seen by this provider, resident involvement on merger or stock rationalisation decisions was more appropriately managed via regional and local consultation.

All the English case study landlords saw resident involvement as having an important bearing on organisational growth through mergers, in that a provider credibly portraying itself as resident-influenced could significantly enhance its attractiveness as a merger partner.

'We have a small group of tenants – most from the Federation – who our Growth team will take to regular meetings with prospective partners… Our history and record of active tenant engagement is often used as a positive offer in our discussions with prospective partners.' [Senior manager, E2]

Similarly, at E3 tenants involved at the regional and local level were involved in hosting visits by prospective partner organisations and their tenants.

As regards growth through new development, a resident consultation exercise on the implications of the Government's 'affordable rent' regime was underway at E2 at the time of the research. While the model's cross-subsidy element had triggered concerns, the fact that the new higher rents would be limited to (some) new tenants rather than to existing tenants (see above) was thought re-assuring. To engage tenants in hard policy choices, E2 had used a board game and participatory budgeting methods enabling them to prioritise a limited budget among new housebuilding, stock improvement, energy efficiency and community investment. 'They almost always chose new development and growth as a priority.'

At all three English case study landlords, resident involvement in decisions on stock rationalisation was seen as standard practice. At E1, this had recently included Customer Services Committee discussions on the methodology for selecting potential recipient landlords. At E2 and E3 involvement on this issue tended to have been more at regional and local levels.

4.6 Chapter summary

Case study organisations in all four study countries have recently been going through a process of change reflecting wider social and political movements. In particular, consumerist thinking is influencing the ongoing evolution of governance structures and service delivery procedures. All of the case study landlords were moving toward a more individualised approach combining the rights of individuals and the consumer power of choice. In recognition of many residents' wish to limit their involvement, they were creating time- and commitment-limited opportunities for involvement based on a consumerist style of operation.

Equally, however, landlords recognised the inherent limits within the individualised model of involvement. Consumerist approaches were, therefore, generally combined with structured, collective forms of involvement more in line with the citizenship model of participation and with the potential to deliver more power to residents. In responding to the challenge of localism for large organisations, case study landlords had, likewise, employed both consumerist and citizenship-type approaches.

Connected with the citizenship conception of resident involvement, a tenant input into landlord strategic priorities was a standard expectation among Dutch and English case study landlords. In this way, resident views could inform the policy context for specific managerial decisions on newly arising growth options. On specific merger proposals resident input was also seen as appropriate, although limited more to how rather than whether such transactions should proceed. Among English providers effective resident involvement was seen as having a bearing on growth via mergers mainly in terms of enhancing an organisation's attractiveness to prospective partner landlords and their tenants.

Landlords increasingly saw resident involvement on a consumer basis as consistent with their own business model, driven by a customer focused ethos. As social organisations provider organisations retained a belief that resident involvement is 'the right thing to do' and that it brings social benefits, but this is now augmented by an increasing understanding of its symbiosis with business efficiency and effectiveness in delivery.

5. Communicating with Residents and Stimulating Involvement

5.1 Chapter scope and structure

The previous two chapters outlined the way in which housing associations in the study have been generally moving toward a more consumerist outlook in their relationship with residents, while retaining the collective, formal structures that generate longer term commitment and expertise. The approach was, in essence, to offer a menu of formal and informal approaches, and of part-consumerist, part-collective offers for residents to pick and choose from, as to how they wish to be involved. This chapter explores the 'menu' approach in more depth.

Also within this chapter we move on to consider associations' techniques for exchanging information – another critical aspect of empowerment – and stimulating involvement with residents. The final section considers what the new ways of working have produced in terms of greater involvement. We begin with the concept of the 'menu'.

5.2 The menu of involvement

Notwithstanding their quite contrasting legal and governance structures (see Chapter 2), consumerist involvement was being actively promoted and developed in all nine case study organisations. Across the cohort of case study landlords in all four countries there was a strong shared commitment to the portrayal of tenants as service users or 'customers' and to the use of customer feedback mechanisms to inform service development.

This was likely to begin at the simplest level with surveys and questionnaires to gain residents' views on their neighbourhood and the services provided. From there, a variety of techniques and structures was used to develop a menu of choices for the individual resident to get involved (see Chapter 3). Indeed, offering a wide menu of choices for involvement was regarded by associations (and seen in guidance, see Chapter 2) as key to maximising the breadth of involvement and overcoming the lack of engagement with hard-to-reach groups. Critical to this is the idea that residents can choose greater or lesser

involvement, and especially types of involvement that suit their lives and interests. Numerous examples came to light in the fieldwork:

N2 had run a self-directed photography project where residents were given cameras and asked to record their daily lives with all the pros and cons of where they live. For this they were each paid 40 Euros. The results informed policy and practice and were directly used to help draw up a 'vision' for the neighbourhood.

Resident estate inspectors have been a common feature of social housing in England over the last decade. Residents acting as individuals and as a group walk around estates to check on standards of maintenance, cleanliness, gardening and so on. Large numbers of people can be involved – about 100 were active across the estates managed by E3, for example.

B1 had volunteer 'block champions' who kept an eye on things locally and reported any problems, particularly with nuisance, to the landlord.

Most of these involvement choices concerned what landlords call operational matters, and therefore made a direct consumerist link between the services provided and the individual recipient of the services. Thus, the thinking was that if a resident believed they would be able to achieve improvements from which they could directly benefit, they would be more likely to take part in a survey, attend a focus group or turn up for a meeting.

Developing information systems

An attraction from the landlord perspective was the opportunity to harvest consumer preference information. Just as a private sector firm carries out market research to drive investment in new products that meet consumers' wishes, landlords saw it as important to do the same and thereby help tailor their services to current and future resident demands.

