

Involving Everyone: Including 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development

Shaping Social Housing – Involving Communities

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- ❑ Research funded by the Housing Rights Service

User involvement in housing services: what do we mean?

- ❑ Taking part in decision-making and influencing decisions about housing policies, conditions and services
- ❑ A two way process: sharing information, ideas and power
- ❑ A community development approach:
 - *Capability*: access to knowledge and information; understanding the context
 - *Deciding*: making choices; influencing decisions; being democratic and accountable; and
 - *Achieving*: instituting actions; prompting actions by others
- ❑ Meaningful involvement should include appropriate participation techniques - and *provide the opportunity to challenge proposals and suggest alternatives.*

Who is 'easy to ignore'?

- ❑ *From the literature review and our previous knowledge:*
- ❑ Housing association tenants
- ❑ Homeless people and those who have recently experienced homelessness
- ❑ Tenants in the private rented sector
- ❑ Shared ownership and other low-cost home ownership residents
- ❑ People receiving housing support services e.g. through Supporting People (including floating support)
- ❑ s.75 groups and others experiencing disadvantage e.g. those in rural areas, those with poor literacy skills, tenants in poverty, migrants, Travellers and Roma people

Our research: what we did

- ❑ Research aim: To assess and make recommendations for the greater involvement of 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland, with particular emphasis on engagement with the Social Housing Reform Programme.
- ❑ Literature review
- ❑ 16 semi-structured interviews, including 19 people. Covered government department and voluntary agencies including housing, homelessness, mental health, learning disability, education, ex-offenders, minority ethnic group
- ❑ Attended one user group
- ❑ Study trip to Glasgow: visited five projects including health, housing, homelessness, mental health and youth work

What we found (1): who is excluded? – what people told us

- ❑ Geographical isolation
- ❑ People with poor communications skills including problems with literacy and numeracy: no jargon, plain language absolutely essential
- ❑ Black and minority ethnic people; English as second language
- ❑ People with severe mental health problems
- ❑ Those with drug and alcohol problems
- ❑ Ex-offenders – especially women and vulnerable people; sex offenders
- ❑ Children and young people
- ❑ Digital exclusion increasingly important
- ❑ No group is homogenous; and multiple identities
- ❑ Advocacy organisations were perceptive about their role – important to empower clients e.g. peer support schemes

What we found (2): Five themes

1. Why do it?

- 'User participation is critical to understanding the impact of change and assessing services'
- 'Good things are not always easy... that's the joys of democracy'
- Perhaps even more important in times of austerity – provides information on what people need, better use of resources and impact
- Waste of time and resources to plan services without user involvement

2. Who gets to speak?

- Power is not on the side of the service user
- Power has to be ceded and shared – principle of co-production
- Patronage and paternalism can exclude, so can gatekeepers
- 'Dependency is a big problem among vulnerable groups and constitutes a barrier to progress'

What we found (3): Five themes continued

3. Improving access

- Rights based approach – treat values with respect. Peer advocacy
- ‘Build capacity and confidence.. when an individual is supported skills are developed. Identify opportunity, facilitate engagement, recognise ability.... capacity release’

4. Making it work

- ‘Treat people as human beings not segregated services’
- People may not be getting involved because they are not used to being asked
- Involvement must be relevant – don’t use words like ‘strategy’ – build from the bottom up, start from where people are. Resources and training needed.

