



Helena Partnerships

Review of Tenant Involvement Structure WLBC Housing Service

Review findings

December 2012

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Acknowledgements

This review was carried out by the following staff at Helena Partnerships:

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A special thanks to all staff, tenants, members and other stakeholders at West Lancs Borough Council Housing Services who contributed to this review.

Contents

Introduction	3
Background	3
National Context	3
Local Context.....	4
Tenant Involvement Structure	5
Methodology.....	6
Definitions.....	6
Executive summary	7
Detailed findings:	10
Recommendations:	11
Suggested changes:.....	15
Options appraisal	18
Implementation – ten steps to change	28

Introduction

WLBC Housing Services is reviewing its tenant involvement and scrutiny arrangements. As one of 10 national co-regulatory champions, Helena Partnerships was asked to undertake an assessment of the existing involvement structures, making recommendations for improvement.

The remit of the review is to assess the tenant involvement and scrutiny structure at WLBC Housing Service, in particular to:

- Undertake a desk based review of the existing structures
- Consult with tenants, residents, staff, and Council members
- Consider best practice examples for involving and empowering tenants and residents
- Suggest an effective tenant involvement and scrutiny model for WLBC Housing Service
- Ensure that WLBC Housing Service is meeting HCA standards and regulatory requirements regarding tenant involvement and empowerment
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the current tenant involvement structure in regards to opportunities to participate in tenant led scrutiny activities and wider tenant participation in the services customers receive.
- Review the value for money (VFM) of the current arrangements.

Background

WLBC Housing Service would like to further strengthen its approach to tenant involvement and empowerment, giving significant focus on tenant scrutiny arrangements. It has therefore commissioned Helena Partnerships to act as a 'critical friend' in the review of its involvement structure.

National Context

The Localism Act 2011, together with changes to the regulatory framework and National standards, place greater importance on the way in which housing providers engage and empower tenants and residents.

Responsibility for the regulation of social housing providers passed from the former Tenant Services Authority (TSA) to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) on 1st April 2012.

The HCA have a statutory duty to reduce the regulatory burden of past frameworks. In response to this, the new approach is based strongly on the principles of co-regulation. There is a clear expectation that landlords should be accountable to tenants for the quality of their services.

The new framework requires all housing providers to meet the National Standards. Councillors and board members who govern housing are responsible for meeting the standards, as well as being transparent and accountable for the organisations delivery of social housing objectives.

Providers must support tenants to both shape and scrutinise service delivery and to hold Councillors and Boards to account. Landlords must ensure that they support tenant panels, or equivalent, to scrutinise performance, complaints and service delivery.

The regulators proactive role will focus on compliance with the economic standards:

- VFM, (although the 2013 self-assessment is not a requirement of Local Authorities)
- Governance
- Financial Viability
- Rents

Councillors (and Boards for housing associations) remain responsible for compliance against the consumer standards:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment,
- Home,
- Tenancy,
- Neighbourhood and Community

It should be noted that **only the consumer standards apply** to Local Authorities.

The Regulator will only get involved with the consumer standards if it becomes necessary to address failure. Significant emphasis is being given to co-regulation, with tenants playing an increasingly important role in scrutinising performance and value for money. A continuous focus on improving VFM remains at the core of the revised principles of co-regulation.

Local Context

WLBC Housing Service owns 6200 properties (source: Housemark). Properties are dispersed across the Borough, with the majority of homes concentrated in the Skelmesdale area.

WLBC Housing Service is committed to ensuring that all tenants can choose how they want to be involved. The Road to Improvement, WLBC's Tenant Involvement Strategy, outlines how the Council places tenants and residents at the heart of service delivery and improvement.

The Council's former Corporate Overview and Scrutiny completed a special project in early 2011 to propose a tenant governance arrangement. The final project report was submitted and approved by Cabinet in March 2011 and subsequently endorsed by Council. The structure was heavily influenced by the Salix Homes governance model.

The structure was reflective of the need to drive forward change in the Council approved Landlord Services Improvement Plan and to meet requirements agreed with the TSA.

The structure was informally reviewed in September 2011 when some changes were agreed and approved by Cabinet in November 2011 and subsequently by Council. In essence those changes reflected the completion of work arising out of initial TSA requirements.

It is important to note these above structures did not seek to change either the function or structure of the Tenants & Residents Forum. It was felt that to do so at that stage, with the introduction of the new arrangements, would have been too disruptive. The only link to the new arrangements was the nomination of four tenant representatives to the Landlord Services Committee (a cross member working group of the Cabinet) as at that time no other formal tenant group existed.

As the governance and scrutiny structures began to operate more effectively the balance and relationships between the TRF and SEG & SIG's and the LSC began to create uncertainty. Additionally as we had achieved further progress on our work programmes it was felt by all parties that this was a natural opportunity to review the structures, frequency and focus of the arrangements to support tenants over the medium term. The Groups themselves had also benefited from training and were now becoming more independent of officer management. It was also felt that Helena's expertise in this area and their external assessment was a vital consideration in undertaking a review.

Additionally along with the TRF it was agreed also not to consider at that time the relationship and future involvement of the TRA's. Some of the TRA's had only just changed from Estate Management Boards to TRA's and any further change would have been counterproductive.

It was stated from the outset that any recommended changes did not emanate from a wish to reduce current HRA provision for tenant participation and involvement rather to seek to rationalise and focus resources to support the wider tenant involvement strategy initiatives.

Tenant Involvement Structure

The tenant involvement structure outlines a range of mechanisms for tenants to get involved. This includes tenant led scrutiny groups, and the Tenant and Residents Forum who play a role in determining how the Council makes changes for the benefit of all tenants and residents.

The tenant involvement structure is made up of:

- **Tenant and Residents Forum (TRF)** – contribute to how the Council makes changes for the benefit of all tenants and residents
- **Service Evaluation Group (SEG)** – the main tenant scrutiny body that is supported by the Service Improvement Groups (SIGs) and Task and Finish Groups.
- **Service Improvement Groups (SIGs)** – who have an in-depth view of service delivery and performance in order to scrutinise and challenge WLBC housing service
- **Working groups** – VFM group and Property Service Quality Monitoring Working Group (SQWMG)
- **Task and Finish groups** – who are commissioned by the SEG or SIGs as needed to work on service specific time bound projects.

And wider tenant involvement activities such as:

- Armchair Army
- Tenant Champions
- Satisfaction surveys

- Tenant Void Inspectors
- Tenant and Resident Associations
- Comments, complaints, and compliments etc.

Methodology

The review of the Tenant Involvement structure included:

- A desk-based review of key documents
- Consultation with tenants, staff and councillors
- Tenant meeting observations
- A survey of tenants who are not involved in the structure

With this in mind, the review focuses on the state of play of WLBC's tenant involvement structure and looks to assess how well the structure complies with the HCA tenant involvement and empowerment standard and how well it can move forward in the line with the new regulatory focus.