An increasingly recognised requirement to support this move into consumerism has been to develop a comprehensive database on customers. Two case study landlords in particular had recognised this and were seeking to build greater sophistication from what was recognised as an inadequate database of their tenant population. They were seeking to record not only basic information on residents - who lived in each home and their characteristics - but also their preferences. One study landlord, E1, was seeking to build its information base on customers' economic circumstances. This type of activity was thought crucial to the process of developing future efforts to provide more individually tailored services, moving the response to residents further towards a fully fledged marketing strategy.

Equalities issues and hard-to-reach groups

The consumerist approach appears to lend itself well to policy aims of involving a wider range of residents, and in particular to supporting involvement by hard to reach groups. Almost all of the case study landlords characterised the traditional involvement routes as dominated by older (usually retired) people, mostly white and mostly men. Generally under-represented in involvement structures (though this is not universal) were people from ethnic minorities, especially non-native language speakers, young people, and families with young children where both parents were working.

Landlords recognised that they must involve a greater range of their customers, or at least seek their opinions, but this could prove difficult in practice. One of the more effective methods for reaching people from minority ethnic groups has been B1's simple approach of visiting individuals in their home and asking them about the services and neighbourhood. Other examples are given below in the section on process outcomes; see also Chapter 6 on putting feedback and databases into action.

For N2, a starting point was in recognising and accepting that not everybody wants to get involved: this was seen as a valid consumer choice. N2 believed that many more could potentially want to get involved, however, and the association was working to involve young people in particular via its youth advisory board. The association communicated extensively with residents both in person and in writing, but admitted that its 'Dutch only' language policy could be a barrier to involvement. It had a very diverse range of residents, including many immigrants who were considered a hard-to-reach group.

5.3 Making information available

It has often been said that those who hold information hold power. This idea is tacitly and overtly recognised in the resident involvement techniques used by associations in the study. In fact, there was general recognition from study landlords that resident empowerment rather than participation was the most appropriate objective, and that a key component of that change lay in sharing information. This in turn was thought to build openness and trust, though residents and boards might still disagree on issues. In fact, the open provision of information was used in some cases to engender robust challenge to the organisation via residents' role as scrutineers of policy or practice.

> *'Information is key. We have an open culture, share information and power, and we communicate systematically so everyone has access to [information]. Our goal is to be completely transparent.' [Board member, D1]*

Landlords in the study used a variety of ways to make available to residents both basic information on services and tips on how to get involved. The most common were websites, sometimes with a dedicated section for residents or even a separate site, newsletters in both paper and electronic formats, brochures, handbooks and annual reports.

There was widespread evidence of associations tailoring their communications to make them user-friendly and welcoming to residents. Information on, for example, how to report repairs or how the structure of involvement works was presented in a straightforward way that was easily understandable.

Some landlords had gone much further with their efforts to present information appropriately. N2 had 30 full-time staff on its communications team, a resource it believed ensured it had a professional and appropriate approach. D1 had hired a journalist to write news for its website on the organisation and events, and more widely about social housing. The reporter had secured an interview with the Minister of Social Affairs. E1 had launched a standard called 'Resident Approved' for its communications, which were checked by volunteer residents.

Two interviewees commented on the difficulties that could arise when technical staff were asked to present information and hold discussions with residents – roles with which they might be unfamiliar. Involvement staff generally offered support to help them get the message across clearly and sympathetically.

'If you want a man to change his necktie, you don't start by telling him the one he's wearing is horrible. The art is in presenting ideas without insulting people.' [Manager, D2]

5.4 Rights to information

Legislation in each of the four countries studied has placed increasing demands on landlords to communicate with and involve residents. Again, the emphasis has been on establishing individual consumer rights. Especially in the Netherlands where most landlords have transitioned from 'association' to 'foundation' status (see Chapter 2), this can be seen as a move to offset the implicitly reduced opportunity for resident involvement on a quasi-democratic model. The landlords in this study had all recognised the importance of the spirit of this type of legislation as well as actual requirements, and had responded with a range of provisions. In Flanders, especially, the recent development of a culture of consultation and information exchange in the study associations was influenced by wider statutory consultation structures at city level.

The most usual form of codified collective rights found in the study was a written contract or cooperation agreement between the highest level formal structure, such as the residents' council or customer services committee, and the main board. As noted in Chapter 3, such contracts set out the resident group's remit to give advice. Importantly, such agreements also specify landlord obligations to provide information, usually about services affecting residents – but this could be at a strategic level. Landlords were usually placed under a duty to provide the requested information within a given timeframe.

Whether formally exercised or not, powers to request responses to policy or data queries appear to have stimulated landlords to provide a range of information that could then inform resident-provider discussion and debate.

In Denmark, tenants at the estate level have a right to information that is used as part of the annual process of setting budgets and rent levels. Both Danish case study landlords saw this as important in informing local decision making and in ensuring that tenant board members looked to the future as well as the present. D2 had begun testing detailed analyses to be presented to local tenant meetings in a way that was easy to understand. E1 allowed residents on the highest level committee access to a closed website for board members where a wide range of data is stored.

5.5 Building capacity

It was generally recognised that residents need support and training to take on the challenges of involvement, and to stay involved after an initial contact. Good decision making and the ability to challenge or scrutinise often depends on skills and experience. Associations in the study therefore provided a wide variety of support services to build residents' capacity to take on roles carrying responsibility. This could range from making photocopying facilities available all the way through training and mentoring to specialised individual coaching for new board members.

> *'We are expecting residents to contribute at the same level and have the same understanding. We do this as a day job but asking a volunteer to challenge on performance indicators, making the connections, it isn't easy. So it's important to have the same support mechanisms as staff have at senior executive level.' [Manager, E1]*

Most if not all of the local resident organisations received a budget to enable them to function, and regional or service specific committees are also supported to ensure they could function. The exception was Denmark, where the estate level boards decided their own finances.

