Housing Rights

PUTTING THE 'US' IN HOUSING

THE MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT OF AFFECTED GROUPS IN DECISIONS MADE ABOUT HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

RESEARCH REPORT: OCTOBER 2022

REBEKAH MCCABE, CHARLOTTE OBIJIAKU, AND CALUM GREEN

involve

About the authors

Rebekah McCabe is Engagement Lead for Northern Ireland with the Public Participation charity Involve. Her focus is on developing the awareness, understanding, and use of participatory and deliberative tools across government and civil society. She is a graduate of Dublin Institute of Technology and Maynooth University, and has worked in the context of community development, participatory research, ethnography, built environment, and democratic innovation in Northern Ireland for over 12 years. She previously worked for PLACE, is a local campaigner on issues of urban development, and Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Open Government Network.

Charlotte Obijiaku is a project officer at Involve, where she is involved in a variety of projects and supports the communications work of the organisation. Charlotte is a graduate in International Development from the University of Sussex and recently completed her MA Social Anthropology of Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). She has an interest in a people-centred approach to community development and positive social change. Charlotte has previously worked with the African Union and the European Network for Migrant Women. In the United Kingdom, she was involved in social mobility programmes, mental health and community development initiatives at the University of Sussex. Thanks to this varied professional and academic experience, she brings a multidisciplinary approach to the projects she works on.

Calum Green is Director of Advocacy and Communications at Involve, a role focused on ensuring both the public and people in positions of power and influence understand and actively support ways for the public to be part of decisions that affect their lives. Before Involve, Calum worked as Communities & Campaigns Director, and then Chief Executive, of London Community Land Trust, an organisation who works with its members to campaign for and directly deliver permanently affordable, democratically determined homes across London. Before London CLT, Calum worked as a Senior Organiser at Citizens UK, building the power of people across the country to participate in the decisions that affect them the most, including founding a local chapter in south London, Peckham Citizens.

Acknowledgements

Foreword - Putting the 'us' in hoUSing

This important scoping report comes at a significant time for housing in Northern Ireland. Rising interest rates, the cost-of-living crisis and increasing levels of homelessness and housing stress all mean that policy development which makes a difference in people's lives, has never been more Needed.

At Housing Rights we are deeply committed to ensuring that people with lived experience of housing problems and homelessness are meaningfully involved in the decisions government makes.

This report was commissioned to better understand the breadth of work already happening in Northern Ireland and further afield to support people to be involved in decisions made about housing and homelessness. It was also intended to shine a light on those groups whose voices are not being heard and to provide insights about how collectively we in the housing and homelessness sector and in government, can improve our practice in the area.

There is appetite and momentum to ensure effective mechanisms exist to involve people in decision making. The New Decade New Approach agreement explicitly commits to ensuring the practice of co-design underpins how government works in Northern Ireland. The draft Department for Communities' Housing Supply Strategy and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 also include commitments that people affected by poor housing and homelessness be involved in the design and delivery of the policy solutions.

In mapping a range of tools and approaches and identifying recommendations, this report makes a useful contribution to the work happening across the housing and homelessness sector in Northern Ireland.

We are grateful to all those who contributed to the research and also to the Research Advisory Group which included representation from the Department for Communities and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and to Involve who brought their expertise in public participation to this important project.

Housing Rights

Contents

Executive Summary

The purpose of this research is to contribute to current thinking about the participation of groups made vulnerable by their housing situation in decisions about housing and homelessness in Northern Ireland. These are important and increasingly urgent issues that demand fresh and bold approaches to policy and service design, shaped by the expertise and needs of people who have experience of poor housing and homelessness.

The aims of the research were to:

- Identify groups whose experience of poor housing and homelessness are not being heard in policy development, and service design and delivery in Northern Ireland.
- Identify and assess mechanisms and models through which the meaningful involvement of affected groups is secured, by looking at approaches taken to participation in related policy (and service design/development) decisions.
- Make recommendations for the practical application of engagement models, including frameworks for planning, implementation and evaluation.

This report approaches these questions through a lens of participatory democracy - a set of ideas and practices based on the belief that democratic decision making at all levels of governance should be made with and by the people who are affected by those decisions. Participation happens along a spectrum, and involvement is best understood in that context. Good participation, at any level on the spectrum, is often about opening up entrenched power structures so that public policy and services can be more responsive to the needs of everyone in society. To do this, however, requires understanding the language of participation and the impact it can have on how processes are planned, implemented and evaluated. Participation is never neutral - it always takes place in a context of unequal power relations, and understanding the nature of that power is essential in order to rebalance rather than reproduce it. One way that power operates in participation is through barriers to participation, and groups who are 'easy to ignore' when programmes and processes fail to meet the needs of many of the people who are affected by them.

There is an obvious and significant overlap between people who experience poor housing and homelessness and those who face barriers to participation, because the factors that contribute to inequalities also often constitute the barriers that prevent people from taking part, such as poverty, education, confidence, work and caring responsibilities, language and literacy barriers, and disabilities. The ways in which the experience of poor housing and homelessness interacts and intersects with identity characteristics is complex because inequalities are structural and systemic. People's identities are multifaceted and intersecting, and demographics alone don't determine housing outcomes. Poor housing is both the result and the cause of inequity, and poverty is a unifying factor across all demographics who experience poor housing and homelessness. However, for those made most vulnerable by their housing situation, including those on low incomes in the private rented sector and those who experience homelessness, there are few formal avenues through which they can influence the decisions that affect them.

Participation is relatively well defined and with established practice in the Social Rented Sector. However, there is inconsistency across the sector, and an absence of data on the diversity, inclusion,

or representativeness of current participatory activities. There are also gaps in the evaluation of tenant involvement, making it difficult to know what works and what doesn't, or how accessible current opportunities are to groups who are systematically excluded.

Consultation is widely used as a way to broaden engagement with strategic policy decisions, both by the Housing Executive and by the Department for Communities, and a key way that decision makers obtain feedback from stakeholders. It is currently the primary method for the public to feed into policy development. However, consultation is just one method, and, beyond statutory obligations to consult, it will often not be the correct approach, especially when the input of 'easy to ignore' groups is required.

There is much more diversity of participatory practice in the claimed spaces occupied by civil society groups, activists, campaigners, and the community and voluntary and advice sectors. The research looked at current practice among a small number of projects and organisations that work at the intersection of housing and 'easy to ignore' groups, and found that they are often effective at involving and collaborating with groups who are affected by poor housing and homelessness, but that they sometimes struggle to see the impact of their work on decisions made about policy and services.

The report summarises these gaps as:

1. **The inclusion gap**, especially in invited spaces.
2. **The empowerment gap**, and the absence of meaningful redistribution of power in decision making about housing and homelessness to those who are most affected.
3. **The impact gap**, and the institutional limits of being open to the input of participation.

Based on these gaps, we present a range of case studies from across the UK, NI, and Europe that demonstrate approaches that address some or all of those gaps. Many of the case studies demonstrate how decision makers, stakeholders, and affected groups can work together more effectively throughout the decision making process.

In learning from existing practice in Northern Ireland, and from the case studies, the report concludes with a set of six recommendations for the meaningful involvement of affected groups in decisions made about housing and homelessness in Northern Ireland. Each recommendation is a principle accompanied by a set of actions that decision makers can take to support improved involvement of affected groups in decision making.

Recommendations

1. Involvement makes a difference

Involvement should make a difference - to participants, to decisions, to policies and to services. The difference involvement can make should be planned into the participation process at the earliest possible stage and should be communicated clearly at the end of the process.

2. The statutory environment supports participation by default

Participation is institutionalised when it happens to a high quality by default: as a normal and unquestioned component of the decision making process, rather than something that happens on an ad-hoc or occasional basis. This happens when it is written into the rules of how decisions get made. Embedded practice is where the decision of whether and how to engage is routine and built-in to the process, rather than being at the discretion of the decision maker. Putting participation on a legal or statutory footing could act as an important precursor to changing the culture, behaviour , and practice of institutions.

3. There is capacity for participation within decision making structures

High quality public participation requires skills, knowledge and experience to be able to respond to different policy contexts and to develop opportunities for people to participate that are inclusive and accessible. This is especially true in policy areas such as housing, where there is significant overlap between the experience of poor housing and homelessness and the experience of barriers to participation, which we elaborated on above.

4. Involvement happens throughout the decision making process

Involvement can take place at any stage in the policy process, as long as there is room for change as a result. However, the stage in the policy process is a key element of the context for involvement, and will impact on the types of methods that are appropriate. Involving people early in the process can help identify issues, generate a shared vision, and shape the agenda so that it is close to the needs of people most impacted by the decision. Likewise, involving people after the decision has been made and during its implementation can provide oversight and scrutiny on how services are delivered and ensure that they meet the aims of the policy and address the needs of service users.

There will be opportunities throughout the policy cycle to invite and encourage participation. However, the approach and the methodologies used should take account of the stage the decision making process is at to ensure participation can add value and to avoid manipulative or tokenistic engagement.

5. Decision makers have strong connections with others who are already involving affected groups

There is significant participation expertise and practice in civil society and the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. Organisations are claiming spaces to involve and collaborate with people who have experience of poor housing and homelessness for whom other spaces of participation present barriers. In some cases, those groups may already work closely with decision makers, in others, their relationship may be more adversarial. However, the onus is on decision makers to build those connections and support civil society groups to continue to do their vital work.

6. Understand what works

Evaluation is important for ensuring that engagement meets its objectives, and for ongoing learning and improvements to how engagement happens. Good evaluation can provide a deep insight into the

strengths and weaknesses of planning, implementation, inclusiveness, participant experience, impacts on decisions, policies and processes, and can capture learning of what works and what does not, so that improvements can be made.

Limitations of the research

A significant component of the landscape review and the case studies was dependent on other organisations for their time responding to questionnaires and/ or being available for interviews. We were unable to compensate those organisations for their contributions. Those who responded were generous and accommodating with their limited time. However there are gaps where organisations who were approached for their input were unable to respond due to resourcing issues, and so the research was unable to feature them as examples of good practice.

This research did not directly include the experiences of affected groups. Further research and/ or the implementation of this report's recommendations should centre the needs and experiences of people made most vulnerable to poor housing and homelessness, and better understand involvement from their perspectives.

Introduction: What is involvement?

The focus of this research is the meaningful involvement of affected groups in decisions made about housing and homelessness in Northern Ireland. The research looks at what is happening now to involve people who have experience of poor housing and homelessness, and how practice can be improved in the future.

Involvement is best understood as a form of participation in decision making, and this report approaches these issues through a lens of participatory democracy - a set of ideas and practices based on the belief that democratic decision making at all levels of governance should be made with and by the people who are affected by those decisions.