Definitions

Reference is made throughout this report to tenant led scrutiny activities and wider tenant involvement initiatives.

For the purpose of this report, the following definitions apply:

The focus for a **scrutiny** group is to hold landlords to account where performance is poor or it fails to meet agreed service standards. Scrutiny is a different level of involvement. It requires a high level of commitment and new skills such as research, presentation skills, and report writing. A scrutiny group is not a consultative body that meets to gather information and is reported to. Scrutiny groups provide critical friend challenge, enable the voice of tenants to be heard, and are tenant led. The overall aim is to improve services.

Tenant Involvement enables tenants to share their views about the services they receive. This may include asking customers to participate in consultation surveys, attend meetings to comment on policy and strategy, and help to shape the services they receive. Tenant involvement will contribute to service improvement but it is not its primary focus to challenge service delivery.

Executive summary

Overall, significant improvements have been made to the tenant involvement service over the last 18 months. A few notable points include:

- The current structure is based on the Salix model, which was highlighted as best practice under the previous regulatory regime of the TSA. For the past two years this structure has served the organisation well with high satisfaction and demonstrable outcomes. These include:
 - Increased number of tenants involved within housing services
 - Tenants who are empowered to challenge the service and act as a critical friend
 - An enhanced skills base amongst tenants involved in the structure
 - Established mechanisms to ensure that the housing service is open and accountable, such as making the minutes of tenant led scrutiny meeting available to all
 - Enhanced culture for tenant involvement through improved communication and staff briefings
 - Established clear process for tenants to challenge services and scrutinise performance issues
 - Ensured that tenant groups have direct access to senior management
 - Achieved high tenant satisfaction (82%) that WLBC Housing Service is listening to tenant's views and acting upon them (an improvement of 2% since 2010).
 - In addition, 83% agreed that WLBC Housing Services keep them informed. (STAR survey 2012)
 - Ensured that involved tenants feel valued for their role and contribution. Tenants stated that they have seen significant improvement to the service over the last 18 months. This was identified as a key strength in STAR 2012.
 - Developed the Task and Finish Groups as effective mechanisms for improvement which are highly valued by both tenants and staff.

The housing world is currently experiencing a period of significant change. Key risks facing the sector and therefore WLBC housing service include:

- Changes to the contractual arrangement for Supporting People funding in 2015 and Housing Benefit eligible services
- Introduction of Welfare Reform changes, associated costs, and potential loss of revenue
- Reduction in available funding to develop new homes
- Delivering significant investment in homes improving services within the new HRA Self Financing Regime.

The Council and its members more than ever need to be aware of the risks, and the means by which to mitigate them. Councils are still responsible for providing quality services, and therefore it is a balancing act between cost and quality. The clear HCA expectation is that co-regulation will remain at the heart of assessing the risk and managing finite resources.

With this in mind, it is no longer sustainable for WLBC Housing Service to maintain the tenant involvement structure in its current format. It is therefore at a natural point for change. Value for money, efficiency and outcomes delivered should be the key drivers.

The new structure could

- In light of regulatory changes consider streamlining the structure to ensure a more efficient process, and make certain that mechanisms reflect the management of key risks and tenant requirements.
- Empower groups to become self-sufficient and develop their levels of autonomy to allow staff roles to move more towards a mentor/critical friend role. This would reduce staff resource required to service the groups and help to foster an improved co-regulatory culture.
- Further explore opportunities for community initiatives that reflect local needs and link into the wider welfare reform agenda.
- Refresh the role of the TRF, giving it a 'community champions' focus. This will enable tenant participation and consultation activity to be clearly distinguished from that of tenant led scrutiny.
- Use of customer insight to ascertain the best time to hold meetings and consider how tenants would like these structured. This would enable WLBC Housing Service to diversify the range of customer groups they engage with.
- Refresh staff and tenant awareness of the purpose of tenant involvement to achieve goal congruence and achievement of objectives. Ensure outcomes are well communicated to all stakeholders using a variety of mechanisms.
- Ensure that tenants have access to cost information regarding tenant involvement activities in order to assess the impact, measure social value, and target resources.
- Merging of some existing groups within the tenant led scrutiny structure to utilise the strong skill base of tenants involved, and ensure more 'bang for the buck'.
- Continue to adopt an open and honest approach, ensuring a high level of integrity and transparency across the board. Detailed minutes should be well documented with actions and responsible officers agreed. Measures to be identified in order to monitor recommendations. These should continue to be made available to all.
- Implement an annual appraisal system for all involved tenants linked to the Tenants Knowledge Circle to further build capacity within the groups.
- Clarifying roles and responsibility within the new structure, making a clear distinction between tenant led scrutiny and wider involvement mechanisms.

- An annual review schedule of the terms of reference of all groups would be beneficial and would enable the service to be flexible and fleet of foot in its approach.
- As mentioned previously, the recent key driver analysis from the STAR 2012 survey identifies listening and acting on the views of tenants as a key strength at WLBC Housing Service. The service should therefore continue to demonstrate how tenant involvement is shaping and improving services.
- There is an appetite amongst tenants, residents, staff and members to have a more flexible approach to tenant involvement, enabling efficiency savings and improved VFM to be achieved.
- Our recommendation is Option 3 (see page 17 for details)

Detailed findings:

A review of key documents was carried out in advance of consultation with tenants, staff and council members. Documents reviewed included:

- Minutes of tenant meetings held in the past few months
- The current involvement structure, terms of reference for some groups
- Latest STAR survey findings (2012)
- Recent publications such as the annual report and tenant newsletter
- The Tenant Involvement Strategy – The Road to Improvement.
- Complaints performance information
- Information regarding how to get involved on WLBC's website.

In addition, a number of tenant meetings were observed by Nina Peters during October and November 2012. The aim was to get an informed idea of how the meetings work, what works well, and areas for improvements.

Focus groups without officers present were held at the end of all meetings observed to ensure that involved tenants had the opportunity to contribute fully to this review.

The aim of the focus groups was to consider the following:

- What works well?
- Areas for improvement
- SWOT analysis
- Roles and responsibilities of individual groups
- How scrutiny activities and wider tenant involvement mechanisms fit together
- VFM
- Outcomes achieved – do tenants feel that they have 'teeth' and make a real difference?
- Transparency and accountability
- Wider tenant consultation
- Involvement in housing policy and strategy
- Whether customers are at the heart of WLBC Housing Service.

Separate staff focus groups were also held to discuss the above bullet points.

To avoid survey fatigue (given that the STAR survey had only just been carried out) and to keep costs to a minimum, the views of uninvolved tenants were sought at the two WLBC customer access points over a three day period by Danielle Tatlock and Graham Jones.

Caution should be taken when interpreting these results due to the low response rate achieved, however they provide an indication of the view of some uninvolved tenants with some tenants indicating an interest in getting involved in WLBC Housing Services.