Some organisations provided training or briefing sessions to help residents get to grips with complex topics such as finance. There was a recognition however that not all residents would be able to become fully empowered, because for some their problems with substance abuse, poor mental health, low esteem and so on might be too great to overcome even with support. On the other hand, particularly in the UK, some residents were being supported to take on extensive responsibilities. At E1, a high level resident committee chair was being mentored to carry out annual appraisals of fellow members, in a process that paralleled the process for main board members.

Several residents taking part in the study commented on the personal development and empowerment they had experienced as a result of their involvement activity. Some said it was a thing they could take pride in. Two who had also become involved with national resident organisations said they had gained a perspective on their own organisation from this, in each case finding it compared favourably with others.

5.6 Stimulating involvement via direct contact

The personal approach that gives a large organisation a human face has not been bettered, it seems, when it comes to drawing in people who have not been involved before. Some of the study organisations had gone to great lengths to 'humanise' their contact with residents. N1 had restructured to move away from having generic staff at regional level to forming a dedicated involvement team for the whole organisation, its remit being to work directly with residents. This had 32 staff and cost about 2 million Euros a year to run. It had a peer supervision project to promote best practice.

Involvement staff in the study generally had two roles of equal value. One was to develop, support and promote the formal resident involvement structure, and the other was to initiate contacts with individuals or groups in the consumerist mode discussed earlier in this report. Initial contact was often via a complaint from an individual, or a suggestion for local improvements. Under both scenarios, case study landlord staff tended to favour direct contact, often by making a visit to the resident, for the initial response. This could be used to build a relationship that supported local initiative and encouraged the person to get involved either as a consumer (one-off panels, estate inspection and so on) or within the formal involvement structure (estate meetings and boards, service improvement groups).

'[Estate] board members work a lot, especially the chairwoman, she talks to everybody… it means a lot. I was encouraged to take part in the playground project, and I have also encouraged some of my friends to show up to tenants' meetings. It is the personal contact, face-to-face meetings that count, they are crucial.' [Resident, D2]

Other forms of action, especially to target groups who might not otherwise get involved, took the form of one-off projects and activities as discussed in Chapter 4. Examples included E2's specially designed game, 'The price is right' (named after a television show) played in a consultation exercise to prioritise spending and establish priorities between competing demands – and to have fun, which was also regarded as important.

All of the study landlords appeared to be searching for, and actively welcomed, forms of resident initiative. They were supporting residents to move up the 'ladder of participation' to take on greater responsibility (see Chapter 1). However, in practice this was often hard to achieve (with some notable exceptions). Several officers and board members said the reality was that the stimulus often came from the organisation. Comments from involved residents in this study suggest that the relationship with support staff and board members was significant, and this carries the danger of 'capture' raised in Chapter 1. Some residents in an English study organisation said they found tension between their involvement and scrutiny roles (the latter to challenge the organisation). However, it was also the case that the involvement structures relied on both active support and a realistic working relationship with colleagues.

5.7 Rewards for involvement

The shift to a more consumer-driven outlook has been accompanied by a stronger interest in systems to reward residents for their involvement. Practices from landlords in the study varied according to the culture and philosophy of the organisation. They were also bounded in some cases by legislation on permitted benefits. The purpose of payments, either in cash or in kind, was twofold: to formally recognise people's personal investment of time and expertise, and to stimulate greater involvement either from those who were not involved or to encourage an involved person to take up more of the 'menu' of involvement choices.

The range of practices cited in the study included:

- At E2 the ethos was to 'be rewarding' rather than to give rewards, so only expenses (including childcare) were paid in general.
- At E1 residents who volunteered for quality assurance, inspecting and so on were 'paid' in shopping vouchers according to the time spent. Further up the involvement ladder, committed residents who were in taking higher responsibilities within the formal structure received monetary payments, with extra for chairing.
- At E3 resident board members received payment, in common with other board members.
- At D1 and D2 members of the main board were paid but all other involvement was unpaid (in line with Danish law). Board members of D2 typically received a few thousand Euros a year, while the chair of the largest member organisation received about £15,000 (equivalent) in recognition of the responsibility and professionalism required.

Informally, E1 had compared its rewards payment system with that of other landlords in the region. While E1's payment levels were relatively high, this appeared to have brought dividends in that more people were involved and they were staying involved for longer. They concluded that their payment level was delivering value.

Other common types of reward were prizes and awards for involvement, which were publicized (e.g. in the organisation's residents' newsletter). This both gave recognition to the individual and, it was thought, helped encourage others to take part. Examples included:

- A certificate of involvement for young people who joined activities and received training from D2 in, for example, running a meeting.
- An N1 children's project brought participants together once a week to learn skills and have tea and cake. They also talked to people in the neighbourhood about cleaning up the environment. Subsequently, participants received a diploma from the mayor in a ceremony with residents. As a form of warm-up for a large future regeneration project, the project helped to create a buzz in the neighbourhood.
- E3 offered annual awards in three categories: youth, significant contribution to the community, and improving community cohesion. Nominations, made by local staff, were judged by managers and a resident representative using criteria that matched the organisation's stated core values of 'progressive, responsible, inclusive and reliable'.

A further type of 'reward' cited by several participants and considered crucial in

building residents' confidence in the involvement process came from organisations ensuring that they took action on suggestions, advice and complaints – and were seen to do so. Activities of this type included the use of 'you said – we did' publicity listing changes resulting from resident input and formal officer feedback to resident committees.