Despite the growth in popularity of participatory approaches to policy development and service design in recent years, there is still little shared understanding of its constituent parts. As both a set of ideas and practices, it has emerged from many disciplines, sectors, traditions, and geographic regions. Terminology can sometimes be used in loose or ambiguous ways, and terms are applied interchangeably in ways that can be contradictory and confusing. This section outlines some of the key terms used throughout this document to ensure they are clearly understood. It is also intended to draw attention to some of the key tensions, challenges, and trade offs that arise as shifts towards greater participation are sought.

It is common for participation to be understood primarily through its practice - the methods and models that are used to engage people on specific issues. However, we also need to understand the ideas behind this practice to ensure participation has an impact on the outcomes of decision-making. For this reason, this section focuses on those ideas and connected frameworks.

What is participation?

Participation is a field characterised by its diversity. However, there are two key frameworks that are commonly used to represent participation as a spectrum of citizen influence on a decision or outcome. Each one has strengths and limitations, but they provide useful reference points for the range of activities that fall under the broad category of participation.
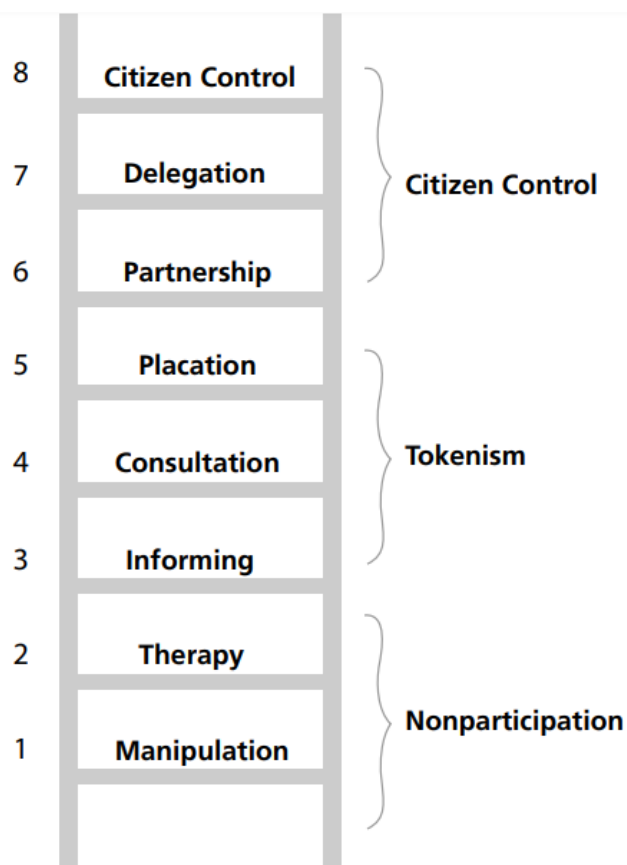
Arnstein's Ladder

First described by Sherry Arnstein in 1969, Arnstein's Ladder shows 'citizen participation' levels ranging from low to high, reflecting who holds power in decision making processes[1]. It is divided into three main categories starting from the top: citizen control, tokenism and non-participation. These main categories are further broken down into the eight levels of the ladder: citizen control, delegated power, partnership, placation, involvement, consultation, informing, therapy, and manipulation.

This framework specifically focuses on power and how it is shared between public institutions and citizens. In her article "A Ladder of Citizen Participation", Arnstein explains how, for citizen participation to be genuine and effective, a redistribution of power from institutions to the public is

---

[1] Dobson, C., (2022). Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation. https://www.citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html

needed [2]. It frames participation as inherently political (that is, concerned with the distribution and operation of power in society) and points to the harm that can occur when processes involve citizens without the meaningful delegation of actual power. Bad participatory practice - tick box exercises, tokenism, providing inaccessible or partial information, or inviting input solely to legitimise a decision that has already been made - can create mistrust, damage relationships, and entrench inequities.

Arnstein's Ladder (1969)
Degrees of Citizen Participation

A weakness of Arnstein's model is that it can be interpreted as saying that citizen control is inherently better than types of participation in which less power is delegated. The reality in which most participation happens is much more complex than that, and includes the quality of participation design, the judgement involved in knowing what level of participation is most appropriate for a given situation, the technical complexity of the issue, and the specific power dynamics between actors, for example. In some cases, particularly with routine public services, quality, comprehensive and timely information is what the public needs, and it is not accurate to characterise that level of engagement as tokenistic.

This weakness is somewhat addressed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum, which was developed in the early 2000s and has become an international mainstay in the planning of public participation.

---

[2] Organizing Engagement, (2022), Models: Ladder of Citizen Participation.
https://organizingengagement.org/models/ladder-of-citizen-participation/

IAP2 Spectrum of Participation

Developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) - an international body advancing the practice of public participation - the Spectrum of Public Participation was created to "assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process".[3]

The spectrum identifies five levels of public participation and moving from left to right each reflects the degree of impact on the decision making process. The furthest right you move on the spectrum, the more decision making power the public or community will have. The IAP2 spectrum resembles Arnstein's ladder by presenting participation as a spectrum, but differs from it by presenting all levels of public participation as equally legitimate. It makes clear the purpose of participation at each level and distinguishes between genuine and tokenistic engagement by specifying what promise has been made to the public, whether implicitly or explicitly, as a result of undertaking engagement at one of the five levels.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION →

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Power and participation

An understanding of power is central to participation. Good participation is often about opening up entrenched power structures so that public policy and services can be more responsive to the needs of everyone in society.[4] As the two models of participation above demonstrate, all participation involves some redistribution of power from institutions to citizens. This reflects the often-unspoken power imbalance that exists between institutional decision makers and individual citizens. However, power operates in a complex and dynamic system. This includes both more visible power - like

---

[3] IAP2 International Federation, (2018), IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.

[4] Involve, (2005), People and participation. https://involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/People-and-Participation.pdf

someone in a position of authority in an institution - and less visible power - like the combination of economic and social inequities that exist between individual citizens.

Participation is never neutral - it always takes place in a context of unequal power relations, and understanding the nature of that power is essential in order to rebalance rather than reproduce it. Understanding how power operates in participation can also strengthen the effectiveness of participation, and improve the impact and value for money.

Power can be hard to define, and even harder to describe, and there are several conceptual frameworks that attempt to do that, particularly in the context of participation. One simple framework for analysing power is the PowerCube, developed by the Institute of Development Studies, which presents power as having three 'faces': levels of power, spaces of power, and forms of power.

1. **'Levels '**describes power in relation to local, national and global scales, and the ways in which they interact. For example, local issues might be impacted by events or decisions happening globally, and local events can have national and even global impacts.
2. **'Spaces'** refers to arenas or forums where decisions are made, as well as 'opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests'.[5] The powercube framework makes a distinction between closed, invited and claimed spaces, and we will use this terminology throughout the report.

    a. Closed spaces: when decisions are made without public input. It can refer to entire institutions, or to areas or workstreams within organisations into which there are no opportunities created for public involvement.

    b. Invited spaces: when input from the public is invited. This is the context in which most public engagement occurs.

    c. Claimed spaces: opportunities to influence decisions that are created by the public, such as activism, campaigns, community organising, and social movements.

3. **'Forms'** refers how power manifests in visible, hidden and invisible ways:

    a. Visible power includes institutions and governance structures, from courts and parliaments to boards and committees.

    b. Hidden power includes the ways in which those with more influence can shape agendas and influence decisions out of the view of the general public. It can operate through rules and procedures that advantage some and disadvantage others, when issues are framed in ways that marginalise some experiences while centering others, or through practices that legitimise some voices over others.

    c. Invisible power refers to the ways in which ideas become normalised in such a way that people accept them without question, even when they are contrary to their best interests. It can disguise outcomes that occur as a result of political decisions as natural or inevitable, and works to discourage active participation in seeking change.

---

[5] Powercube, (2011), Spaces of Power. https://www.powercube.net/analyse-power/spaces-of-power/

The three faces of power interact and relate to each other; for example, power can take on a hidden form in a claimed space at a local level. How power is used, who has it, and what form it takes are important elements of the context for participation. These dynamics can be understood by linking the three faces of power through a power analysis; in other words, planning for participation should include an explicit exploration of the power dynamics impacting on how, where, and who is making decisions, and who will be impacted by them.

Barriers to participation and 'easy to ignore' groups

One of the ways that power inequities reproduce through public participation is through barriers to participation. Barriers to participation exclude people from civic activities, with the result that the needs and wants of excluded groups are less likely to be reflected in decisions.[6]

Muir and McMahon (2015) describe how barriers to participation can show up in many ways. They categorise them in the following ways (which are further described later in this report):

- Methodological
- Physical
- Attitudinal
- Financial and resources;
- Timing
- Consultation fatigue

It is important to emphasise that barriers to participation are created by the process, not by the participants, and are rooted in the mostly unspoken expectation that participants should 'adapt to structures, behaviour, and expectations of service providers and policy-makers'.[7] For example, formal meetings held during working hours, jargon-heavy information, reliance on written materials, and poorly facilitated meetings, are commonplace features of engagement that favour the most confident, most literate, and those with the most time.

Related to barriers to participation is the idea of 'easy to ignore' groups. This term refers to groups who 'are ignored because it is easier than tackling the diverse and hugely complicated barriers that some people face. There are structural and epistemic weaknesses in many of the programmes, policies and projects which fail to recognise the needs of many groups and individuals'.[8]

People can be 'easy to ignore' for different reasons, sometimes connected to issues of discrimination, such as equalities groups as defined by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, but also because of

---

[6] Lightbody, R., Escobar, O., Morton, S., Seditas, K., (2017), 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement. http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/WWSHardToReachOrEasyToIgnoreEvidenceReview.pdf

[7] Muir, J., & McMahon, M., (2015). Involving Everyone: Including 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland. https://www.housingrights.org.uk/sites/default/files/policydocs/Easy%20to%20Ignore%20Full%20Report%20-%20June%202015.pdf , page 26

[8] Lightbody, R., Escobar, O., Morton, S., Seditas, K., (2017), 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement. page 6

where they live, communication issues such as language or literacy, or because they are an 'unwanted voice'.[9]

There is an obvious overlap between people who experience inequalities and those who face barriers to participation, because the factors that contribute to inequalities also often constitute the barriers that prevent people from taking part, such as poverty, education, confidence, work and caring responsibilities, language and literacy barriers, and disabilities.[10]

Understanding and tackling barriers to participation will be addressed throughout this research, however, it is important to underline that it is not enough to enable access to participation; barriers can exist throughout a process, as well as within the capacity of decision making institution to listen and give consideration to the views of 'easy to ignore' groups. Thinking about the meaningful involvement of affected groups must therefore extend beyond considerations of access and reach, and must also shape choices around the design, facilitation, engagement materials, language and literacy, and support for participation.