Recommendations:

Aim

Suggested improvements in response to changes in regulation and current risks facing the housing sector:

Existing mechanisms for involvement and scrutiny

- Clearly define the roles of all groups making the distinction between tenant led scrutiny and wider tenant consultation and involvement.
- Establish the TRF as a key consultation group for the development of housing policy and strategy. In addition, this group could play a key role in assessing the impact of tenant involvement activities and associated VFM (of tenant involvement activities only).
- Reduce the number of groups included within the tenant led scrutiny element of the involvement structure (see Option 3). This will help to remove duplication of effort and reduce expenditure. In addition, it will provide a clear focus which will ultimately help to ensure a greater number of outcomes are achieved.
- Clearly define the SEG and SIG as mechanisms for co-regulation and tenant led scrutiny activities **only**.

Effectiveness and associated VFM of the current structures

- Ensure that the costs of implementing tenant and resident involvement can be monitored
- Identify mechanisms for evaluating the impact of all tenant and resident involvement activities, ensuring that tenants play a key role in this function.
- Ensure that all outcomes achieved have monitoring mechanisms established to evaluate impact of the changes made.
- Maintain an outcomes log and regularly report this to tenants, staff and members.
- Reduce the number of groups within the structure (specifically the SIGs).
- As mentioned above, clearly define the roles of all groups making the distinction between tenant led scrutiny and wider tenant consultation and involvement.
- Review the menu of mechanisms for getting involved in WLBC housing services considering the five levels of involvement outlined on page 15.
- Limit the number of staff attending meetings where the purpose is only to provide a brief verbal update.
- Review the frequency of TRF meetings as part of the revised role.
- Review frequency of SEG and SIG meetings as part of

revised role.

Co-Regulation

- Ensure that WLBC Housing Services can demonstrate that the tenant involvement service is providing good value for money
- As mentioned above, keep an outcomes log to demonstrate how the views of tenants and residents have led to change and improvement. This will help to demonstrate VFM as well as empowering tenants by clearly demonstrating that tenants influence services and can hold the department to account for poor performance
- Involve tenants in clearly defining the roles of all mechanisms for involvement. As mentioned previously, separate out wider consultation and involvement from tenant led scrutiny activities.
- Communications to staff and tenants involved on roles and responsibilities of each group.
- Wider communication of the menu of opportunities to get involved as part of recruitment work planned by Tenant Involvement Team.
- Review how tenant representatives are voted onto the LSC. Currently, only members of the TRF have the right to vote tenant representatives onto the LSC. WLBC may wish to consider widening voting rights to allow all tenants involved in scrutiny activity to also vote.
- Ensure that VFM is an integral part and key consideration of all scrutiny reviews. WLBC Housing Service may wish to also consider the 'social value' of tenant involvement and tenant led scrutiny activities in order to ascertain and maintain that the service is providing good VFM. (See information on Housemark and the National Housing Federation for further information on Social Value.)

Culture of involvement throughout the housing service

- Continue to build a positive 'culture' for involvement throughout WLBC Housing Service.
- Ensure frontline staff are regularly informed and updated of the structure, its aims, and objectives.
- Ensure that the tenant involvement service is transparent, open and accountable. This may be achieved by defining roles and responsibilities, continuing to openly publish meeting minutes, and monitoring and reporting the impact of

recommendations made as a result of tenant involvement.

Open and Accountable

- As mentioned above, reduce the number of formal groups within the structure. This will help to reduce the burden of ensuring all groups are kept fully informed and remove suspicion amongst some that some know more than others.
- Continue to ensure that all minutes are readily available and accessible.
- As previously stated, establish effective mechanisms to monitor the impact of tenant involvement initiatives. Report the outcomes regularly so that tenants can clearly see how their views are shaping services.

Opportunities for involvement that are inclusive

- Look at new mechanisms for engaging with young people. This may require less formal means of involvement, such as opinion polls, use of Smart Apps, focus groups and linking into young people events. Reducing the number of groups in the formal structure will free up time within the tenant involvement team to resource this.
- Use customer insight and profiling to identify customer preferences for involvement in order to tailor the menu of mechanisms.

Adequate provision of support, learning and development opportunities

- Carry out annual appraisal of involved tenants and tailor the training programme accordingly.
- Ensure that a log of all training activities is maintained and assessed in regards to impact and VFM
- Continue to develop and implement Tenants Knowledge Circle
- Review course content of external training events to be held and agree agenda with tenants in advance (in response to recent TPAS training)

Involvement and scrutiny at the heart

- Run a series of staff briefings following implementation of the new structure
- Consider the development of a staff toolkit to complement the menu of opportunities for involvement
- As already stated, establish effective mechanisms for assessing the impact of resident involvement and ensure the outcomes are feedback to throughout WLBC housing services department regularly

Menu of opportunities to get involved

- Review the menu of opportunities ensuring that wider mechanisms for involvement feed into the formal structure.
- Consider mechanisms for engaging with young people

Effective mechanisms to measure the impact of involvement and scrutiny activities