5.8 Retaining the value of collective involvement

The examples exemplified above our fieldwork suggest showed a broad consensus among that larger social landlords that resident involvement should include favour a mix of new consumerist and citizenship approaches in their involvement structure and practice. The differences among the study landlords are nuanced. Some, such as E1, clearly favour the consumerist menu of choices blended with strong collective power, also in a consumerist approach, as the way forward for their organisation and residents. Others, however, perhaps concerned at the potential loss of other valued characteristics, have sought to retain a more traditional form of collective resident power in tenants' and residents' associations. The longer term commitment, expertise and knowledge that residents involved in these latter structures have are still very much valued.

In Denmark the traditional legal and governance structure in which local organisations own their own stock and estate residents are required to vote on budgets ensures that collective involvement will remain a foundation of the social housing sector. Alongside some emerging consumerist initiatives the emphasis is on building and supporting the existing organisations so that residents have the capacity to take significant and responsible decisions. One means of blending the two approaches by D2 is being tested. This is to present the estate and divisional boards with a far more systematic analysis of their status, together with suggested strategies and policies. This will form part of the account/budgeting process they are already familiar with. The aim is to ensure that individual tenants when they vote are able to grasp the complexities of needing to raise rents to anticipate future major repair costs, and similar issues.

'Tenant democracy means residents are able to hold us fully to account. They can ensure we do not own money for the sake of making money and can take their own decisions. When they make political statements, they know what they are talking about.' [Manager, D1]

At E2, while the organisation offers a menu of involvement including board places for residents, it has retained its support for local tenants' associations and the officially recognised tenants' and residents' federation (TRF). All residents are members of the TRF. The TRF executive committee is the body the organisation consults about group-wide strategic and policy issues. The TRF's links to other

resident organisations (it is a member of independent national resident bodies that provide information, training, support and act as lobbyists for collective tenants' rights) give it an autonomy and well-informed capacity in its dealings with E2 as an organisation.

5.9 Process outcomes and effects

Ambitiously, social landlords in England have been strongly encouraged to quantify and cost both their resident involvement activities and their outcomes.[40] Our fieldwork, however, found relatively little evidence of such work, either here or elsewhere. Partly this may be because of the relatively recent introduction of current systems, and partly because in some cases there has been dramatic organisational change as well during the last decade. Another impediment cited by case study interviewees was the aspiration for resident involvement activities to be incorporated within staff roles widely across the organisation in a 'continuous stream' rather than partitioned to a designated (and easily costed) 'resident involvement' officer or team. Wider organisational and quality-of-life outcomes are explored in the next chapter of this report. The section below deals with process measures directly concerning resident involvement activity.

In terms of quantified outcomes, the measure most commonly found among study organisations was the number of residents involved during a given period (e.g. 12 months). In some cases, a new approach to involvement had produced very significant increases in numbers. E1's most recent information showed 74 residents were involved in service improvement groups, regional executive groups and the highest level resident committee. Staff estimated that 160 to 180 were involved in quality assurance (e.g. through estate inspections) and, in all, perhaps 800 people were involved in some way in one of its three regions alone, compared with about 70 under the previous organisational structure. E3 had recruited about 100 resident estate inspectors.

Recently enhanced information systems also allowed some landlords to track equalities issues and establish whether the move to flexible consumerist approaches was in fact drawing in previously under-represented groups. This facilitated targeted action. E1's monitoring, published in graph form on its website and for involved resident groups, confirmed that involvement of women and men was broadly similar to the regional demographic under its new structures. There were similar figures for involvement of White British and BME

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[40] Audit Commission (2007) *Housing Inspectorate Key Lines of Enquiry – Landlord Services: Resident involvement*; http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing/inspection/Keylinesofenquiry/Pages/ResidentinvolvementKLOE.aspx

residents, and for involvement of disabled and non-disabled people, compared to demographic. Young people were consistently under-represented, compared with demographic, so the organisation had established a task force to work on this issue.

Qualitative outcomes of resident involvement activity were equally important to study landlords and residents. Better communication was seen as an end in itself, something that was 'the right thing' as well as useful in a practical sense and empowering for residents. It underpinned the relationship of trust for residents involved in the formal structures.

5.10 Chapter summary

All of our case study landlords reported a growing emphasis on widening the range of participating residents. The motivation was threefold: to create a more even balance of power between organisation and resident, to recognise the existence and specific interests of 'hard-to-reach groups'; and, in a practical way, to help shape and improve the services offered.

Most of the provider organisations recognised the need for a menu of involvement choices that included both informal and formal involvement; long and short term activities; and involvement channels or vehicles designed to cater for particular groups who were traditionally under-represented or whose views tended to remain un-heard. In this way the menu of choices was seen by some landlords as crucial in translating their equalities commitments into action. Information exchange, with appropriate presentation of information, was seen as a key component of involvement activity.

Although there was increasing use of surveys and electronic contact, landlords still (and in some cases increasingly) favoured personal interaction to underpin their involvement work. This type of approach was also valued by residents.

Measurement of involvement activity and its outcomes was still at a relatively early stage but some landlords had begun to develop sophisticated activity monitoring, and to use it to direct future action. Development of customer profiling and related data was in development and is likely to feature more strongly in future, in line with the shift to a more consumerist culture.

6. Translating Resident Views and Preferences into Action

6.1 Chapter scope and structure

We have detailed in this report the increasing attention paid by the study landlords to resident involvement, the sophisticated methods used by some and the accompanying diverse menu of choices for involvement. Resident involvement can be viewed as a good thing of itself, offering residents the chance to have their voice heard and to be treated with respect. For organisations it can help them improve their services, reduce complaints, and thereby improve the quality of life of their residents.

There are two qualifications to that view, voiced by some participants. The first is not to lose sight of the fact that the views of involved residents are not necessarily the only views: management and boards must remember also the (perhaps unknown) views of the many uninvolved residents.

