



## Independent Tenant Support

What sort of support is needed?

- Tenant training – how to engage, communication skills, organisation skills, capacity building, personal development
- Leadership training – successful community groups generally have one or two key people who drive any achievements. Without this key person, with necessary skills, ambition, interest, the groups often fail.
- Landlords also need recognition of the good work that they're already doing and of any new programmes that deliver results
- There needs to be continuous engagement with groups and the programme needs to adapt to suit needs/aims of individual groups
- Supporting adoption/use of plain English – jargon/technical terminology creates barriers, gets people off on wrong foot (echoed by all four groups)
- Suggestion that there should be local fora for all landlords - so that they can work together on common issues, can be difficult for groups/agencies to get in contact with relevant people at HAs, easier to engage with NIHE
- Training needs to be standardised but also to be available at different levels
- Developing a set of standards would allow individual LLs to set their own training agenda, which may be more suitable to their needs, but still ensure LL's commitment to engagement/involvement
- Quality of SCNI training praised by those who have participated
- Housing officers also need training, particularly on how to communicate with tenants, particularly those with mental health issues or addiction problems.
- Housing officers need to be trained so that they have greater awareness of support services available to help any tenants who have problems.
- Floating support services are great, but too often HOs are told that there is waiting list or service is at capacity and cannot assist.



### Any groups that require particular support?

- Tenants with mental health issues re less able to engage, need to consider how these tenants can be helped to express any issues that may be affecting them.
- General needs tenants can often be harder to engage than those in supported housing or those who already make use of advocacy groups – don't identify as needing support or may not have immediate access to staff/support
- Some groups of tenants may need an advocate – may feel more comfortable expressing issues to this person, but there needs to be follow through. This advocate must be able to effect change and must share what s/he has heard from tenants – people get disenfranchised if they feel that they haven't been listened to properly.
- Tenants tend to worry or panic about visits from landlord – landlord communication needs to be clearer. Language can be quite intimidating, need to express things in friendlier terms.
- Young people/secondary students need to be educated on tenant responsibilities, community involvement, participation etc
- People on waiting list and in temporary accommodation should be supported and advised of their options and of expectations when they become tenants
- Point made that HOs should maximise on opportunities to engage at sign up, before tenants become disillusioned or lose interest. If tenancy starts off on wrong foot, it can sour entire tenant/LL relationship.

### Who needs support?

- Tenants
- Housing providers management
- Housing officers
- Private landlords



- Private tenants
- Community groups and church groups
- Shops & local businesses (for issues of ASB)
- Owner occupiers, private tenants – need to consider multi-use developments
- Any service should be community wide and open to those who need it

#### Who should provide the support?

- Overwhelming backing for SCNI. They have experience, expertise and have earned trust of other agencies.
- SCNI may need to outsource expertise to deliver training, but have the necessary background in community organisation
- Concern about using just one organisation – how to guarantee value for money or good results. Would an element of competition improve the end service for funder?
- Need to consider conflict of interest – how will funding impact on service's independence/autonomy?
- Has/NIHE need to look more closely at joint procurement – could a tenant participation officer for one area be shared/funded by a number of landlords?
- Provider should be regulated.
- However, SCNI may not have knowledge/skills to deliver all support required.
- Some support for a central hub which could source appropriate, standardised training for those who need it – however, this should not be a profit making exercise.
- Any appointed support body should have the necessary, appropriate skills to deliver services effectively.

#### Who should pay?

- Some suggestion that central government should pay, however, groups acknowledged this was unlikely.



- Landlords should contribute to the cost of the service as it will ultimately enhance their own services.
- Need to ensure that any landlord levy is not seen as a penalty charge
- Important that independence is retained – having “in house” TP officers may not be ideal, look to NIHE/SCNI model
- Consider levy on social housing rents? How is that fair to other service users (owner occupiers, private landlords/tenants – pay to use?)
- Acknowledged that most landlords are already happy to invest in staff and want to provide an excellent customer service so should support this type of initiative.
- However, point made that many problems are caused by issues outside of housing management, so landlords cant be expected to bear all the responsibility for resolving problems. (Other departments, such as roads service, police, councils, social services etc may be involved – should they contribute to costs if benefits are shared?)