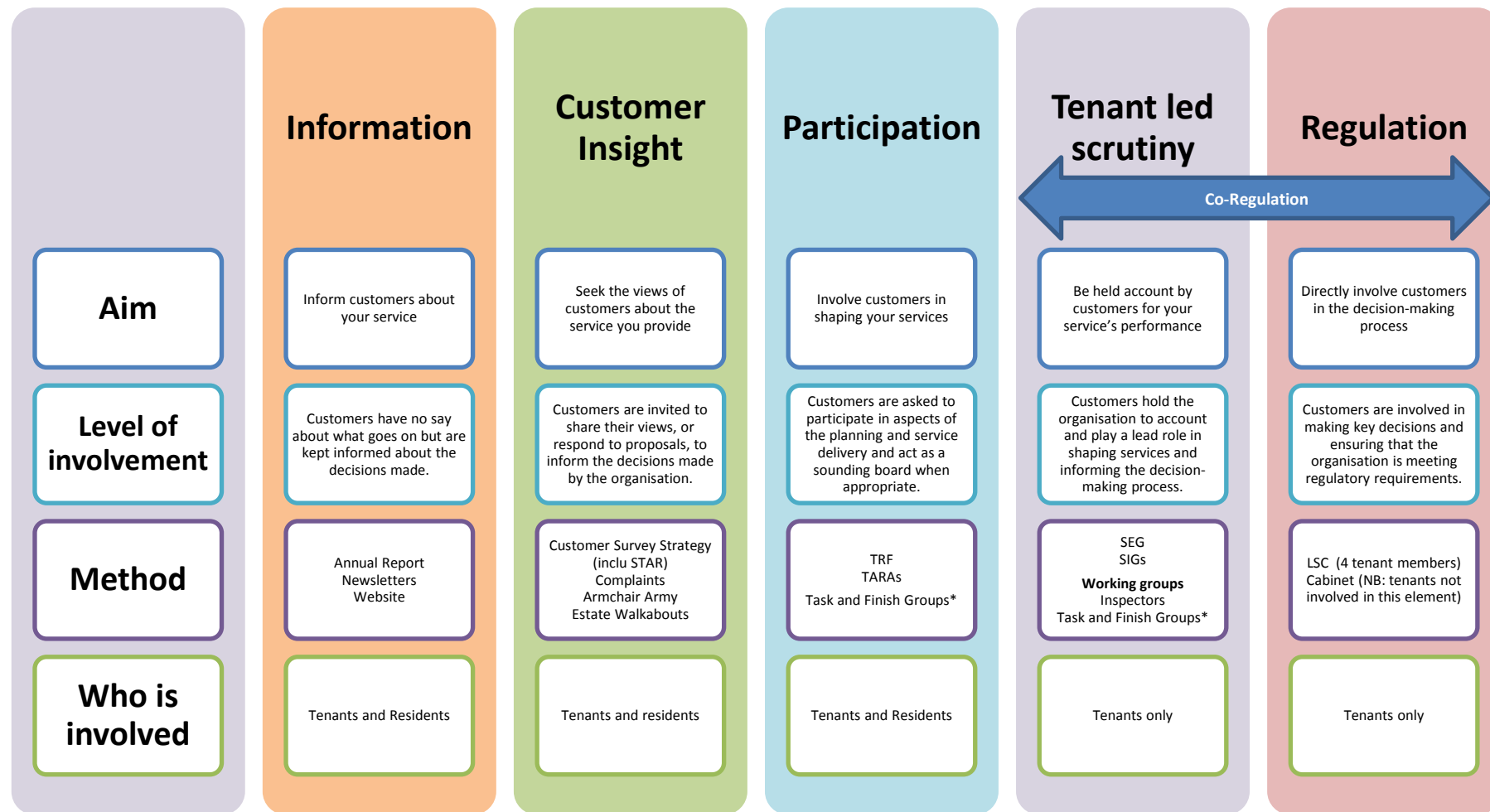
- Ensure that effective mechanisms are developed to monitor the inputs, outputs and outcomes of all resident involvement activities.
- Consider the role of the TRF in relation to assessing the impact of tenant and resident involvement.

Effective performance and reporting mechanisms are established

- Consider reducing the number of SIGs so that one group can make an assessment of the overall quality, timeliness and cost of services provided.
- Ensure that any recommendations made via the formal tenant involvement structure have performance measures or agreed success criteria identified. This will enable the SEG to monitor progress against the actions agreed and for impact to be assessed.

Suggested changes: Clarify the purpose, roles and responsibilities of all groups

There are a number of different methods, tools and techniques for engaging with customers and communities. It can therefore be confusing when considering which method is most suitable. The diagram below identifies five levels of involvement, and how the tenant involvement structure can fit within this framework. This framework will help to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all groups.



*Level of involvement required in a Task and Finish group could differ depending on the purpose of the group.

Suggested changes to the tenant involvement structure

The findings of the desk based review and consultation exercise, together with recent changes to the regulatory framework (with a focus on VFM), indicate that a more streamlined and less formalised structure for tenant involvement would be of benefit.

Three options have been identified below:

Proposal	Recommendation:
<p>Option 1 The tenant involvement structure to remain the same with no changes to the structure implemented.</p>	<p>In commissioning this review, WLBC and tenants, has already identified the need to change. With current changes to regulation the</p> <p>The current structure appears to be high cost (based on administrative costs, staff time etc). The structure needs to deliver good value for money and maximise outcomes achieved.</p> <p>It is therefore not recommended that the structure remains static in its current form.</p>
<p>Option 2 Incremental changes to be made over time. Starting with the TRF in the initial phase, with the aim of streamlining the tenant led scrutiny structure over the next 12 to 24 months.</p>	<p>Providing a clear focus and remit for the Tenant and Resident Forum should be a key priority.</p> <p>WLBC housing service should clearly define roles of all groups involved separating tenant led scrutiny from wider tenant involvement and consultation initiatives. See page 15 above for suggested levels of involvement and how this can be applied to WLBC’s involvement structure.</p> <p>It is recommended that the TRF is utilised to assist in the development and consultation of housing strategy and policy issues. The meeting should include an element of ‘work’ for those in attendance. Tenant and residents views should be sought on matters of interest and the sessions used as a problem solving forum as and when necessary.</p> <p>The venue used for TRF meetings may need to change to enable group work to be carried out. The frequency of meetings could be reduced, or meetings called on an ad-hoc basis as and when issues for resolution occur. Meetings could be held as an when agenda items are requested by its members as opposed to set</p>

times within the year.

The focus of the TRF should be on policies for the wider benefit of all living in WLBC and not focused on individual neighbourhood or individual tenant issues, (which are already dealt with at TRAs and daily on an individual level).

Once the new role for the TRF has been embedded, focus should be given to reviewing tenant led scrutiny activities, with the aim of reducing the number of groups in place. This will help to remove duplication of effort, free resources to deliver a wider range of initiatives and improve VFM across the service.

This approach to reform is incremental and may therefore take up to 2 years to implement.

Option 3 Radically change the structure. Reducing the number of formal groups in place, providing a clear focus to the TRF, and freeing up resource to deliver wider and/or more localised involvement initiatives.

Make radical changes to the tenant involvement structure as outlined on page 24.

As outlined in Option2, the focus of the TRF should be to assist in the development of wider housing policy and strategy. The meeting should include an element of 'work' in which tenant and residents views are sought and the sessions seen as a problem solving forum as and when necessary.

The number of groups within the tenant led scrutiny element to be significantly reduced. This will remove duplication, reduce the administrative burden of supporting the groups and provide greater VFM.

Option 3 represents the biggest gain in regards to VFM, and will help to improve the level and frequency of outcomes achieved.

Resources could then be directed towards the wider menu of opportunities and more informal methods of involvement, for example engagement with young people.

Based on the findings of this review, our recommendation is Option 3.

Options appraisal

Option 1

The table below outlines the impact and implications of the current tenant involvement structure remaining the same.