The language of participation

In this section, we define some of the key terms used to describe, plan for, and evaluate participatory processes, and which are used throughout this report.

Engagement, participation, and involvement

Engagement

Engagement, public engagement, civic engagement, service user engagement, are all broad terms that encompass a wide range of activities through which members of the public can become better informed or more involved with governments, institutions, and organisations. It can be considered as an overarching term to describe the spectrum of activities from the sharing of information to collaboration in the design and delivery of services, where participation is invited by the decision maker. On its own, the term engagement communicates very little about how people can actually participate in decisions that impact them.

Participation

Like engagement, participation is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of activities through which people get involved in their communities, interest groups, campaigns, and influence the policies and decisions that affect their opportunities, their environments, the public services they receive, and ultimately their quality of life.

Participation is voluntary, but the choices to participate, and how people participate is based on a number of factors (which can shift as individual and community circumstances change over time and

[9] Muir, J., & McMahon, M., (2015). Involving Everyone: Including 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland., page 24

[10] Lightbody, R., Escobar, O., Morton, S., Seditas, K., (2017), 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement.

in response to external factors). People participate in things that matter to them, provided they have the opportunity to do so, and if they feel that participation will make a difference.

Research into how people participate has found three categories of activity (between which there will be some overlap):[11]

- Social participation: This involves collective activities: from being involved in formal voluntary organisations (e.g. volunteering at a day centre or being a trustee), to contributing to grassroots community groups (e.g. a residents' group or a sports club), to taking part in informal opportunities for mutual aid or skills sharing (e.g. a peer-support group or a knitting group).

- Individual participation - People's individual actions and choices that reflect the kind of society they want to live in can also be a form of participation: from buying 'fair trade' products, to supporting a school fundraiser or giving to national or international charities.

- Public participation -This is the engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of democracy and decision making: it could include voting, contacting a political representative, campaigning and lobbying, or taking part in consultations or other forms of engagement initiated by a government or public body.

Participation can be driven by individuals, communities, organisations in the community and voluntary sector, and/ or campaign and activist groups, or it can be driven by decision makers, such as governments, institutions, or public bodies.

Involvement

Although used broadly as a synonym for engagement and/or participation, in public participation practice, involvement refers to a specific *level* of participation. It implies working directly with the participants to ensure that their experiences, needs and aspirations are fully understood, and that the final decision gives 'conscientious consideration' to public input. In Arnstein's ladder, involvement would relate most closely to 'partnership' and would be at the 'citizen power' end of the spectrum. In the IAP2 Spectrum, 'involve' is its own category. In practice, involvement would entail methodologies that allow for dialogue between participants and decision makers, and an exchange of viewpoints among participants.

Who participates? The public, citizens, service users, & consumers

The people with whom decision makers engage are referred to using different and often very general terms. This can sometimes result in an overly broad, unfocused approach to identifying and recruiting the people whose voice most needs to be included. The language we use to describe participants also has an impact on how they are perceived, and how they perceive themselves, in relation to the issues on which they are engaging. We break down some of the commonly used terms for participants, and the implication of each on the planning and design of participatory activities.

---

[11] PTP Loans and Lending, (2022). PTP Loans and Lending: Financial information and loan guides
http://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/

The public

The public is often used as a catch-all term to refer to a very general and amorphous idea of anyone who is not attached to a stakeholder group or an institution. It is sometimes used interchangeably with terms like 'society', 'citizens', 'communities', or, in the context of electoral politics,' the electorate'. In the context of participatory practice, 'the public' is sometimes used to indicate the broadest, and therefore in theory at least, the most democratic way to think about who to engage on an issue that has wide-ranging impacts. In some cases, when combined with the right approach and at the right stage in the decision making process, engaging with the general public is an appropriate way to raise awareness of an issue, to stimulate a public conversation on an issue, or to temperature check opinions on an issue at the population level. However, the public is not homogenous, and thinking of them as such for the purpose of participation can exclude minority views and experiences, and limits the diversity of understanding (also known as cognitive diversity) that is so valuable, especially on issues that are complex or contentious and for which new ideas are needed to solve problems.[12]

It may be more useful in the context of participation to think of multiple publics, each of which have their own characteristics. Effectively planning for participation involves thinking about who you need to hear from, based on a clear understanding of the purpose and scope of engagement as well as on the context in which participation takes place.

Involve's *People and Participation* suggests identifying who (i.e. which public) needs to participate by thinking through the following questions:[13]

- Who is directly responsible for the decisions on the issues?
- Who is influential in the area, community, and/ or organisation?
- Who will be affected by any decision on the issue (individuals and organisations)?
- Who runs organisations with relevant interests?
- Who is influential on this issue?
- Who can obstruct a decision if not involved?
- Who has been involved in this issue in the past?
- Who has not been involved, but should have been?

In answering those questions, it is useful to make a further distinction between categories of participants (i.e. different publics):[14]

- The public at large, or a sample that reflects the diversity of the public;
- Particular sections of the public affected by the issue;
- Self-selecting groups;
- Statutory consultees;
- Governmental organisations;
- Representatives of special interest groups, local or national NGOs, trade unions, etc;
- Individuals with particular expertise (technical or personal).

Selecting who to involve in any participatory process is often politically charged. Intuitively, this leads some decision makers to manage the risk of being seen to have treated one group preferentially over

---

[12] Cognitive diversity 'refers to a diversity of ways of seeing the world, interpreting problems in it, and working out solutions to these problems' (Hong and Page, 2001; cited in Landemore H, 2013).

[13] Involve, (2005), People and participation. page 25

[14] Involve, (2005), People and participation.

another by taking an 'as wide as possible' or an 'open to everyone' approach, especially when it comes to engaging with individuals that make up the general public. However, without careful consideration, this approach can result in privileging those most able, most confident, and with the most time to participate, and crowding out the 'easy to ignore' voices.

Everyone does not have to be involved in everything, and there is more than one way to be involved in a participatory process (for example, in providing oversight, by providing expertise, including expertise by experience as an input into the process, and by participating in activities such as workshops and panels). What matters is that choosing who is involved, and how they are involved, is a considered decision informed by a clear, shared understanding of the purpose of engagement, and that the subsequent choice of methods supports the full access and inclusive participation of every participant.

Citizens, service users, or consumers?

There has been a trend over many years for the term 'consumer' to enter into the language of public and statutory agencies. A consumer is a user of a product or a service. A citizen, in the context of democracy, is a participating member of a society. A consumer approach is an individualised way to view a person, in that it removes people from their social context. Research has found that referring to someone as a consumer can have a psychological effect, resulting in a more self-oriented and competitive response to engagement.[15] A 2017 report on tenant involvement in governance observes that 'consumerist approaches regard the tenant as a consumer of a housing service and therefore their involvement with social housing should be service oriented.'[16]

This is in contrast to a citizenship approach, which places the individual within a set of interdependent social relationships: 'citizenship is a political act, with people taking responsibility on behalf of wider society'.[17] This distinction is borne out in the research, showing that when people are asked to respond to a challenge as citizens rather than consumers, they act more cooperatively and less self-interestedly.[18] This has significant implications for thinking about participation. In particular, it is important to think about whether participants are being asked to participate from an individual perspective based on their own interests as users of a service or product, or as a citizen who is part of a society, with a sense of broader purpose and representing a collective voice (such as protecting the public good). Likewise, asking people to participate as a 'stakeholder' can emphasise their role as representing or promoting a particular point of view, and representing others who share that view. This can make reaching a shared understanding between people who may approach the same issue from different perspectives and with asymmetrical power (such as tenants and landlords, or communities and developers) more difficult. It can also work to equivalise stakeholders in the mind of decision makers, leading power and resource imbalances to be overlooked in decision making, rather than centering those power asymmetries and addressing them. The role in which people are asked to participate also needs to be clearly communicated to them, and will have an impact on how they respond to the issues at stake. Good participatory design makes room for a range of voices and

---

[15] Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, and Bodenhausen, 2012, *Cuing Consumerism: Situational Materialism Undermines Personal and Social Well-Being* in Psychological Studies, 23(5), 517-523. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956797611429579

[16] Mullins, D., Shanks, P., Sacranie, H., (2017). Tenant Involvement in Governance: Models and Practices Final Report. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/ea2b026c-e05a-481b-9114-f6d7da1b6020/tenant_involvement_in_governance.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

[17] Involve, (2005), People and participation. page 27

[18] Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, and Bodenhausen, 2012, *Cuing Consumerism: Situational Materialism Undermines Personal and Social Well-Being* in Psychological Studies

types of expertise, while addressing rather than reproducing the power imbalances that result in some voices carrying more weight than others.

Methods in their place

There are innumerable methods with which to involve people in decision making. Methods are specific tools and techniques, such as questionnaires, workshops, roundtables, citizens' juries, reference panels, and focus groups. They are the most tangible and easily understood element of what is often a much larger process, and for this reason they easily become the focal point and the beginning and end of conversations of how to do participation well. However, methods are much less important to the outcome of a process than the context in which the process takes place, including the level of institutional buy-in, the resources committed, and the quality of the detailed design, including, in some cases, the independent oversight, the quality of inputs, and the facilitation of the process.

There is no best method, only the method best suited to the specific social, political, institutional and policy context for engagement, and the scope of what can be meaningfully influenced as a result. Methods are just one ingredient of many that make for good participation. The skill of participation is understanding how those ingredients work together, and combining them in the right way to get the outcomes needed.

Why participation matters

Participation has a range of broad benefits for decision makers and public, including:[19]

- **Improved governance**, including increased democratic legitimacy for institutions because of close links with the public, improved reputations for public bodies, increased opportunities for active citizenship, and greater accountability of public bodies because of more effective information dissemination and better dialogue.

- **Greater social cohesion**, including bringing diverse and sometimes hostile communities together, bringing 'easy to ignore' groups into discussions, building relationships within and between different communities and social groups ('bonding' and 'bridging' social capital)[20], strengthening and creating new networks that enable different interests to work together as a result of building more positive relationships based on a better knowledge of each other, and increased equality of access to policy and decision-making processes.