> *'It's great working with knowledgeable residents but sometimes we need a sense check.'* [Manager, E1]

The second caveat is that having a voice is necessary but not enough of itself, in the view of most participants. Residents in the study wanted their views to be treated seriously and for their contribution to result in real change. Officers wanted to effect that change wherever feasible. Residents tended to regard service improvements, and the way their landlords went about them, as evidence of a change in organisational attitudes. Sometimes there may be a gap between policy, goodwill and implementation, but the evidence from the study suggests that resident-driven change is happening both at small and local level, and at policy level. The process is still in development and not fully consistent but the virtuous loop of consultation, action, feedback and further action appears evident across the group of widely differing organisations studied.

This chapter considers the practical and qualitative outcomes to involvement activity, and explores what has been achieved for residents' quality of life and in terms of enhancing the way services are managed. We start by examining ways in which organisations used the information they had gained through their involvement activities, including to promote equalities. The next section considers the use of ringfenced resources to promote residents' autonomy. The following section outlines the increasingly widespread role for residents in scrutinising and challenging organisational policy and practice. Not every

initiative or relationship goes smoothly: the following section considers ways of handle difficult situations. Underpinning resident confidence by publicising the outcomes of involvement was seen as crucial, and this is examined in the final section.

6.2 Using feedback, tools, databases and ideas

Responding to resident wishes

A range of actions and outcomes was offered by landlords and residents from the study organisations to demonstrate that residents' views and preferences about services were acted upon and resulted in changes that residents wanted. The actions could be ad hoc responses to particular situations, or policy level changes as a result of scrutiny. Some examples of direct reactions to resident demands, advice or requests included:

- E3 made major revisions to the terms of the group's car parking enforcement contract in a particular locality.
- E3 responded to complaints about management of a particular estate by working with residents to develop and estate agreement specifying local standards.
- Prompted by comments from its Tenant Advisory Board, B2 made changes to the costs charged to residents for repairs associated with vandalism and anti-social behaviour.
- B1 implemented an emergency phone contact for evenings and weekends, staffed in turn for a week each by members of the management team.
- B1 recruited volunteer resident 'block champions' to provide better communication in response to problems of nuisance and noise.
- E2 brought in wardens for one area in response to resident requests. The short-term project was extended and has now run for 10 years.
- E1 found that some residents were dissatisfied with complaints handling. Residents were invited to review and improve response letters, and they made a video about how to complain, which was posted to the website.

D2 reported that demands from residents for greater action on crime and anti-social behaviour were leading to debate within the organisation, which had formerly taken a liberal attitude on such issues. The debate was prompting initiatives to curb nuisance while supporting 'problem' tenants.

Achieving systematic change

In other cases the actions were initiated by the landlord and were more systematic or policy-driven in nature. Sometimes landlords were working to ensure that consultation with residents before a piece of work was carried out became routine. This helped to drive 'right first time' policies, avoided negative feedback and promoted organisational efficiencies by reducing the need for remedial works. One study landlord involved in building both for sale and for social renting used comparative exercises to survey people before and after they moved in to a new development (the exercise continuing until one year from first occupation). Residents were asked about their home, neighbourhood and community. The information from these exercises was used to inform other new developments and to aid best practice on regeneration of existing estates.

D1 had developed a tool for use in researching and developing social capital among residents. Local organisations could buy the package which measures the strength or weakness of 'social glue', or the bonds between communities, and develop capacity building responses from it. An organisation could buy the complete package with staff carrying out all of the work but a preferred option was for volunteers from the local organisation to conduct the surveys, themselves. As well as minimising costs, the act of carrying out the surveys brought people together and generated ideas. Staff would analyse the findings and make recommendations, which the now more empowered community could take forward. The tool had proved highly successful, particularly in generating the 'simple stuff' such as Saturday clubs for children.

N2 was in the process of developing a 'toolbox' for staff in support of the menu of involvement. The digital online resource was intended to enable staff to select the most appropriate idea or technique in particular situations, to stimulate involvement and ensure different options were considered. The association was working on the development with organised resident groups, giving them a role in deciding which instruments to use and agreeing a resulting programme of action.

A critical factor influencing the extent to which resident views feed through into operational practice is the way that involvement forums interface with an organisation's corporate governance and managerial structures. As noted in Chapter 3, there is a range of approaches to enabling organisation-wide residents panels to feed into decision-making by an organisation's main governing body or senior management team. Also emphasized as important at E3 was the organisation's model for regional residents forums mirroring the regional corporate structure so that each panel interfaced directly with the relevant regional manager.

Promoting equalities

Several organisations in the study were taking initiatives to contact people from hard-to-reach groups, begin a dialogue and then respond to their wishes (see also Chapter 5). Analysis of quantitative involvement data by E1 confirmed that disabled people were under-represented. The organisation therefore used its database of residents' characteristics to identify a sample of people with disabilities, and to contact them asking how they preferred to be contacted or to be involved. Resulting changes included greater use of the internet to enable people to participate without attending meetings, and also increased the number of disabled people becoming involved.

E2 was working up an initiative to involve more lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) residents and planned to do this by using the staff LGBT group because anecdotal evidence suggested it was more likely to succeed.

6.3 Ringfenced resources to fund local resident priorities

One means of empowering local communities is by offering resources to be spent as the residents wish. In Denmark the question was beside the point since local organisations already had full control over their priorities and budgets (see Chapter 2). Elsewhere, the main type of work funded from such local budgets was environmental, benefitting the local community. In some cases a group of residents alone took the decisions on which projects to fund. In others, staff would also be involved. In Denmark and in at least one English case study, staff would complete the supporting work, such as obtaining supplier prices and commissioning feasibility studies.

6.4 Improvements by means of collective challenge and scrutiny roles

Wider changes at regional or organisation-wide level were emerging from the activities of the increasingly powerful resident committees and boards that are part of involvement structures. These forums, which go by a variety of names, generally have an advisory and scrutiny role as outlined in Chapter 3.