Option 1	Remain the same – Impact:
Existing mechanisms for involvement and scrutiny	Overly formalised. Duplication of efforts. Limited outcomes. No mechanisms for evaluating impact.
Effectiveness and associated VFM of the current structures	Poor. Resource intensive. Limited outcomes achieved.
Co-Regulation	Structure is in place for co-regulation. However, outcomes are limited. Impact cannot be assessed and VFM is not clearly demonstrable.
Culture of involvement throughout the housing service	Lack of understanding and clarity of the involvement structure.
Open and Accountable	Difficult to keep all people fully informed of all elements within the structure. This has led to suspicion amongst some and a feeling that WLBC is not open and transparent. Tenants do not feel that they have ‘teeth’ or fully recognise the positive impact they have made on improving services.
Opportunities for involvement that are inclusive	The current structure is resource intensive and therefore limits opportunities for wider and more inclusive mechanisms for involvement to be developed.
Adequate provision of support, learning and development opportunities	Tenants referred to recent external training which they rated as poor. There was no mention of the knowledge circle. Tailored training was stated as both a positive within WLBC housing service and an area for improvement by tenants.
Involvement and scrutiny at the heart	It is clear that structure aims to place tenant involvement at the heart of the housing service. However lack of clarity amongst staff regarding the range of groups, and the absence of impact assessment and monitoring mechanisms is barrier to achieving this.
Menu of opportunities to get involved	Whilst a menu of options is in place, focus is directed toward tenant led scrutiny in the main. The structure is very resource intensive and therefore wider involvement is not being addressed.
Effective mechanisms to measure	Effective mechanisms are not well defined or applied. WLBC

the impact of involvement and scrutiny activities

housing service may therefore not be able to fully demonstrate how it is achieving good value for money in regards to tenant involvement as required by the HCA Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.

Effective performance and reporting mechanisms are established

An assessment of the cost, quality and timeliness of services is split between various groups. Tenants stated that the SEG having overall responsibility for pulling it all together. It is therefore difficult for tenants to accurately determine whether the balance between cost and quality of services is right. Duplication of effort in achieving this is also evident.

Option 2 – Incremental change

Option 2 recognises that change may need to be made incrementally over a 12 to 24 month period.

Focus for change should begin with the TRF ensuring a clear role and remit is agreed with all involved. Reference should be made to the five levels of involvement as outlined on page 15. There is a potential role for the TRF to play in shaping the wider housing strategy and policies within WLBC Housing Services.

There is currently a gap in regards to monitoring and assessing the impact of involvement activities. As mentioned previously, this could be a potential role for the TRF which would help to improve communication, and ensure greater transparency around scrutiny activities.

The tenant led scrutiny structure will continue to be resource intensive in its current format. Once work regarding development of the TRF is completed, it is recommended that WLBC housing service looks to review and reduce the number of groups involved in scrutiny activities.

Incremental steps may make the change management process easier to accomplish. However, improved outcomes and reduced expenditure, and ultimately VFM, would not be met to its full potential for some time.

Option 2	Incremental change
Existing mechanisms for involvement and scrutiny	Some areas of duplication will remain within the tenant led scrutiny activities. Lack of clarity will therefore remain whilst the incremental changes are being implemented.
Effectiveness and associated VFM of the current structures	VFM will be improved incrementally.
Co-Regulation	Structure is in place for co-regulation. Duplication of efforts impacting on VFM. Outcomes likely to be limited.
Culture of involvement throughout the housing service	Clarity around the structure will be improved over time, which in turn should help to further improve the culture for involvement.
Open and Accountable	<p>The proposed changes to the TRF will help to improve levels of transparency and accountability.</p> <p>Issues are likely to remain within the tenant led scrutiny element of structure due to the number of groups involved until the service is streamlined.</p>
Opportunities for involvement that are inclusive	The tenant led scrutiny element of the structure will continue to be resource intensive in the short term. It will therefore be difficult for WLBC Housing Service to focus on wider involvement initiative such as engaging with young

people.

Adequate provision of support, learning and development opportunities

Tailored training programmes should be developed for all involved. Those involved in scrutiny may need additional training and/or regular refresher training around the skills required for this role.

Involvement and scrutiny at the heart

Further clarification of roles and a clear distinction between scrutiny and tenant involvement is required.

Menu of opportunities to get involved

Whilst a menu of options is in place, focus will continue to be directed toward tenant led scrutiny in the main (due to the number of groups in place). The structure is very resource intensive and therefore wider involvement will be difficult to address.

Effective mechanisms to measure the impact of involvement and scrutiny activities

Effective mechanisms are not in place. WLBC housing service may therefore not be able to demonstrate how it is achieving good value for money in regards to tenant involvement as required by the HCA Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard. If the number of groups involved in the structure continues as is, monitoring the impact may become an administrative burden.

Effective performance and reporting mechanisms are established

An assessment of the cost, quality and timeliness of services is split between various groups. Tenants stated that the SEG having overall responsibility for pulling it all together. It is therefore difficult for tenants to accurately determine whether the balance between cost and quality of services is right. Duplication of effort in achieving this is also evident. Whilst the number of groups remains, this will continue to be an issue.

Option 3 – Radical change

The current structure is resource intensive, and relies on a small number of tenants to contribute to a large number of groups. With reduced outcomes being achieved, the service does not appear to be providing good value for money.

The findings of this review suggest that a more streamlined structure for involvement would be of a benefit to WLBC Housing Services. This would reduce the administrative burden on staff, enabling greater scope for the tenant involvement team to focus on additional priorities as outlined within the tenant involvement strategy.

The new structure would ensure that all groups have a clear purpose. This would be of particular benefit to the TRF, ensuring that the group has a clear remit which does not duplicate the work of other existing groups.