- **Improved quality of services, projects and programmes**, including ensuring public service investment is based more on people's expressed needs, reducing management and maintenance costs by reducing vandalism and misuse as a result of engendering a sense of

---

[19] Involve, (2005). The True Costs of Public Participation – Full Report. https://involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/True-Costs-Full-Report2_3.pdf

[20] Social capital consists of the networks, norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the quantity and co-operative quality of a society's social interactions. Three main types of social capital can be distinguished: bonding social capital (e.g. among family members or ethnic groups), bridging social capital (e.g. across ethnic groups) and linking social capital (between different social classes). Social capital can be measured using a range of indicators but the most commonly used measure is trust in other people. Directly quoted from Aldridge and Halpern 2002, cited in Involve, (2005) .p.76

ownership, enabling faster and easier decisions (e.g. on new developments or protective designations) by reducing conflict between different parties and increasing trust through better communications, and enabling people to share in the responsibility for improving their own quality of life (e.g. health and well-being, or the local environment).

- **Greater capacity building and learning**, including raising awareness and increasing understanding of public institutions and the way they work, enabling citizens to better access the services they need, and to understand the boundaries and limitations of different public bodies, building confidence and optimism among citizens who then go on to other civic activities or learning, supporting the voluntary and community sectors by recognising their vital role in building the capacity of community and specific interest groups (especially disadvantaged and excluded groups), and increasing the skills among the staff running participation and those taking part (especially interpersonal skills).

Part 1: Landscape Review

Methodology

The purpose of this landscape review is to assess the available evidence and information on the involvement of people with experience of poor housing and homelessness (including tenants in both social and private sectors, residents, home owners, and people experiencing homelessness) in decisions about housing and homelessness policy and service delivery in Northern Ireland.

Its aim is to understand the extent to which housing and homelessness policy and service delivery, across all tenures, is shaped by and responsive to the needs of people with experience of poor housing and homelessness. It also aims to establish the extent to which current engagement practices create barriers to participation for people whose situations make them vulnerable to poor housing and homelessness.

Part 1 provides a baseline understanding of the current relationship between decision makers and people with experience of poor housing and homelessness, including identifying the groups that are most affected by these issues, by reviewing current evidence to understand current practice and identify gaps. Part 2 addresses the gaps in involvement by focusing on case studies of participatory practice, including but not limited to housing, through which those gaps have been meaningfully addressed. Part 3 sets out recommendations for decision makers, the advice sector, advocacy groups and activists to improve participation, with a focus on the involvement of systematically ignored groups.

The review is guided by three questions:

1. **Who are the groups most affected by poor housing and homelessness?**

2. **Which groups are currently being involved in decisions about housing and homelessness policy and service design, and in what way are they being involved?**
   a. Models and mechanisms for involving people impacted by poor housing and homelessness.
   b. Where there is involvement, what data is being collected about who is participating?
   c. What information is being collected about participants' experiences of participation?
   d. What can we say about how 'meaningful' this involvement is? Are there gaps in information about the impact of participation?
3. **Based on the above, where are there gaps in participation? Examples of gaps include:**
   a. Groups unable to participate because of systemic barriers
   b. The level of participation e.g participation is largely at the 'consult' level.
   c. Impact, i.e. there is involvement but it's impact on policy or service design is hard to track or is not being measured
   d. Spaces of participation e.g. meaningful participation of marginalised groups is happening within claimed spaces, but not within invited spaces.
   e. What spaces within the housing / homelessness sector are closed to participation?

To answer these questions, we have reviewed a range of sources including equalities information, statistical information, public policy, organisational policies and strategies, consultation evaluations, news sources, information from advocacy groups, and academic literature.

In assessing this literature to identify gaps in participation, we have drawn on best practice guides, principles and standards around the design, delivery, and evaluation of public engagement, scholarly work on engagement and participatory democracy.

Groups experiencing poor housing and homelessness

Housing inequalities

Housing inequalities encompass the range of differences in access to, adequacy, and sustainability of housing, including those experienced as a result of demographic criteria, wealth inequalities, and inequalities of influence.

Equality is a widely used term, and various definitions exist, sometimes in tension with each other. For example, under some circumstances, equality requires that everyone be treated the same, whereas in others, equality might focus on the need for preferential or differential treatment of certain groups if, for example, they already experience disadvantage.

Though we intend for the the term housing inequalities to be used in a broad sense, much of the literature on housing inequalities in Northern Ireland focuses more narrowly on the demographic categories named in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and the requirements on government and public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations within policy making and service design.

Previous research on housing inequalities in Northern Ireland has observed that the intersections between and within these equality groups are complex, as are the ways in which they influence housing outcomes.[21] Some of the key housing issues relating to Section 75 categories are summarised below, however, it is important to recognise that inequality is structural and systemic, and cannot be understood by looking at its operation through demographics in isolation from other dimensions of inequality, including those arising from the unequal distribution of wealth and influence.[22]

Section 75 places a statutory duty on public authorities to promote equality on named grounds. However, it has been criticised for the ways in which it is limited in its ability to proactively address systemic inequities, and for its omission of socio-economic factors.[23] We outline the ways in which the experience of poor housing and homelessness interacts with some of the characteristics protected under Section 75 below, before expanding on the role of poverty as a determining factor in the experience of poor housing and homelessness .[24]

---

[21] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland. https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/HousingInequalities-FullReport.pdf

[22] This summary excludes the categories 'political opinion' and 'marital status' due to lack of evidence of their relationship to housing outcomes.

[23] Smith, A., and McLaughlin, E., (2009). Delivering equality: equality mainstreaming and constitutionalisation of socio-economic rights. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1504645

[24] We have not included information on the experience of poor housing and homelessness on the basis of political opinion or marital status as there is limited evidence that inequality is experienced on these grounds.

Gender

- Gender dimensions interact with life-stage, income, the presence of children, migrant status, and other issues to influence housing outcomes.
- Single men are more likely to present as homeless than single women.[25]
- There is growing evidence that women experience chronic homelessness at greater numbers than previously thought, and that women are more likely than men to experience 'hidden' homelessness i.e. 'staying in insecure housing or accommodation provided by family, friends and acquaintances for long periods'.[26]
- The hidden nature of female homelessness, means that there is less of an understanding of the conditions that leave women vulnerable to homelessness and less in the way of specialist services to respond to the particular needs of women experiencing those circumstances (*ibid*).
- Female reference person households are more likely to rent (both social and private) than male reference person households, and are at a greater risk of relative poverty. The risk of relative poverty after housing costs is highest for women in the private rented sector, and lowest among owner-occupiers.[27]
- There is little data on the experience of Trans and non-binary people in terms of housing outcomes in Northern Ireland, but qualitative research commissioned by the Housing Executive into the housing and homelessness experiences of LGBT people in Northern Ireland suggests that Trans and non-binary people reported feeling concern about the availability of adequate housing, with their choice limited to areas in which they perceived there was less of a risk of being exposed to abuse on the basis of their gender identity.[28]
- In the period from April 2020 to March 2021, 1,222 households presented as homeless due to domestic abuse. These figures are not disaggregated on the basis of gender. However, research from the UK charity SafeLives suggests that, nationally, almost a third of women who experience homelessness say that domestic abuse was a contributing factor in their becoming homeless.[29]

---

[25] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2017). Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland: Full Statement. https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/HousingCommunities-KeyInequalitiesStatement.pdf, page 7

[26] Boyle, F., (2021). The Impacts of Chronic Homelessness for Women: A report for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Homelessness/Impacts-of-Chronic-Homelessness-for-Women.aspx?ext=

[27] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2017). Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland: Full Statement, page 7

[28] O'Doherty, J., and Rowledge, R. (2014). Through our eyes: The housing and homelessness experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans people in Northern Ireland. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/a0eb8f0d-6e0e-4d15-a037-329af560eab3/through-our-eyes.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

[29] SafeLives, (2018). Safe at Home: Homelessness and domestic abuse. https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe_at_home_Spotlight_web.pdf

Age

- Younger people are more vulnerable in the housing market generally, are more likely than other age groups to present as homeless, and experience more relative poverty after housing costs are considered.[30] [31]
- Young people leaving care are at an increased risk of homelessness and of exploitation as a result of being homeless.[32]
- Younger people experience more barriers to access in the private rented sector.[33]
- Older people are more likely to experience non-decent homes, especially in the private rented sector, where the likelihood doubles compared to households with a reference person aged 17-59 years old.[34]
- The dominant tenure type for households with a reference person aged 60 or above is owner-occupation, and this sector contains the largest proportion of older people in non-decent homes[35].
- The likelihood of older people living in non-decent homes is linked to the need for adaptations to the home as people age (due in part to age related disabilities) and the difficulty of making those adaptations as well as general repairs to maintain the quality of the home as age impacts on ability. For older people who do not have a disability but who still require adaptations to meet changing needs, accessing the finance to do so is a barrier (ibid p. 17).

Religion

- Religion likewise interacts with other demographics, such as age profile and location, however aggregated data shows that, for social housing, Catholic applicants and applicants who identify with other religions wait longer and receive a slightly smaller proportion of allocations compared to Protestants.[36]
- In some areas where demand for housing is greater than supply, Catholics and applicants of other religions wait up to three times longer to be housed than Protestants. People from other religions or no religion also experience the worst overcrowding and the smallest homes, despite having smaller than average households compared to Catholics, and are twice as likely compared to Catholics to live in non-decent homes[37].
- Segregated housing patterns continue to add complexity to the housing market, where supply in one area cannot meet the demand in another, even within relatively small geographic areas such as North Belfast. This has a disproportionate negative impact on Catholic reference person households.[38]

[30] Boyle, F., and Pleace, N., (2021). Experiences of Youth Homelessness: A report for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Single-Downloads/Experiences-of-Youth-Homelessness.aspx

[31] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty. https://www.nerinstitute.net/sites/default/files/research/2019/neri_working_paper_housing_final.pdf

[32] Housing Rights, (2022). Leaving care. https://www.housingadviceni.org/leaving-care-0

[33] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2017). Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland: Full Statement., page 13

[34] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[35] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[36] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[37] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[38] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

Race

- There are higher rates of private renting among Black people, as well as people from EU Accession states, and therefore minority ethnic groups are more vulnerable to what Morris (2015) refers to as the 'the universal issues of sustaining the costs of private rents, the terms of access, security and the conditions within the sector'.[39]
- Evidence is also cited that suggests ethnic minority tenants receive less favourable conditions of tenancy and are less aware of their tenancy rights.[40]
- Minority ethnic groups are also vulnerable to intimidation and racial attacks, impacting on their level of choice, affordability, and security.[41]
- Refugees and asylum seekers are often placed in private rented accommodation in areas of high housing need, concentrating vulnerable people in areas with multiple deprivations.[42]
- Irish Travellers experience considerable issues regarding access to culturally suitable housing, and are the group most likely to be without basic amenities.[43]
- Migrant workers are vulnerable to being subject to tied accommodation (accommodation provided as part of continued employment), making them vulnerable to exploitation[44].
- Households from ethnic minority and migrant communities experience barriers to accessing benefits, housing advice, and information about their rights as tenants.[45]
- Migrants with 'No Recourse to Public Funds', 'cannot access homelessness support, social housing allocation, or support to pay their housing costs whether through housing benefit or Universal Credit'.[46] [47]
- The current housing stock in Northern Ireland does not reflect the needs of ethnic minority households, which tend to be larger, and may be made up of an extended family group living together.[48]

Disability

- Disability covers a broad spectrum of needs and is diversely defined, making data difficult to aggregate.