At B1 the tenant advisory board 'called in' issues it had chosen for detailed scrutiny, and would spend a year on each topic. The method was formalised: a first meeting explored the issue, a second debated the strong and weak points of the service provided, and the third formulated recommendations to take to the management board. The board was obliged to respond and provide reasons for any recommended actions not implemented. This could result in more fundamental change than an ad hoc response as issues arose. Topics called in to

date were liveability and ASB; accessibility of the association and landlord services; and repairs.

'Tenants are encouraged to participate because they have a real say on matters that relate to their estates … we measure our success by our influence.' [Resident, D2]

6.5 Handling difficult situations

Most, if not all, of the study organisations had faced situations where residents' wishes could not be implemented, or had to be significantly delayed. Some had received negative publicity over particular incidents and most had encountered dissatisfied residents. The most common issues were budget constraints and the timing, presentation or details of regeneration projects. All nine organisations were going through a process of learning about handling such situations better, and they reported the key element as explaining properly to residents what was happening, and why. Residents and staff felt it was important that decisions should be seen to be fair.

Examples cited (which largely concerned presentation, rather than issues of resident power) included:

- A group of N1 residents wanted a housing refurbishment programme brought forward by a year. Because this would have required the postponement of another project, it was in practice impossible. This was explained and although residents were discontented with the outcome, they understood it.
- At D2, a resident was very critical during a general assembly meeting and wanted to discuss specific estate-based issues. As a result the residents' assembly set up a new 'speak freely' meeting where residents could ask about any administrative or service issues. All input was recorded and processed for action.

'What to me is most important is that we are a user-driven and user-owned organisation. The essence is that you have a direct influence on your housing context; from how often stairs should be cleaned to renovation projects and housing policy issues.' [Resident board member, D2]

6.6 Publicising the outcomes of resident involvement

Offering feedback to residents in return for their involvement activity was seen as crucial. This was equally true for non-involved residents who simply needed and wanted to be informed. This was seen as a matter of courtesy and respect,

as well as fostering the potential for greater involvement as residents saw their actions bearing fruit. Some residents had experienced negative incidents where, for example, a project they supported had been cancelled without explanation, or an initiative to install equipment had been clumsily handled with residents not fully informed on what would happen.

'It's an adult to adult relationship, not adult to child. We can all make rational decisions.' [Manager, E1]

'People are afforded the respect of knowing we can't do that because x. As long as things are explained it's all good. It's a critical friend thing.' [Resident committee chair, E1]

Examples of good practice cited include:

- E3 routinely offered 'you said – we did' feedback in newsletters (as did other study organisations). It also published an annual 'What matters to residents' report bringing together results from surveys covering a wide range of activities and highlighting both satisfaction trends over time and the types of suggestions for service improvement coming from residents.
- E2 staff completed 'impact assessments' to appraise the effect of any resident involvement activity. They were encouraged to think about the eventual impact and outcomes at the planning stage. The organisation was working on producing the first organisation-wide annual impact assessment in 2011.

6.7 Chapter summary

For residents in the study it was important that their views and suggestions about services were taken seriously and that, where feasible, such contributions resulted in real change to landlord operation. For them, such changes offered a concrete demonstration that organisational claims to an open, customer-focused culture held water. Crucial here are the ways that resident panels and the like interface with the wider governance and managerial structures of the organisation.

Landlords sought to be responsive to residents' expressed wishes in a variety of ways. These could be direct reactions to an individual consumer's request or complaint, they could be policy changes influenced by service user feedback research, or they could be more embedded policy changes originating with resident involvement forums. Some landlords had initiated contact with hard-to-reach groups, then used the feedback from these interactions to develop appropriate ways for them to become involved.

Provider organisations in the study were continuing to develop their approaches on how best to handle tensions in the landlord-resident relationship resulting from a provider view that resident proposals were infeasible or complaints invalid. Both the mode of presentation and nature of information communicated were regarded as key elements in conveying managerial decisions that, while perhaps unwelcome, were understood and accepted. This was one aspect of a broadly recognised priority on publicising the outcomes of involvement. Such activity was seen to underpin the involvement structure and give residents confidence in it.

7. Embedding Resident Involvement

7.1 Chapter scope

'The biggest challenge for regulators and landlords is to create a culture that is committed to the principles of tenant involvement, not simply compliant with a set of rules'.[41] This statement alludes to the importance of embedding resident involvement within housing management practices and within the thinking of all social landlord staff. In this short chapter we consider the meaning and significance of organisational culture and how this can be shaped in the interests of resident involvement. This discussion draws on our case study fieldwork. However, it is largely limited to the English case study organisations because the restricted nature of our contacts with landlords and tenants in the other three countries (see Chapter 1) meant that related issues could not be explored in any depth.

7.2 The importance of organisational culture

As seen from an English regulatory perspective, there is a need for social landlords to complete a transition 'from a paternalistic model… to one with a focus on the customer or tenant'.[42] This is all about reforming organisational culture, a concept which can be defined as 'the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of the organisation, that operate unconsciously and define in a basic, taken-for-granted fashion, an organisation's view of itself and its environment'[43] or, more simply, 'how things are done round here'.[44]

Most of our case study organisations had established specialist posts to develop and promote resident involvement. At N1, for example, a 32-strong team had recently been created to support involvement, as well as to tackle nuisance and other social issues. A number of staff interviewees also noted the key role of strong leadership in championing the cause of tenant participation in the recent past. It is important to recognise that while such commitment may not in itself be *sufficient* to engineer a customer responsive organisation, it is almost

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[41] p32 in: Tenant Services Authority & Audit Commission (2010) *Tenant Involvement: Assessing Landlords' Progress* http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20215
[42] Ibid
[43] p45 in: Johnson, G. and Scholes, K. (2002*) Exploring corporate strategy*; Harlow: Pearson Education
[44] p6 in: Hartley, J. and Rashman, L. (2002) *Organisational design in housing*; Community Housing Task Force discussion paper no.1; London: ODPM

certainly a *necessary* condition for success in this respect. At E3 it was seen as significant that the Resident Involvement Manager 'has the ear of the Chief Executive'.