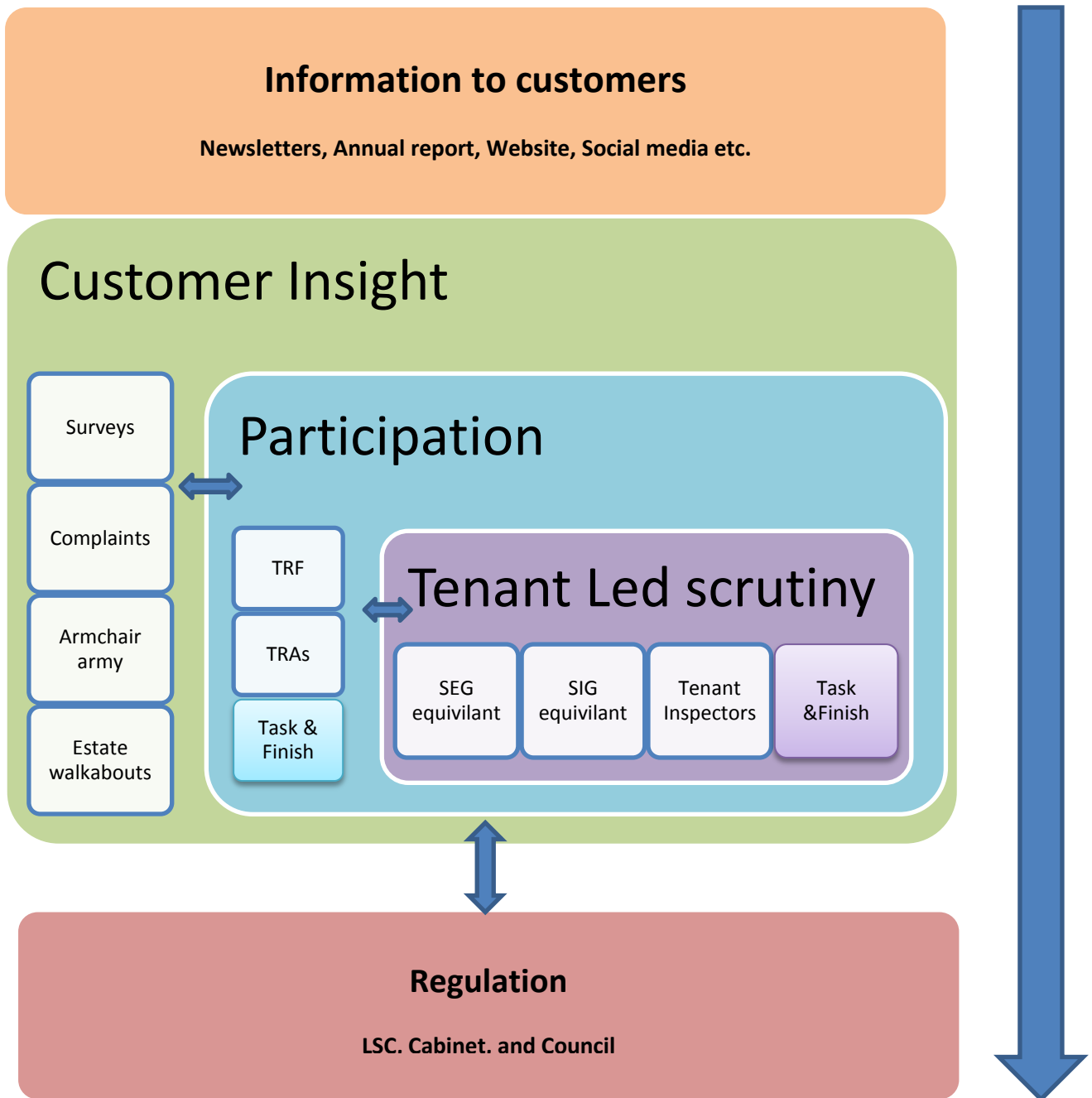
In addition, managers were often confused as to which group they needed to meet with and for what purpose. There was a feeling amongst some staff/managers that the new structure had made it difficult to identify where to go for general consultation around service specific issues.

The structure proposed on page 24 will help to clarify roles and responsibilities and provide a guide to staff as to which group they need to work with depending on the overall objectives they seek to achieve.

Option 3	Radical Change
Existing mechanisms for involvement and scrutiny	Clear roles and responsibilities defined. Effective monitoring mechanisms established to regularly review impact and VFM, and to hold WLBC housing service to account.
Effectiveness and associated VFM of the current structures	Good. Reduced costs and improved outcomes.
Co-Regulation	Clear involvement structure. Co-regulation requirements achieved and tenant involvement service providing good value for money.
Culture of involvement throughout the housing service	Improved understanding of the structure, its aims and roles within it, will help to improve the culture for involvement within WLBC housing service.
Open and Accountable	A more streamlined structure will make it easier to keep all adequately informed. Effective monitoring mechanisms will enable to tenants to hold senior staff and council members to account as required in the HCA Tenant Involvement and

	Empowerment Standard.
Opportunities for involvement that are inclusive	Resource will be made available to focus on additional mechanisms for involving tenants and residents and wider consultation.
Adequate provision of support, learning and development opportunities	Reducing the number of groups in place will make it easier to manage and administer a tailored training programme. The programme should be directly linked to individual annual appraisals of all tenants involved in scrutiny. A training programme should also be offered to the TRF, however the skills required will differ to that of the scrutiny groups.
Involvement and scrutiny at the heart	A simplified structure will make it easier for WLBC housing service to place involvement at its heart. Clearly distinguishing between the scrutiny and tenant involvement will also assist in achieving this.
Menu of opportunities to get involved	Resource will be made available for focus to be given to alternative methods of involvement and engagement.
Effective mechanisms to measure the impact of involvement and scrutiny activities	An effective mechanism should be developed to monitor the impact of involvement activities. Reducing the number of groups involved will reduce the administrative burden of completing the assessments.
Effective performance and reporting mechanisms are established	<p>A reduction in the number of groups will allow for cost, quality and timeliness of services to be assessed overall. Ensuring that there is an appropriate balance.</p> <p>Measures should be identified and effective monitoring mechanisms established following all tenant led scrutiny reviews in order to assess whether it has led to a service improvement. This will enable WLBC housing service to clearly demonstrate outcomes achieved.</p>

Option 3 – Proposed structure



Option 3 - Expected outcomes:

By implementing the above structure WLBC can expect to achieve:

- Streamlined approach. Clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Remove duplication and eliminate waste.
- Improve efficiency and effectiveness (VFM)
- Focused approach – greater emphasis on outcomes.
- Staff resource/time can be made available to focus on wider workload e.g. recruitment and local involvement initiatives
- Remove ambiguity – staff can be clear where to go to consult with tenants, and who is responsible for holding their service to account.
- Improved transparency around involvement initiatives.
- Clear outcomes – tenants will be able to see how their contribution has helped to make a difference.

Key changes:

Role of the TRF:

- Focus on wider housing policy and strategy issues that impact on borough as a whole.
- Tenants and residents involved.
- Frequency of meetings reduced.
- Meetings only held as and when agenda items are requested by tenants and residents.
- Could play a role in evaluating the impact of tenant involvement activities and rating them accordingly. This would also help to improve communication between different elements of the involvement structure.

Tenant led scrutiny structure:

- Reduction in the number of groups (maximum of two) who are supported by the tenant inspectors. This will remove duplication and free up resource to be focused on widening involvement elsewhere.
- Within the proposed structure, as an evaluation group, the SEG could be responsible for monitoring performance information regarding cost, quality and timeliness of services on a quarterly basis.
- It is best practice to ensure that any changes as a result of scrutiny and involvement have appropriate monitoring mechanism and performance measures identified in order to assess the success of change. The SEG could also, therefore, play a role in monitoring success measures on a regular basis to ensure it is leading to improvement and to hold WLBC housing service to account if necessary.
- The SIG's role could be to carry out detailed service reviews where a failure to meet service standards or poor performance has been identified.

Task and Finish Groups:

- Feature as both a method for participation and tenant led scrutiny.
 - Participation Task and Finish Groups – may be a one off focus group/ consultation exercise e.g. to review a policy.
 - Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups – may be commissioned by the scrutiny groups if required. However, the new role proposed by the SIG may mean that the need to establish scrutiny task and finish groups will reduce.

Use of social media

Many housing providers are now recognising the clear customer service and business benefits that social and digital engagement can bring. Online communities can broaden participation, and help to engage harder to reach groups.

Social media can be a useful tool enabling you to reduce the number of meetings required to engage with your customer base. It also enables participation over evenings and weekends so can be more inclusive.