---

[39] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[40] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[41] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[42] PPR (2022). A Place to Call Home? – Refugees in Belfast's Housing System.
https://www.nlb.ie/investigations/FOI/2021-12-nihe-places-vulnerable-refugee-families-in-private-rentals-in-areas-of-the-highest-housing-need-in-belfast

[43] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[44] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2017). Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland: Full Statement., page 25

[45] Housing Rights, (2021). Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry into the experiences of ethnic minority and migrant people in NI.
https://www.housingrights.org.uk/sites/default/files/policydocs/Housing%20Rights%20written%20evidence%20NIAC%20Inquiry.pdf

[46] No recourse to public funds is 'a condition imposed by the Home Office on most migrants with limited leave to remain (also referred to as temporary status or persons subject to immigration control) in the United Kingdom'. Housing Rights, (2021). Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry into the experiences of ethnic minority and migrant people in NI. (page 3)

[47] Housing Rights, (2021). Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry into the experiences of ethnic minority and migrant people in NI.

[48] Housing Rights, (2021). Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry into the experiences of ethnic minority and migrant people in NI. (page 7)

- People with learning disabilities do not always have an opportunity to live independently.[49]
- People with disabilities are disproportionately in social housing.[50]
- Some data indicates that wheelchair users wait longer for suitable accommodation, and there are key issues in relation to choice, independence and control over housing, including access to needed adaptations, especially in the private sector. Disabled people are more likely to live in poor housing than people who aren't disabled.[51]
- Data from the 2007 Northern Ireland Survey of Activity Limitations and Disability (NISALD) indicate that there is an absence of quality information about grants available to help with modifications and adaptations in both private and public sectors, with more than half of those surveyed reporting that they were unaware of such grants.[52]

Sexual Orientation

- Sexual orientation impacts on the likelihood that a young person will become homeless as a result of family breakdown.[53]
- Young LGBT+ people especially experience vulnerabilities around access; safety of the home and neighbourhood is an issue for LGBT+ people of all ages, and in later life, access to suitable shared housing and social care settings.[54]
- LGBT+ people also report feeling discriminated against by frontline housing workers.[55]

Dependency Status

- Single household reference persons with dependents are over represented in the social and private rental sector, and low income families are increasingly reliant on the private sector, where their tenure is less secure and where costs are higher, contributing to the higher relative
- poverty rates of households with children.[56]Poverty and the experience of poor housing and homelessness

Poverty and the experience of poor housing and homelessness

Poor housing is both the result and the cause of inequity, and poverty is an underlying factor in the experience of poor housing and homelessness across all demographics. For low income individuals and households, particularly those in the private rented sector, housing costs can present a particular burden and increase the risk of poverty.[57]

---

[49] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2017). Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland: Full Statement., page 33

[50] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2017). Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland: Full Statement., page 145

[51] Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2017). Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland: Full Statement., page 146

[52] Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, (2004). Northern Ireland Survey of Activity Limitations and Disability, 2006 - 2007. http://doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/7236/mrdoc/pdf/7236_methodology.pdf

[53] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland., page 153

[54] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland. page 153

[55] O'Doherty, J., and Rowledge, R. (2014). Through our eyes: The housing and homelessness experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans people in Northern Ireland.

[56] Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

[57] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty.

Need for social housing in Northern Ireland has been increasing for decades. Almost 44,000 households are currently on the waiting list for social housing in Northern Ireland.[58] Over a 20 year period from 2002 to 2022, there has been a 70% increase in the number of households on the waiting list, and a 140% increase in the number within that cohort who are considered to be in housing stress.[59] [60] During the same period, the proportion of people renting from private landlords has also increased significantly.[61] Long term trends point to a concentration of home ownership, especially outright ownership, among 65+ age groups, with a fall in rates of home ownership across all other age groups.[62]

These trends are particularly significant when affordability is factored in. Notably, the lowest cost tenure is mortgaged ownership. When taken as a percentage of net household income, the highest housing costs are those in both the social and the private rented sectors.[63]

Across all tenures, almost 10% of households spend more than 40% of their net household income on housing costs. This situation is most common in the private rented sector (one in six) and least common among those who have a mortgage (one in 20). Among those in the social rented sector, one in 10 spend more than 40% of their net income on housing costs.[64]

These differences in the financial burden faced by households across tenures is just part of the picture. The NERI working paper *Housing Provision in Northern Ireland and its Implications for Living Standards and Poverty* (2018) compared housing costs and income inequality, and found that for households in the lowest income quintile, median income in both social rented sector and the private rented sector is the same, but renters in the private rented sector spend a much high portion of their income on housing costs.

In other words, as a proportion of income, housing costs place the highest burden on those with the lowest incomes, and at the lowest household incomes, the extent to which households can make choices to lower their housing costs is much more constrained than for those with higher incomes. For low income households, they will also have less left over in absolute terms for other non-housing spending once housing costs have been met (residual income). The NERI working paper finds that in the PRS, 69% of households in the lowest income quintile are at risk of poverty, compared with 50% of those in the same income quintile in the SRS.[65]

Among those most at risk of poverty after housing costs in the SRS are those households described by the NERI working paper author as 'workless' (74%). In contrast, in the PRS, the majority of

[58] Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, (2021). Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2020-21. https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/ni-housing-stats-20-21-full-copy.pdf
[59] Housing stress means that households have 30 or more points under the social housing selection scheme.
[60] Miller, R., (2022). Homelessness is many different problems. https://scopeni.nicva.org/article/homelessness-is-many-different-problems
[61] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty., Page 15
[62] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty., page 16
[63] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty., page 20
[64] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty.
[65] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty., page 29

households at risk of poverty after housing costs are ones in which at least one adult is in employment. Single adult households and households with children are the household types most likely to be at risk of poverty after housing costs in both social and private rented sectors.[66]

The working paper observes marked differences in the socio-economic and socio-demographic composition of those more at risk of poverty after housing costs in the PRS compared to the SRS, with higher proportions of those coming from working households, households with good health, and single households. This evidence has implications for the kinds of interventions that might address the risk of poverty among households in this tenure and the extent to which housing policy, and in particular a need to increase housing supply in the social rental sector is needed to address the needs of these households.[67]

Homeowners in Northern Ireland also experience higher levels of poverty than elsewhere in the UK, with 14% of outright owners and 17% of mortgaged households are in poverty after housing costs.[68] [69] Homeowners at increased risk of poverty include those who 'were in semi-routine or routine employment, were self-employed, had a minority ethnic background, were young, single, a lone parent, overcrowded, or had experienced relationship breakdown'.[70]

Research into the journey of service users into and through homelessness conducted in 2021 on behalf of the Housing Executive attempted to provide 'an improved understanding of service users who currently use or have used homeless services, looking specifically at the homelessness process, and the individual's journey into, through and in some cases out of homelessness' (Boyle, 2021, p. 4).[71] That research found that the causes of homelessness are complex, and involve the interaction of personal characteristics and experiences (such as mental health, substance dependency, abuse, family breakdown and time spent in prison), factors arising from institutional practices and processes (such as eligibility criteria, service provision, signposting, and legislation), and structural factors (such as poverty, housing supply). Input into that research from people who had personal experience of homelessness emphasised mental health issues, substance use, experience of abuse, and having spent time in prison as factors that triggered and/ or caused them to become homeless, and which made their journey out of homelessness more difficult and protracted.[72]

All of these factors mean that policy and service design and delivery in relation to housing and homeless is complex, and intersects with personal, social, political, moral, economic and identity-based issues. This complexity, especially in a Northern Ireland context, means that the issues are often politically charged, with tensions, contradictions, trade-offs and unpredictability. Decision makers will need to rebalance the structural inequities between the needs and wants of those who have the resources to help solve housing issues, such as landlords and developers, and those whose

---

[66] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty.

[67] Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty., page 33

[68] Wallace, A., Rhodes, D. and Roth, F., (2018). Home-owners and poverty in Northern Ireland. https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/home-owners-and-poverty-northern-ireland

[69] This is based on data from 2013-2014

[70] Wallace, A., Rhodes, D. and Roth, F., (2018). Home-owners and poverty in Northern Ireland., page 3

[71] Boyle, F., (2021). Homelessness Service User Journeys. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Homelessness/Homelessness-Service-User-Journeys.aspx?ext=

[72] Boyle, F., (2021). Homelessness Service User Journeys. page 112

lives are most impacted by housing policies and services. These are challenging issues for decision makers to solve, and they can't do it alone.

In the next section, we examine how participation happens across housing and homelessness currently, and identify where there are gaps that can be addressed through new approaches to participation.

Current approaches to participation

This section describes the mechanisms and avenues available currently that enable participation in decisions about housing and homelessness. It is divided into two sections - the first section looks at the social rented sector and the opportunities for engagement created by decision makers, or 'invited spaces' including those created by the Department for Communities, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and independent Housing Associations.

- The term 'invited space' is widely used to make a distinction between opportunities for participation that are created and/ or directed by the decision maker, and 'claimed spaces' or those that are created and/ or directed by stakeholders, communities, or citizens. These terms are often used as a way of understanding the power dynamics within a system and to take account of the ways in which a system can be changed and improved from 'outside'.

The second section looks at the housing sector more broadly, and the ways in which claimed spaces have been created by the community and voluntary sector and through associational participation.

The social rented sector - invited spaces

Service user participation is relatively well-defined in the social rented sector. *A Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015 - 2020* is the main document that informs how tenants in social housing in Northern Ireland can get involved. Its stated aim is to improve the quality and consistency of landlord-driven engagement, to give tenants a greater say, and to advance the quality of social housing. It sets out the regulatory standards for tenant participation and defines ten principles of good participation based on what social landlords should do, developing tenants' capacity for greater participation, and what government will do in a leadership role. The strategy states that *"effective tenant participation methods, developed by landlords who have asked and listened to their tenants' needs (including where tenants are living with disabilities), will remove barriers arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability" (p.9)*

However, the extent to which this strategy enables tenants to have a meaningful say over the decisions taken by social landlords is unclear. Individual Housing Associations develop their own engagement activities in response to the strategy. Among the 20 independent Housing Associations registered in Northern Ireland, the range of opportunities for tenant participation varies widely, and the types and levels of participation available to tenants is inconsistent across the sector.