Equally, however, the crucial necessity for embedding an open and customer-friendly ethos across an organisation was widely recognised. Senior managers generally acknowledged the need for a corporate commitment to embedding 'customer focus' into the working practices of all employees.

7.3 Organisational heritage and organisational culture

All of the English case study providers had, within the past few years, absorbed organisations created via ownership transfers of former local authority housing. The prominent role of tenants in such organisations – especially as governing body members – had had profound consequences for thinking across each of the broader groups concerned. At E2 reserved resident seats on governing body boards had become a consensus belief. These experiences and perspectives are in line with previous research which has indicated that, in the UK, transfers of local authority estates into housing association ownership have provided a major stimulus to resident involvement and the associated reform of organisational culture.[45] At E1, an organisation assembled relatively recently following a succession of mergers, there had been an explicit attempt to 'take all the best practices from previous organisations and build on them'.

In common with other case study landlords, however, the ongoing development of resident involvement in the English organisations was more in the spirit of a 'consumerist' rather than a 'representative' ethic. For E1 and E3, this seemed to be involving a move away from involvement structures built on tenants' and residents' associations and federations and towards one of involving residents as individuals. Elsewhere this was less apparent.

7.4 Managerial practices to promote a resident involvement culture

Staff management practices designed to support relevant culture change can include the specification of 'customer awareness' as a criterion within an organisation's routine staff appraisal framework – as reported at E3. Another potentially significant managerial initiative at E3 was the designation of Resident Involvement Champions in each region and functional service area.

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[45] Pawson, H., Davidson, E., Smith, R. & Edwards, R. (2009) *The Impacts of Housing Stock Transfer in Urban Britain*; Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/impacts-housing-stock-transfers-urban-britain

These staff were encouraged to advocate within the managerial structure for customer-oriented service improvements.

Also relevant to embedding resident involvement are organisational development and training policies and budgetary priority given to these. This is both about staff training and resident (and community) capacity building. It must, of course, be recognised that such investment does not always pay off because not all individuals recruited as, for example, resident board members manage to sustain such roles. However, such training outlay is essential in skilling up potential contributors.

Organisations commonly seek to embody their commitment to key principles or ethics through mission statements or strategic priorities. While these are valuable only if backed up by substantive action, they can help to galvanise a commitment to a particular way of working. At E3, for example, the organisation's espoused commitment to resident involvement was articulated within its six strategic priorities as an undertaking to: 'Understand residents' needs and ensure our residents shape the continuous improvement of our products in meeting those needs'. Also relevant to the question of a service user-friendly corporate ethos were comments voiced separately by both staff and tenants at E2 that the organisation has an instinct to do things *with* tenants rather than *for* or *to* tenants.

7.5 Summary

Lasting gains in resident involvement will be achieved only through the creation of a corporate ethos which is fully committed to this objective. Managers therefore need to recognise the concept of organisational culture and the ways that this may be shaped in support of legitimate objectives. Given the origins and traditions of social housing in many countries, this often implies the need to complete a transition from a paternalistic mindset to a service user-oriented way of thinking. These concepts were generally well-recognised by case study landlord senior managers and had stimulated the development of productive managerial initiatives and techniques. As summed up by both managers and tenants of one English landlord, this is about developing an organisational instinct to do things *with* rather than *for* or *to* tenants.

8. Conclusions

This final section of the report draws conclusions from the fieldwork findings, literature review and country reports. It assesses the findings with particular reference to the research questions set out in Chapter 1.

QUESTION 1: What specific models exist for resident empowerment, scrutiny and influence relevant to larger housing associations operating across large geographical areas?

Housing organisations across the four study countries have been experiencing rapid change in the legislative and administrative contexts in which they operate. In England, particularly, the recent move to 'co-regulation', in which housing organisations are expected to be held to account by their tenants, has cemented a cultural shift, ongoing for at least a decade, towards a more consumerist model. Despite the wide range of historical, cultural and organisational backgrounds, landlords across the four countries were employing relatively similar techniques for gauging service user views. These typically included surveys and other direct response techniques that did not involve any lasting commitment from residents. Time-limited actions and projects also featured, again offering opportunities for residents without an ongoing commitment or responsibility.

While an increasingly consumerist tilt has been widely adopted in recent years, the resident involvement models in place in the four countries remain quite diverse and contrasting. At one end of the spectrum is the 'tenants' democracy' model seen in Denmark. Here, resident influence is exerted through majority board membership both at the local estate and ownership unit level and at the level of larger non-stock-holding organisations contracted by individual housing associations to provide management services. While governing body resident members generally play a lesser role in the three other countries, case study evidence suggests that large housing associations typically afford an important role for organisation-wide panels or main board sub-committees where residents account for at least half the participants.

In terms of geographically specific representation, some larger organisations continue to relate mainly to resident groups at the estate level (and to federations of such bodies). At least in England, however, the three leading exponents of resident involvement selected as case studies in this research were increasingly focusing on forums operating at the regional level to interface with

regional management structures. Recruitment to these and other entities designed to articulate resident perspectives is increasingly by advertising and selection, rather than by the traditional mechanism of nomination from estate level groups. Hence, involvement has come to be more about articulating a resident perspective rather than *representing* resident interests.

QUESTION 2: What is the potential of resident incentive and rewards schemes in increasing levels and quality of involvement?