Customers are already online, but many housing providers think that they're not. Research indicates that with the use of smart phones, the number of customers who have internet access is a lot higher than is often perceived; and over 50% in some areas. More people are now going online via smartphones or tablets than fixed PCs, which has led to an increased need for mobile friendly websites. The over 65's are the fastest growing market for ipads, dispelling the myth that the internet is not only for the young.

In addition, many customers will not realise that they are online. Lots of housing providers are asking their customers if they have access to the internet and are told no. However, when asked if they use Facebook the answer is yes. Many people do not realise that by pressing an app on their smart phone they are accessing the internet.

Starting points for introducing social media are often Facebook presences with a corporate look, feel and name. You can use these to post news updates, ask questions and gather feedback, promote events etc.

Housing providers using social media have found that overtime customers start to bypass traditional customer service channels to get a quicker response. Social media enables you to engage a cross section of staff – It is not a standalone communications team function although there needs to be a robust policy with sensible guidelines. You will need staff ready and willing to provide answers when a customer has posed an awkward question or made a negative comment.

Many younger customers or the children of your primary customer base do not even use email – they expect social media to be available as a mechanism for communication and engagement. Social media may therefore not only be a useful tool for engaging with younger tenants, but an expectation of younger tenants.

Issues for resolution:

Ensuring that the service is providing good value for money is a critical requirement of the HCA tenant involvement and empowerment standard. To ensure regulatory compliance, WLBC Housing Service must ensure that costs can be identified, outcomes from involvement are logged and monitored, and that tenants have a role to play in evaluating the impact of the service.

WLBC Housing Service could face opposition from tenants when attempting to streamline the structure. However, involved tenants agree that the structure should provide good value for money and that there needs to be a balance between costs incurred and outcomes achieved. Any changes should be made in partnership with all tenants involved. It may help to provide tenants with actual costs incurred through the current structure in order for them to make an informed opinion on how the new structure could be streamlined.

The current work programme for tenant led scrutiny is shaped around what those tenants involved in the structure feel is of importance or have a keen interest in. WLBC would benefit from introducing an annual planning day. All tenants involved in scrutiny groups and the inspectors, should be invited to attend. The group should determine the annual work schedule at the planning day based on:

- performance information (where performance is poor),
- service standards that are not being met,
- benchmark information (such as that gathered by Housemark) and
- customer feedback (e.g. the STAR survey 2012).

This would ensure that the service review program is based on improvements aimed at wider benefit of all tenants at WLBC and remove any suspicion that involved tenants are only in it for their own gain.

The number of reviews should be kept to a maximum of 4 per annum in order to allow in-depth analysis/scrutiny to be carried out.

Performance measures to monitor impact and improvements made should be identified and regularly reported. This will help tenants to see and understand how their contribution has helped to shape services and make a difference.

Implementation – ten steps to change

The changes proposed within this document (whether incremental change or radical change) will require the following action:

1. **Feedback** – to all involved in this review on the outcomes and the next steps
2. **VFM and impact assessment** of current structure– WLBC housing service should aim to establish costs for delivery of each element within the resident involvement structure. It is recognised that actual costs are not currently available, however estimates based on average salary cost per staff member attending or supporting meetings, together with tenant expenses should be gathered. This would enable staff, tenants and residents to evaluate the level of resource that is currently involved in administering this service in comparison to outcomes achieved, in order to fully appreciate the need for change.
3. **Consultation and negotiation** - Tenants, staff and members should have the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes and what plan of action is agreed to be taken forward. Tenants involved should be assured that the changes are in no means a criticism of their effort and input, but are a natural means to delivering a more efficient service. Detailed negotiations may be required in determining how the new structure can be effectively streamlined in order to develop an exit strategy. As a first step it may be useful to determine an overarching ‘tenant involvement vision’ of how WLBC staff, tenants and members would like the service to look.
4. **Steering group** – it may be of benefit to establish a task and finish group to oversee the implementation of new structure. The role of the group would be as change managers and should include tenant representation. A project plan should be developed and communication of the proposed changes should be an integral part of this.
5. **Clearing define roles**, responsibilities, and the distinction between tenant led scrutiny and wider involvement mechanisms. Ensure clear role descriptions are in place for those involved in scrutiny arrangements and that terms of references for groups reflect any changes made.
6. **Recruitment and selection** – Reducing the number of groups within the scrutiny element of the structure is likely to require tenants to reapply for membership of the new groups and you may wish to consider changing the group names. Membership numbers of the new scrutiny groups may increase as a result, and you may in addition, wish to look to recruit ‘new faces’ to the structure.
7. **Training** – carry out a Training and Skills Audit of all involved and establish an annual appraisal process for involved tenants. The outcomes from the appraisal process should inform the annual training programme.
8. **Establish an effective monitoring and impact assessment process** – tenants should be involved in assessing the impact of tenant involvement activity. All recommendations that are taken forward from tenant involvement initiatives should have monitoring and performance measures identified. These should be reported to the SEG on a regular basis.
9. **Communication** – of the changes made is of key importance. In addition, communication of outcomes achieved from tenant involvement activities should be a priority, linked to the monitoring and impact assessment process.

It is important that WLBC ensure that all staff and members are fully aware of the new

structure, how it works and how they can link in and work in partnership with tenants and residents.

Both involved and uninvolved tenants and residents should be informed of the changes.

10. Agree an action plan and allocate resources –

The above actions should be agreed within a SMART action plan. It is difficult to estimate the cost required to implement changes until the final structure is agreed. Implementing change will require a high level of staff resource (potentially from the Tenant Involvement Team) however in taking the above steps forward efficiencies can be gained.

Appendix A: Survey of uninvolved tenants

To avoid survey fatigue (given that the STAR survey had only just been carried out) and to keep costs to a minimum, the view of uninvolved tenants were sought at the two WLBC customer access points over a three day period.

Caution should be taken when interpreting these results due to the low response rate achieved, however they provide an indication of the view of some uninvolved tenants.

Number of respondents: 15

Methodology: Face to face interview/survey

Summary of key findings:

- 60% of respondents (9 tenants) agreed that WLBC listens to their opinions and acts upon them. (Due to the low number of respondents, caution should be taken when comparing this to the recent STAR survey findings.)
- Awareness of the menu of mechanisms to get involved at WLBC varied. Whilst the majority of respondents had heard of their local tenant and resident association, most had limited awareness of the other options available to them such as Estate Walkabouts, the Armchair Army, Service Improvement Groups etc.
- Two thirds of respondents stated that they would not wish to get involved in WLBC activities. A variety of reasons were provided as outlined below:
 - 19% (4 respondents) felt that the time of evening meetings are not convenient
 - 14% (3 respondents) stated that they are not sure how to get involved
 - 10% (2 respondents) felt the time of daytime meetings are not convenient
 - 10% (2 respondents) stated that agenda items are not of an interest to them
 - 10% (2 respondents) felt that their views would not be taken into account
 - 10% (2 respondents) stated that they do not have time to get involved
 - 1 respondent felt that meetings are too formal
 - 1 did not think that outcomes as a result of getting involved are evident
 - A further 19% (4 respondents) stated 'other reasons' for not getting involved.
- The majority of respondents stated that they would not need any further support from WLBC to take an active role with their landlord. However, five respondents stated that they would require help with transport costs and background information about the housing

service. Help with childcare costs was an issue for two respondents, and confidence building and help with numeracy and literacy was a concern for one respondent.