Notably, the Tenant Participation Strategy makes no reference to diversity, inclusion or representativeness as a principle of tenant engagement. As a result, none of the Housing Associations publish data on the diversity in relation to their residents, and do not report on the characteristics of who is included in participation. There are significant gaps in the evaluation of

tenant participation, making it difficult to say anything meaningful about the quality of participation or the extent to which current engagement reflects the diversity of residents. The absence of evaluation of participation by participants also makes it difficult to assess the extent to which participants feel their input has an impact on decision making, or the impact that engagement has on the outcomes of decisions.

NIHE's Community Involvement Strategy sets out how the Housing Executive, as NI's largest social landlord, 'enables, engages and empowers [their] communities to influence, challenge and lobby to help improve services', and describes several routes by which tenants can engage, including specific options for disabled tenants, residents in rural areas, and older people.[73] It does this primarily through engaging with the independent tenant associations through the Housing Community Network (HCN - see below) and through the Central Housing Forum, which is the most direct way that community input into decision making at the Housing Executive is sought. Membership of the Central Housing Forum is made up of one community representative from each of the 13 Housing Executive districts across Northern Ireland, as well as representatives of Rural Communities Forum, Disability Forum, LGBTQ+ Forum and Youth Forum, along with staff and board from the Housing Executive, and workers from Supporting Communities. The Central Housing Forum is a well-established mechanism for scrutiny and input into the decision-making of the Housing Executive. However, there is also a gap in the evaluation of the Forum and the extent to which it is reflective of the diversity of Housing Executive communities.

As with the independent housing associations, NIHE does not publish diversity data in relation to tenant participation, so it is difficult to assess the extent to which current engagement activities are accessible to structurally excluded groups, or the degree to which current participation in tenant groups reflects the diversity of the populations they represent[74]. In the 2019 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey, despite overall high rates of respondent satisfaction with the service provided by the landlord, results also state that 'the vast majority of respondents interviewed were not aware of tenant initiatives such as local residents groups, tenant scrutiny panels, village voices, community champions, estate inspections etc. A number of the questions also point to a particular challenge in engaging young people and families.'[75] While there is no doubt good work underway within the SRS, there is also significant room for improving the range and scope of tenant participation, for diversifying who participates, e.g. by age, gender, ethnicity, and tenure, removing barriers to participation, and for capturing both baseline and evaluative data to monitor inclusivity and improve the quality of participation over time.

Consultations

For most strategy and policy development processes, both the NIHE and the Department for Communities will have a statutory obligation to undertake a formal consultation, during which they publish a draft of the proposed strategy or policy, and ask for feedback from stakeholders and the public. It is currently the primary way in which public input into policy development is sought. The

---

[73] Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2018). Community Involvement Strategy 2018 – 2023. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/About-Us/Corporate-Strategies/Community-Involvement-Strategy, page 7)

[74] The Housing Executive have carried out research into current participation levels by area and customer profile as part of their Community Involvement Strategy. A copy of this research has been requested but was not made available to the author of this report at the time of writing.

[75] Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2021). Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey 2019: Summary of Key Findings. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/CTOS-Reports-2019/2019-CTOS-Summary-of-Key-Findings, page 21

legal framework on which consultations are based is the Gunning Principles, a set of four rules intended as minimum standards to make public consultations fair and worthwhile.[76] [77]

1. That consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage;
2. That the proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response;
3. That adequate time is given for consideration and response; and
4. That the product of consultation is conscientiously taken into account when finalising the decision.

Although consultations provide a mechanism through which the public can have a say, they present significant methodological barriers to participation, particularly for 'easy to ignore' groups, such as an over-reliance on large amounts of written information, and the extent to which they allow for the meaningful inclusion of diverse voices in policy making and service delivery is limited.

Consultations occur at a late stage in policy development, which also limits the extent to which input can have an influence on the final outcome. This is a common issue across a range of policy areas, and the underlying issues are complex, ranging from lack of capacity or knowledge of alternative methods, 'path dependency' where there may be resistance to change, lack of trust between stakeholders, inadequate time planning, or the under resourcing of public engagement in the overall policy development budget.

To better understand the way public input into housing policy is sought within the housing sector, we conducted a light-touch review of the consultation reports on three recent strategy documents to assess the following:

- Methodologies used
- Diversity of participants
- Evaluation of engagement
- Impact on final draft

---

[76] A set of rules for public consultation that were proposed in 1985 by Stephen Sedley QC, and accepted by the Judge in the Gunning v LB of Brent case.
[77] Though the Gunning Principles are intended as the 'floor' for standards in public consultation, they have become the 'ceiling', with consultations rarely striving to go beyond them.

	Department for Communities Housing Supply Strategy[78]	Housing Executive 'Ending Homelessness Together' Homelessness Strategy 2022-27[79]	Housing Executive Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy 2021-2026[80]
Methodologies	Online responses to a written 'call for evidence'; public consultation via Citizen Space portal; Series of workshops and meetings ; consultation on draft Strategy and associated impact assessments.	Pre-consultation (details not provided); 12 week public consultation; workshops with the Central Homelessness Forum; workshops with Local Area Groups.	Details not provided.
Diversity of participants	Range of organisations and individuals representing various s.75 groups, as well as professional organisations from across the housing sector.	No information given.	18 stakeholder groups engaged, some of which are Traveller groups. No other information provided (i.e. gender or age breakdown); there were nine respondents to the written consultation.
Evaluation of engagement	Report published summarising responses received to the call for evidence[81]. No evaluation of workshops was published.	Consultation response document published, which responds to comments received as part of the consultation process.[82]	None
Impact on final draft	The report on the call for evidence states that 'The responses and evidence	Five key changes listed as a result of 'reflecting the views of our	Written responses were aggregated into 17 themes. Of these, five

[78] Department for Communities, (2022). A new housing supply strategy. https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/new-housing-supply-strategy

[79] Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2022). Ending Homelessness Together: Homelessness Strategy 2022-27. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness-Strategy-2022-2027/Ending-Homelessness-Together-Homelessness-Strategy.aspx

[80] Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2020). Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy 2020 – 2025. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Consultation-Irish-Travellers-Accommodation-Strate/Irish-Travellers-Accommodation-Strategy-2020-25.aspx?ext=.

[81] Department for Communities, (2021). Housing Supply Strategy: Call for Evidence Summary Report. https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/communities/dfc-housing-supply-strategy_0.pdf

[82] Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2022). Ending Homelessness Together 2022-2027: Consultation Response Document.

	the draft Housing Supply Strategy'. The second round of consultation on the draft Housing Supply Strategy included explanation of how the response to the call for evidence influenced it, and why some issues raised in the early consultation were not taken into account.[83] Publication of the final strategy is on hold due to the lack of an Executive at the time of writing.	The public consultation resulted in almost unanimous support for the strategy, and so 'no major amendments have been made'.	the NIHE that: 'This response is noted and the Strategy was reviewed to take account of this response.'[84]

Housing sector - claimed spaces

Claimed space in this context refers to organisations, frontline service providers, and groups, including tenants and activists, who are attempting to influence the housing sector from outside of its institutions and structures. Because many of these organisations and groups are concerned with housing and homelessness more broadly, they have been captured under the catch-all 'housing sector'. There are many groups actively claiming space within the housing sector in Northern Ireland.[85] Many of them are advocates for minoritised and marginalised groups, and housing is one issue among many on which they campaign. It is impossible to fully capture the breadth of this work, so the following section focuses on a small number of organisations that occupy the intersection between easy to ignore groups and housing.

The examples below demonstrate that the infrastructure, tools, and expertise exists in Northern Ireland to engage with groups affected by poor housing and homelessness, and that there is significant scope to improve connections between formal structures and the spaces and methodologies that are most accessible to 'easy to ignore' groups so that their voices are amplified and policy is more responsive to the needs of those made most vulnerable by the system.

Information on the projects below was gathered through a combination of desk research and interviews or questionnaires with the organisations involved.

The examples we looked at are:

1. Supporting Communities - Housing Community Network
2. Participation and the Practice of Rights - Right to a Home
3. NI Youth Foundation - Relentless Change Project
4. Homeless Connect Regional Service User Network
5. Voices of Young People in Care

---

[83] Personal correspondence with Department for Communities officer, October 2022.

[84] Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2020). Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy 2020 – 2025.

[85] The list of stakeholders that responded to the DfC consultation on the Housing Supply strategy demonstrates that many civil society and community and voluntary sector organisations in NI see housing as important to their mission.

6. Renters Voice
7. Community Foundation Housing and Homelessness Innovation and Voice Programme
8. Community Action Tenants' Union

Supporting Communities - Housing Community Network

Supporting Communities NI (SCNI) is a registered voluntary and community organisation that promotes best practice in community participation. It receives funding from the Housing Executive to run the Housing Community Network (HCN), which is the key forum for tenant and community engagement in Northern Ireland. It has a membership of between 300-500 tenants groups across all of the Housing Executive's areas of housing management. Supporting Communities takes a community development approach to tenant involvement, building capacity within communities to advocate for their interests. Most of the tenant groups in the network are self organising, but sometimes the Housing Executive will ask for support for specific communities where a tenant group has not been formed.[86]

There are six levels that make up the HCN, represented by a pyramid structure. The base of the pyramid is made up of the tenants groups, and the pinnacle is the Central Housing Forum. Supporting Communities act as an independent secretariat and honest broker to ensure that information flows from the top of the pyramid to the bottom, and vice versa.

As with the Central Housing Forum, data isn't collected on the diversity of participation in the HCN, though anecdotally, Supporting Communities acknowledge that membership tends to be dominated by an older demographic, and that succession is a concern[87].

In addition to the HCN, Supporting Communities also acts as the Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO), a role defined in the Tenant Participation Strategy 2015-2020 to 'support all social housing tenants to develop the skills needed for effective participation.' In its role as ITO, Supporting Communities convenes the Housing Policy Panel which 'acts in a consultative function to the Department for Communities (DfC), focusing on social housing-related matters.'

Participation and the Practice of Rights - Right to a Home[88]

PPR describes itself as 'a small human rights NGO with a big vision: to turn international human rights standards into grassroots tools for economic, social and environmental change.'

The primary purpose of all PPR's housing campaigns, from Equality Can't Wait to Build Homes Now to Take Back the City is to ensure the realisation of the right to housing, as set out in international human rights law, through democratic participation and accountable governance. PPR does this by facilitating and supporting communities marginalised by laws, policies, public authorities or private interests to advocate for and monitor change as well as to build their own responses to inequality. The overall aim of PPR's housing work is to produce action by people in power, particularly by supporting people to advocate directly with elected representatives and officials for the change they want to see and to hold them accountable for implementing it.