The practice on recognising residents' contribution through rewards systems varied according to landlords' policy and culture, and was in some cases constrained through legislation. Several landlords offered payment to resident board members and/or other representatives at senior level, to recognise their responsibility and commitment. A minority also offered either payment or vouchers for residents involved in consumerist activities such as quality assurance (e.g. mystery shopping or inspection). Others preferred to offer publicised prizes and awards. Only one organisation had (informally) attempted to quantify the benefits of cash or voucher rewards. The organisation concluded that a relatively high level of payment compared with other organisations in the locality was proving an incentive to recruitment and retention of involved residents. Related to rewards although perhaps somewhat distinct are the resident involvement awards systems operated by some landlords to celebrate contributions to local communities.

Generally, however, it was felt that financially or otherwise directly 'rewarding' residents for time spent engaging with their landlord had only very limited potential in terms of stimulating wider and deeper participation. Much more important was to design structures and procedures to effectively link resident forums into governing body and/or managerial decision-making procedures and to demonstrate the value of involvement by publicising service improvements informed by resident contributions (e.g. the 'you said – we did' model). Beyond this, of overarching importance is the promotion of an organisational ethos where the respectful treatment of resident opinions and complaints encourages constructive dialogue and mutual understanding.

QUESTION 3: In what ways can social landlords effectively facilitate resident influence and participation in (a) decision-making in the delivery of local services; and (b) strategic decision making?

To some extent this has already been covered above. In terms of enabling residents to influence local service delivery, landlords have traditionally focused on supporting and engaging with estate level residents organisations. In Denmark, as previously noted, tenant control at the local level means this continues to be a foundation of the system. In Belgium and the Netherlands there was a sense from the fieldwork that such local level representation retains its historical importance as a key fulcrum for landlord-resident engagement. In England, however, perhaps partly reflecting the growing trend towards 'remote management', such structures appear to have become somewhat degraded in recent years. Stimulated by the TSA's local offers framework, 'local' is being redefined as 'regional'. Whether this makes sense to residents is a question yet to be researched.

As regards how social landlords can effectively involve residents in strategic decision making, the tenant controlled structure of Danish social housing makes this a relatively unproblematic question. Elsewhere across our case study countries, debates on this issue continue. While (minority) resident membership of main governing bodies continues to be recommended in both England and the Netherlands, the novelty of the Dutch interpretation is the requirement that – to avoid 'conflict of interest' – such a participant may not be a tenant of the organisation on whose board they sit.

Generally speaking, however, except where resident board majorities are the norm, the main emphasis in terms of engaging tenants in strategic decision-making seems to rest with the organisation-wide panels or 'resident voice' governing body subcommittees mentioned above. Indeed, for most of the Dutch and English case study landlords, organisation-wide residents' forums or panels were seen as the crucial vehicle for giving residents a collective say on decisions on a wide range of matters including strategic issues such as organisational growth priorities.

QUESTION 4: How can social landlords best involve hard to reach groups and ensure representation from all the seven Equality strands?

The disproportionate representation of older white men among participating tenants and other residents was familiar to all of the landlords included in the study and widely recognised as problematic. Several had made considerable efforts to draw in groups such as young people and ethnic minority households.

The main principle for measures aimed at widening participation was the 'menu of involvement' concept – designing an organisation's overall resident involvement strategy to include the widest possible range of participation vehicles. Cited examples included fun days to draw in families, youth activities to engage young people, minority culture events and/or translated literature to involve ethnic communities.

The consumerist-citizenship mix of opportunities was widely regarded as critical to addressing equalities issues and involving hard-to-reach groups. Increased consumerist opportunities had begun to draw growing resident responses not only globally, but also in terms of people from under-represented groups. Such activity was by no means a panacea: landlords reported continuing challenges in this area. All of those adopting such strategies were confident in their value, however, and planned the further expansion of such initiatives.

The need for resident involvement to address the complete range of equalities strands had not been fully taken on board by all the case study landlords. Outside of England, such thinking was less familiar than the 'hard to reach group' concept. In England it has been complicated by the recent emergence of eight 'protected characteristics' in place of the previous 'equalities strands' (Equality Act 2010). Two significant categories highlighted here but not usually considered as a 'hard to reach' group are firstly, lesbians and gay men and, secondly, bisexual and transgender people. One English case study landlord was developing an initiative aimed at engaging these groups using its staff LGBT group. Generally speaking, however, it seems that relatively little thought has been given to the involvement of such groups.

QUESTION 5: What is to be learned from the practices of leading social landlords in relation to the recording, monitoring and measuring resident engagement activities?

Many of the resident involvement activities detailed in this report are relatively new to the organisations concerned. In addition, most if not all of the nine landlords had undergone structural change in recent years. Monitoring, recording and measuring resident involvement therefore remained generally unsophisticated. While it was easy for case study landlords to quantify their organisation's resident involvement activity in terms of the number of specialist posts concerned, this was understandably downplayed on the grounds that – by ignoring the relevant action of 'mainstream' colleagues – such a statistic would grossly understate the true scale of commitment.

For such purposes as corporate annual reports, some landlords had quantified 'process outcomes' such as the number of residents becoming involved, their characteristics and their type of engagement over specified periods of time. This information was providing encouraging results that in general terms showed increasing numbers of 'involved residents' and a wider spread of participation among resident groups.

Most commonly, however, when confronted with the question of how the impact of resident involvement is measured, managerial respondents fell back on emphasizing the importance of resident satisfaction surveys and, in particular, tracking trends in responses to the standard question on satisfaction with opportunities for participation. At least far as England is concerned, given the greatly relaxed regulatory regime post-2010, any development of resident involvement activity and outcome monitoring would need to be an entirely industry-driven process. Only if co-ordinated and led by a body such as the National Housing Federation does it seem possible to envisage this.

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