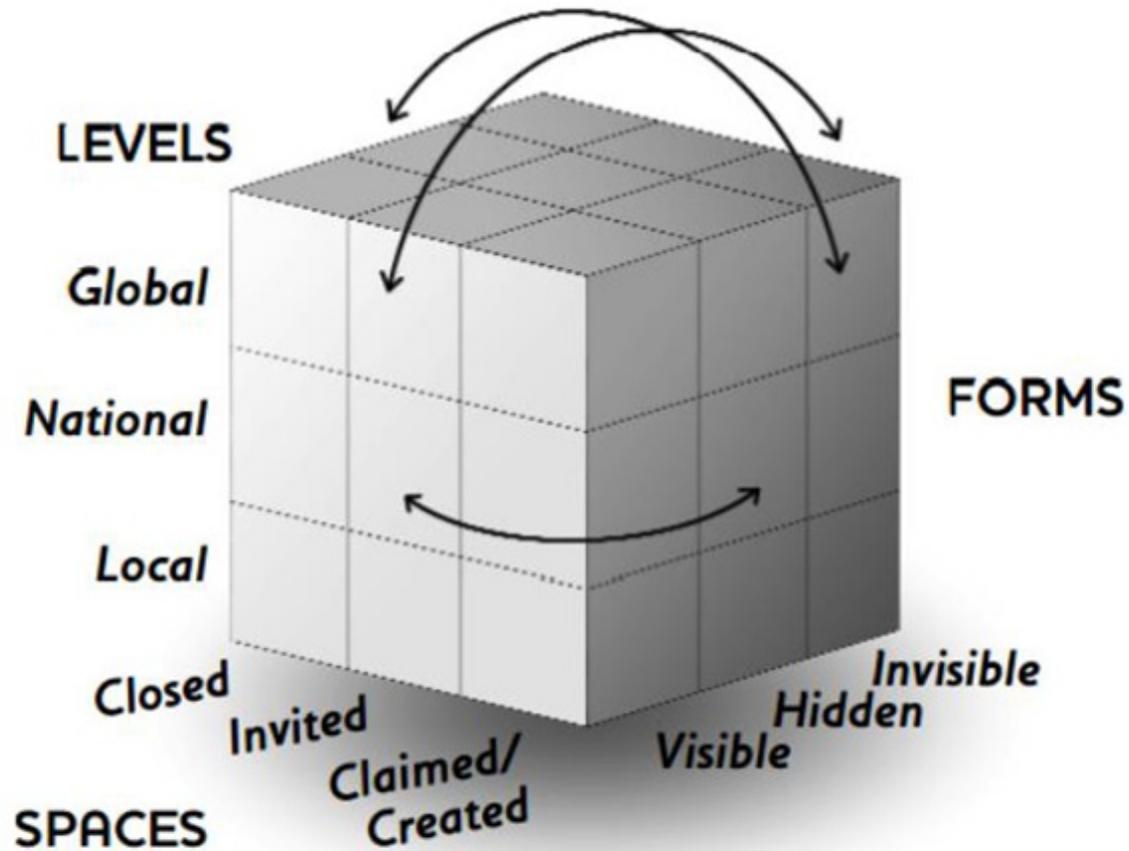
5. The future

- Cultural change – promote a genuine culture of involvement throughout the organisation: ‘remember the reason that we’re here!’ Value lived experience

What we found (4): The One Thing

- ❑ One thing to improve participation? – what people told us:
 - Above all – LISTEN
 - Honesty and transparency – don't give people the run around
 - Demonstrate the value of the process and provide feedback
 - Include participation in everyone's work, not an optional extra
 - Involve, consult and empower – people should be involved in both the design and delivery of services
 - Talk about barriers, be flexible, adapt and change when needed
 - Try to seek a positive outcome; be open to new participation techniques
 - Ask why do you want to do this? What will be the impact?
 - 'Take the pain out of meetings'
 - Include user involvement in regulation/ make it a statutory requirement

Analysis (1): the 'power cube'



From Gaventa, J. (2006) 'Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis', IDS Bulletin 37(6): 23-33.

Analysis (2): improving involvement for all – a 3 stage approach

1. *Finding the right structures*

- Open up existing spaces: transparency for previously 'closed' spaces; improved democratic practice for 'invited' spaces – including efforts to include 'easy to ignore' groups
- Use newly created or 'claimed' spaces to increase the power of the relatively powerless e.g. campaigns and lobbying

2. *Facilitating engagement*

- Make sure service users feel they are heard within these structures
- Provide some power over agenda-setting
- Listen, provide practical support such as transport costs and lunch
- Also use participation techniques e.g. Shared Solutions (Glasgow Homeless Network); Planning for Real – co-production of policy and strategy using lived experience as well as professional perspectives

Analysis (3): improving involvement for all – a 3 stage approach

3. *Capacity release*

- Facilitating engagement can be short-term and relatively superficial without an additional commitment to a sustainable model of empowerment and cultural change through deepening the capacity of all participants – including staff
- Identify individual and community ‘assets’ which are already there and look at the barriers to their release
- Adopt a rights based approach e.g. assess rights to housing, support
- Peer mentoring is another valuable way of working on capacity release
- As is a community development approach
- Learn from other policy areas and from housing practice in other UK jurisdictions and other countries

Case study: Private Tenants' Forum – turning issues into strategy



Agenda FOR Action



1. The right structure: hosted by the Housing Rights Service, philanthropic funding, dedicated worker
2. Facilitating engagement: training, support, to turn individual issues into 'Agenda for Action' strategy document; also private renting guidance and video
3. Capacity release: ongoing – what's next? Culture change about PRS



'More Than Bricks and Mortar' Award 2015

Conclusions

- ❑ People first – start with the individual and their issues
- ❑ Rights based approach
- ❑ Think about power all the time - and everybody has some power
- ❑ Turn issues into policy and strategy – widen the agenda
- ❑ Improve processes, communication and negotiation – better outcomes
- ❑ Work with people's strengths (assets) – capacity release
- ❑ But use multiple participation techniques too – including good quality information
- ❑ Evidence based approach – small independent resource base needed, including international links

Thank you... any questions?