---

[86] McDaid, C, personal communication, 2022

[87] McDaid, C, personal communication, 2022

[88] PPR, (2020). Right to a Home. https://www.nlb.ie/campaigns/right-to-home

The impact of PPR's housing work has been particularly pronounced on issues of housing supply and housing conditions, and their work has led directly to the development of new social housing in several sites in Belfast including the Lower Shankill, Girdwood, Hillview and the Markets as well as investment in existing housing north and south of the border and in Scotland. PPR have an ongoing campaign for homes on a large publicly-owned site at Mackie's in the area of highest housing need in Belfast. They have supported a homeless family to bring a successful judicial review against a planning decision blocking the development of housing made by Belfast City Council.

PPR also supports groups who face barriers to participating in decision making in other contexts, such as people who experience poor housing, homelessness, inadequate income, mental health needs or who are in the asylum system. Many of the people who PPR work with 'would self-identify with s75 characteristics, and data indicates that certain s75 groups are those furthest away from realising their rights e.g. NIHE data shows that Catholic communities are over-represented on the housing waiting list in north and west Belfast'.[89]

Barriers to participation are actively addressed through the provision of appropriate support, such as translation, and flexible approaches, including supporting participants to use human rights-based complaints processes, using activities such as community gardening, the arts, family fun days, activism, workshops, and town hall meetings to engage participants with the issues.

Northern Ireland Youth Forum - Relentless Change Project

The Relentless Change Project (RCP) was started in 2017 with funding from the National Lottery to work with young people who have or are currently experiencing homelessness, with a focus on leadership and campaigning. RCP works in partnership with the Housing Executive and other statutory partners. It works with young people who are marginalised and made vulnerable by the system, including those with experience of chaotic lives and complex trauma.

Their work centres around meeting young people where they are at, including work in hostels and supported accommodation, and by building connections and trust with young people through group activities. The young people they work with are often apathetic or angry after negative experiences accessing services, confusion over where to find information, and feeling powerless.

They support young people to identify the issues they are affected by, and help to develop campaigns around the changes young people want to see, including sharing their lived experiences and their personal experiences of journeys into a through homelessess.[90] Their 'Pinball' series was developed in collaboration with young people who had experience of homelessness, and through which they were given a voice to talk about their experience as service users. The 'kNowhere to go' report is 'a peer approach to preventing homelessness in NI which included interviews with more than 40 young people across Northern Ireland who have experienced homelessness and understand the issues and barriers facing young people at risk of or currently homelessness'.[91]

However, the project faces barriers to impact, including feeling that engagement with policy makers is often tokenistic and repetitive (an interviewee and member of staff summed it up as 'how many times

---

[89] Trew, C, personal communication 2022

[90] NI Youth Forum, (2022). https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=NI+youth+forum+pinball

[91] North Ireland Youth Forum, (2022). kNowhere to Go? report – a peer approach to preventing homelessness in NI. https://www.niyf.org/2022/02/07/knowhere-to-go/

do we have to tell you what we need?), promises aren't followed through, and resources are often not adequate to support the changes required to meet young people's needs.[92]

Homeless Connect Regional Service User Network[93]

RSUN works as a conduit for the voices of service users with lived experience of substance use into policy and practice, including for Health and Social Care services and for community and voluntary organisations. It is part of the Homeless Connect network. It sits on a regional steering group convened by the Public Health Agency to 'work collectively to address drug and alcohol misuse by developing events, initiatives and resources'.[94] RSUN 'supports service user involvement through establishing service user groups across all the 5 health trust areas. RSUN supports service user representation on local level and regional level decision making bodies, e.g., local drug and alcohol coordination teams through to Substance Use Strategy programme board', as well as on relevant policies including the draft homelessness strategy.[95]

RSUN mainly works with groups who are considered 'easy to ignore' in other contexts, including people who have in the past or are currently experiencing substance dependency or who have problematic use and who have accessed treatment and support services. Some network members have or are currently experiencing homelessness.

Participation in the Network includes a range of methodologies, including capacity building through training based on individual needs assessments. Input of members into consultations is obtained through workshops or one-to-one interviews, and service user representatives as well as RSUN staff engage with service providers and funders.

RSUN staff plan these activities with their network members' needs in mind, including timing, provision of refreshments, covering the costs of travel, and where possible giving vouchers as a gesture of thanks.[96]

Voices of Young People in Care (VOYPIC)[97]

VOYPIC is a regional charity for children and young people with a lived experience of care in Northern Ireland, a group that experiences a disproportionate risk of becoming homeless and of being exploited because they are homeless.[98] It collaborates with young people to develop resources, campaigns and policy responses to promote the rights and voices of children in care and care leavers and to try to improve their experience of life beyond care. Staff work in partnership with young people to influence policy and legislation. Their approach is participative, with forums created to allow young people to identify priorities and issues that they want to campaign on, and to organise opportunities for young people to talk directly with high-level decision makers.

Current advocacy work is focussed on helping young people leaving care to secure long term accommodation when options are limited, especially for young people who leave juvenile justice and/

---

[92] Stewart, A, personal communication, 2022

[93] Homeless Connect, (2022). The empowering voice of people who use substances. https://homelessconnect.org/rsun/

[94] Homeless Connect, (2022). DACTS. https://rsun-ni.org.uk/dacts/

[95] Logue, S, personal communication, 2022

[96] Logue, S, personal communication, 2022

[97] VOYPIC, (2022). VOYPIC: Voice of Young People in Care. https://www.voypic.org/

[98] Housing Rights, (2022). Leaving care.

or who have disabilities. They submit responses to public consultations if they are on issues that young people want to engage on, and they contributed to the Housing Supply Strategy as part of a working group to facilitate a response that reflected the concerns of young people.

However, the impact that this work has on the outcomes of policy decisions is, they say, hard to see. Statutory agencies work slowly, and the absence of a functioning Executive, and general supply issues impacting on accommodation limits opportunities for impact.[99]

Renter's Voice[100]

Renters Voice is a project of Housing Rights, established in 2019 to engage private renters across Northern Ireland. It is focused on 'engaging tenants who are more likely to be experiencing challenges in their lives such as low-income households, households with young children, and older people.'[101] It aims to build the capacity and confidence of participants by developing skills and knowledge and encouraging group participation, help create a culture of tenant involvement in the private rented sector, and actively influence improvements in legislation, policy, and practice in areas relevant to private tenants.

It is focussed on groups who are less able to evade problems associated with private renting, including but not limited to those on low incomes, people who are marginalised because of their personal characteristics (e.g. age, disability, nationality). While core membership of the group has fluctuated, it has a current core membership of five people, including people with disabilities, older people, and new arrivals in Northern Ireland who speak English as a second language. Currently, all members are based in Belfast.

Renters' Voice main method of engagement is the co-production of campaign materials based on issues of concern identified by members; accredited training on tenant participation; participation in external events and consultations. Over 100 private tenants have completed tenant surveys designed by the group, sharing their views on the impact of Covid and more recently, the cost of living crisis. It submits evidence to scrutiny bodies and consultation responses, including to the NI Assembly.

Community Solutions to Housing and Homelessness

The Community Foundation's Community Solutions to Housing and Homelessness which is supported by the Oak Foundation is one of a number of Innovation and Voice programmes, managed by the Foundation. Building on from their work in Social Innovation and Community Voice, this programme provides support to community, voluntary and public sector organisations to address the root causes of housing stress and homelessness by designing new solutions to the challenges.

Solutions could either be new services to be directly delivered by the sector, or campaigns seeking policy change at statutory level, or both. The programme advocates for participation of lived

---

[99] Personal communication, 2022

[100] Housing Rights, (2022). Renters Voice for Private Tenants. https://www.housingrights.org.uk/renters-voice-private-tenants

[101] Hickman, P., and Frey, J., (2021). Understanding Approaches to Tenant Participation in the Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland: A Scoping Report. https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Understanding-Approaches-to-Tenant-Participation-in-the-Private-Rented-Sector-in-Northern-Ireland-v4.pdf, page 15

experience to be a fundamental component of both the project teams and the solutions that are developed. Organisations are invited and supported to form a project team that addresses one of the identified priority challenge areas. Collaboration is encouraged and opportunities are provided by the Foundation to support collaboration between the community and voluntary sector, public sector representatives and people with lived experience. Collaboration, however, is not mandatory and an organisation can provide a team from within their own staff/volunteers. Teams should consist of 4-6 individuals.

Once the project teams have been selected for the programme, they participate in a series of workshops that support design thinking and creative problem solving techniques in order to gain person centred insights and stimulate creative thinking in addressing the issue. It starts by asking: what is it like for that person? This supports the emergence of new services and solutions centred on the individual and informed by lived experience. Focus groups and user insight groups aligned to the project teams further inform and develop the ideas as they evolve through this process.

Once a solution has been developed, the teams are then supported to pitch their idea to a panel of experts, both by experience and those working in the sector. If successful, they will be awarded Seed Funding of between 15k-25k which will support the further development or testing of their solutions.

Throughout the Programme the Foundation has been conscious of the need to amplifying the voices of people with lived experience with their direct inclusion on the Programme's Steering Group and the initial research and survey work to identify the key challenges that need to be addressed. The Steering group reviewed the results of the survey and the associated research and agreed priority challenge areas that were the basis for the next stage of the programme.

As the programme is delivered, priority is given to those project teams and projects that can demonstrate how participation of those with lived experience is an integral value base in both the design and delivery of the solution they developed. Built into the Programme is the process of participatory grantmaking which has given people with lived experience the opportunity to have a say in making decisions on which projects are awarded the seed fund grants.

The model promotes charities and organisations to listen to and involve people with lived experience in the design and delivery of new solutions to the challenges within housing and homelessness in Northern Ireland. It also creates the opportunity for groups to take risks and gives people the time and space to think about social problems which is important for service development.

Community Action Tenants' Union (CATU)[102]

 CATU is an all-island organisation applying the member organising and collective action approach of trade unions to place-based issues. Thought describes itself as representing a broader group than

---

[102] Further information was requested from CATU but they had not responded by the time of writing.

just PRS tenants, its campaign focus in Belfast (the only part of NI where it has a local committee) has been on PRS landlords and letting agents, advocating for fairer practices, greater affordability, and a higher standard of rental accommodation. It does so largely by critiquing the profit motive of private landlords.

Gaps in participation

There is significant overlap between the groups who experience poor housing and homelessness and groups who face barriers to involvement in decisions about housing policy and service design. Many of the factors that contribute to the experience of poor housing and homelessness also produce barriers to participation. The reasons why people experience poor housing and homelessness are complex, and not determined by any single characteristic. However, poverty is an underlying factor and housing costs play a significant role in the exacerbation of poverty across all demographic groups.