- Postal surveys are the preferred method for getting involved with 13 out of 15 respondents choosing this option. 40% (6 respondents) would be interested in getting involved in community events.

Appendix B: Meeting observations and tenant focus group findings

	Strengths	Areas for improvement
SEG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an independent recruitment and selection exercise • The group is very effectively chaired. Members are enthusiastic and supportive of one another • All members agreed that they can challenge officers • Members of the SIG are clear on their role and how it links into the wider structure • The group felt that WLBC housing service has moved away from involving tenants as a 'tick box' exercise and now value tenant's contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When asked to rate whether the group is a 'rubber stamping' group or scrutiny group, the majority of responses were in the middle of the scale indicating that further work may be needed for the group to fully meet its scrutiny role. • Only one out of 4 people stated that the group is tenant led, with 3 rating the group as somewhere in the middle between officer led and tenant led. • Members agreed that tenants on the SEG should not be able to sit on the LSC. They did however feel that they should have a vote on who becomes a tenant rep on the LSC without having to become a member of the TRF • There is a view that the SEG is scrutinising the work of other tenant groups as opposed to scrutinising the services provided by WLBC housing service. The balance therefore needs to be considered.
SIGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Service Review Group is clearly meeting its objectives, challenging services and making recommendations for improvement. • Excellent chairing skills within the groups helped to keep the meetings to the agenda. • There is a high level of enthusiasm and commitment from all involved. • The groups were happy to challenge officers if necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time, quality and cost performance measures may be looked at in isolation due to the current group structure. (PM SIG, VFM group, and SQMWG each looking at different elements.) • As an umbrella group, the SEG's role challenges and scrutinises the work of other tenant groups as opposed to the work of WLBC housing services • Reviews are currently selected by those on the groups indicating a need or preference. The SEG and SIG would benefit from an annual planning day

- In the main, those involved in the SIGs agreed that the meetings are tenant led
- The majority of tenants agreed that their views are listened to and acted on.
- Tenants on the SIGs were clear of their role and how the groups linked together. Duplication between groups was considered a strength to some but an area of improvement and frustration to others.
- Tenants agreed that there is a tailored training programme in place
- Tenants are provided with log-in details for Housemark. (However some noted that there are gaps in the data, and others stated that they can't access the site).
- in which priorities for review are determined by performance information, benchmarking, customer feedback and complaints.
- Whilst performance information is reviewed by the PM SIG on a regular basis, specific measures linked to the findings of previous service reviews were not highlighted to enable tenants to monitor progress and impact.
- Whilst those involved feel that their work is valued, they did not feel that WLBC housing service gave them recognition or reward for their efforts. The groups did not think that this had to be anything on a large scale, but a thank you card or Christmas card as a minimum would help to show that their input is valued.
- When asked to rate whether performance was improving, the majority said that it wasn't.
- Tenants did not feel that there is currently an equal balance between cost and quality.
- Following discussion, the tenants agreed that they tend to accept what officers tell them regarding performance and don't necessarily scrutinise the evidence.

TRF

- The number in attendance was fairly high
- Members are keen to get involved and demonstrated a clear enthusiasm for helping to improve WLBC housing services.
- Lack of clarity around role and purpose of the group
- High number of staff in attendance in relation to outcomes achieved did not appear to be good VFM
- There is feeling of 'us and them' between tenants and residents

- The group does not act as a 'forum'. Whilst information is presented to them, there is limited opportunity for discussion and consultation.
- There is duplication between the TRF and the Performance Management SIG.
- Whilst members value receiving updates from street scene, some did not feel that a member of staff was needed to attend the meeting. (In the meeting observed a short verbal updated was provided stating that Christmas collection dates were being finalised.) Such information could be provided to the chair for example to share with the group on behalf of Street Scene.
- "The TRF is no longer a forum. It is a listening group and is very fragmented."
- When asked to rate how strongly members agree or disagree that they are proud to be a member of the TRF, only 40% agreed that they are proud to be a member.

Chairs meeting

- Has helped to developed good working relations between groups and share ideas.
- Helped to develop the confidence of Chairs.
- Direct link to senior management
- Structure doesn't really fit young people's needs and aspirations
- Feeling amongst some tenants that scrutiny is not truly independent. Links with officers may be too close. Things are accepted without scrutiny on occasion.
- Tenants agreed that the structure may need streamlining. It was set up with the TSA in mind and so does not reflect new regulatory requirements as well as it could.

**General
issues and
comments**

- Over reliance on the same people to make up groups.
- One tenant commented: “There is confusion at time between the role of officers and the role of tenants – with tenants getting too involved in officers jobs.”
- The relationship between tenants and the housing service differs greater to the relationship between tenants and property services.
- There is a view from some tenants that TARAs (and previous EMBs) are likely to feel ‘pushed’ out of the current structure.
- Tenants on the SIGs and SEGs should be able to vote on the tenant representatives that attend the LSC without having to become a member of the TRF.

Appendix C – Staff Consultation

Summary of key findings:

Example comments: (Full details have not been included due to confidentiality)

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Strengths | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff value tenant involvement more since the new structure was implemented• Culture for involvement has improved. Managers automatically consider how they can involve and engage with customers.• We are being challenged by tenants• Awareness of the menu of mechanisms was strong at a management level, however frontline staff did were not fully informed.• Task and finish groups were especially well regarded by staff |
| Areas for improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It's difficult to understand what each of the groups do and when we need to link into them• "We have lost some of the wider consultation"• The same people are often involved in a number of groups.• Limited examples of outcomes could be provided (however staff did agree that outcomes are more evident since the new structure was implemented).• Duplication – too many staff attending meetings or attending more than one tenant meeting with the same information• Staff would like to see more young people involved in the housing service• Lack of understanding around what is scrutiny and what is involvement activity. |
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Appendix D – Consultation with Portfolio Holders

Key findings:

- Tenant involvement was highly valued
- Can see clear outcomes as a result of tenant involvement
- Ensuring that the Housing Service is delivery good value for money is a key priority
- There is a strong culture within the organisation towards involving tenants
- Improvements in the service have been reflected in the recent tenant satisfaction survey.
- Value the role tenants can play in shaping the service.
- Value the role of tenants on the LSC