Based on available evidence of who experiences poor housing and homelessness summarised above, and the current opportunities identified for meaning involvement in decision-making within the housing system, we have identified three main gaps that further investment in participation in the sector could address. These gaps inevitably overlap and intersect with each other. They are:

1. **The inclusion gap**, especially in invited spaces.
2. **The empowerment gap**, and the absence of meaningful redistribution of power in decision making about housing and homelessness to those who are most affected.
3. **The impact gap**, and the institutional limits of being open to the input of participation.

The inclusion gap

Participation in the social rented sector is well established. However, there is a significant and troubling absence of both baseline population data and of evaluation of participation to determine the extent to which current engagement is inclusive of the diversity of people who are impacted by decisions on housing policy and service design and delivery. This makes identifying who is included much more difficult.

However, as noted above, there is considerable overlap between the groups who are most vulnerable to the experience of poor housing and homelessness and groups who are widely recognised as being 'easy to ignore', or those people for whom traditional approaches to engagement create barriers to participation.[103] Participation in the social rented sector and in the invited spaces of the housing sector more broadly, there is an overreliance on traditional approaches to engagement, which will, by default, exclude many of the people who are at that intersection between being vulnerable to the experience of poor housing and homelessness, and being considered 'easy to ignore'.

In their primary research with service users, practitioners and policy makers in the housing sector, Muir and McMahon (2015) propose the following categorisation of easy to ignore groups:

Easy to ignore groups

Equality groups and issues: Particularly Black and minority ethnic groups, including people from the Roma and Traveller communities; people who speak languages other than English; children,

---

[103] Lightbody, R., Escobar, O., Morton, S., Seditas, K., (2017), 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement.

39

young people and young families; people with mental ill-health; people with learning disabilities; carers.

Where people live: People experiencing homelessness, especially people with other complex needs such as mental ill-health, drug or alcohol use, and poor numeracy and literacy; renters in the PRS, especially lone parents, people who have been in prison, young people, people with disabilities, and minority ethnic groups; owner occupiers[104]; some SRS tenants, especially in rural areas, those living alone or supported residents, and those who are isolated as a result of being part of a small or stigmatised group.

Communication issues: Poor numeracy and literacy; poor interpersonal or social skills; digital exclusion; English as a second language.

Nature of impairment and 'unwanted voices': People with complex needs, especially mental illness, emotional vulnerability, drug and alcohol use; people who have been in prison.

The barriers to participation codified below are particularly pronounced in the 'invited spaces' within the social rented sector,as well as in the over-reliance on formal consultation on housing policy more generally (which is addressed more directly below).

Independent research undertaken in 2015 by Jenny Muir and Mary McMahon discussed the factors that can contribute to exclusion from decision making in relation to policy design and service delivery, as well as some of the barriers that can be unintentionally created by the design of involvement.

Barriers to participation[105]

1. **Methodological Barriers:** the methods used in the involvement process can have an impact on the effectiveness of these opportunities. Examples: emphasis on formal meetings; reliance on large amounts of written material ; information presented in jargon and inaccessible language; failure to acknowledge lack of confidence and self-esteem in service users; not providing access to translation or interpretation including sign language, and to recorded and Braille versions; inadequate information about the topic under consideration or about practicalities such as how to get to the venue; failure to facilitate meetings in a way that allows everyone to be heard; lack of knowledge of facilitative techniques; bureaucratic approach.

2. **Physical Barriers:** the types of places that organisations choose to use can have an impact on the effectiveness of these opportunities. Examples: lack of disabled access e.g. steps, heavy fire doors, no accessible toilets, entry system; lack of accessible transport; lack of appropriate communication aids; background noise; location of meeting difficult for public transport users.

---

[104] Northern Ireland has the highest rate of poverty among homeowners in the UK, according to Housing Rights. Housing Rights, (2018). Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023.
https://www.housingrights.org.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic_plan_1823_web.pdf
[105] Muir, J., & McMahon, M., (2015). Involving Everyone: Including 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland.

3. **Attitudinal Barriers:** these can consist of how those conducting involvement respond to groups and individuals' needs, and the assumptions which are made about people. Examples: generally negative attitudes towards some groups of service users from individuals or from organisations; questioning the legitimacy of group representatives; failure to challenge negative or discriminatory attitudes; assumptions made about people's abilities or lack of ability; discriminatory 'humour'; inability or unwillingness to acknowledge difference; tokenism; stigma; cultural assumptions and failure to recognise cultural difference e.g. through ethnicity, class, gender; attitude of gatekeepers; not acknowledging childcare and other caring responsibilities; failure to understand or make allowances for chaotic lifestyles or challenging behaviour; assuming easy access to the internet and social media, and knowledge of how to use them; using informal networks to spread information and recruit new participants.

4. **Financial and resource problems**: it's important to remember that some people may not have the resources that others have – either financial or other types. Examples: not paying travel expenses; not providing lunch; not providing access to information or training; not paying for or providing access to childcare; taking a long time to refund expenses. Lack of resources can also lead to inadequate staff training and support.

5. **Timing:** it is critical to take the timing of any event into consideration, as this may impact upon people who fall into a number of the equality groups for many different reasons. Examples: early evening meetings which exclude parents of young children; older people may prefer a meeting during the day; meetings in rural areas and meetings that don't take into account public transport times; meetings held in normal working hours for staff convenience.

6. **Consultation/ participation fatigue:** many groups and individuals can suffer from this, especially where people feel that they are being consulted on everything. Examples: individuals representing their user groups on several forums; perhaps particularly an issue for geographically based groups such as tenants' associations.

In the SRS, both the NIHE and independent housing associations have specific routes into engagement for some excluded groups, including disabled people, older people, and rural residents.

While these are important mechanisms for involvement, no group is homogenous, equalities categories can be extremely broad, and despite being alike on one dimension, people may have very different needs, values, and opinions, and their identity may intersect with other groups in ways that inform their interests. This complexity can be hard to capture through engagement without skilled process design that makes space for those differences and permits tensions that exist between them to surface so that common ground can be meaningfully sought.

When the interface between participants and decision makers is at its most direct, such as in the invited spaces of statutory agencies, the interactions take place in highly formal settings such as board-style meetings. This is an intimidating and unfamiliar environment for many people, especially those who belong to the 'easy to ignore' groups listed above. In addition, this model of participation, and the related skill and capacity building for tenants that it necessitates has been associated with the 'realignment' of tenant identity towards greater affinity with landlords than with tenants (Bradley, 2011, cited in Preece 2019 p. 7).[106]

---

[106] Hickman, P., and Frey, J., (2021). Understanding Approaches to Tenant Participation in the Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland: A Scoping Report.

In addition, the tendency to engage with organised civil society and community groups may mean that individuals who are not part of an organised group will also experience exclusion. For some users, their contact with client services or case workers may allow for their needs to be captured and inputted into consultation responses, but more can and should be done to involve affected groups who are less interested, able, or comfortable to join organised groups.

Even in the relatively well-catered for SRS, the most recent available information in the NIHE Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS) 2018 reported very low levels of awareness among tenants of ways to get involved in decision making. This indicates that much more needs to be done to recruit and incentivise involvement of groups who are less represented and less likely to self-select into current tenant groups.

The 'empowerment' gap

There is an overreliance on consultations, especially on strategic issues by statutory agencies. Though statutory agencies have a duty to consult the public, as an engagement tool, it is an approach that has many weaknesses: it creates barriers to participation, and limits the extent to which service users can influence the issue, including how the issue is framed, how the agenda is set, how success will be measured, how contributions can be made, who can be involved, the types and sources of evidence made available to support participants to come to their own conclusions.

The conceptual models of participation presented earlier in this report (Arnstein's ladder and the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation) articulate that engagement takes place along a spectrum from least delegated power to most delegated power. In both models, and widely accepted among participation practitioners, 'consultation' or 'asking or being asked for information or advice' is a very weak form of listening, and has very different implications for the degree of influence a participant has on a decision compared to participation, involvement, collaboration or empowerment.[107]

Consultations tend to suit participants with higher levels of education, literacy and numeracy, and for stakeholder groups rather than individuals. In a consultation, no distinction is made between responses that are reasoned and informed, based only on top-of-mind opinions, or submitted to advocate for one particular course of action. They are poor measures of broader public opinion, and tend not to reveal much about underlying values, needs, or fears.

Consultations also tend to reinforce, rather than challenge, the status quo, and often reflect entrenched opinions. For issues with a high degree of complexity, and which can intersect with moral and ethical issues as housing discourse often does, methods that encourage mutual learning and understanding before seeking an opinion are preferable.

There are examples of involvement, collaboration, and empowerment (i.e. engagement with greater levels of impact on the decision) in both invited spaces within the SRS, and in claimed space within the PRS and housing sector more generally. However, in the case of the former, there is a significant gap in evidence about who is participating (intersecting with the inclusion gap identified earlier), and in the latter, there are gaps in evidence to demonstrate the extent to which this involvement has an impact on decision making or policy outcomes. This is discussed further below.

---

[107] Involve, (2005), People and participation.

The impact gap

The landscape review of current approaches to participation has illustrated that there is a range of participatory activities bringing diverse voices into the housing sector. However, the extent to which the voices of people made vulnerable by the current housing system are being heard by decision makers is unclear, and there appears to be a disconnection between participatory spaces that are accessible to 'easy to ignore' groups and those that most directly influence decision making.

Participation in the social rented sector is characterised by tenant groups, where self-organised community-based groups connect with the invited spaces created by the Housing Executive, or in independently facilitated spaces that directly consult on policy decisions, such as the Housing Policy Panel.[108] However, as discussed above, systemic barriers to participation mean that these groups are not necessarily reflective of the range of identities, experiences, needs, interests, or opinions of the communities they represent.

For tenants and homeowners in the private sector, there are no formal structures through which they can input into housing policy and practice. This means that many people who experience poor housing and homelessness have little or no opportunities to influence the decisions that impact them.

Much of the participation that happens outside of the formal engagement structures of the SRS, whether it be focused on social housing, private tenancies, or housing issues more broadly, happens as a result of activism, or collective participation.

Organisations who claim space for activism and campaigning on housing issues, such as the examples discussed above appear to have a different participant profile compared to the invited spaces of the SRS. For example, the landscape review suggests that there is more involvement of people made vulnerable by the current system in claimed spaces of activism and the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, suggesting that invited spaces may have created barriers to participation that other groups have not. A better understanding of how engagement happens in claimed spaces may help decision makers to engage more effectively with groups who are currently excluded.

Claimed spaces can often be more accessible to marginalised groups, but can have a less direct impact on the outcomes of decision making. There may be a gap between the voice of vulnerable groups in claimed spaces, and the 'ears' of decision makers that institutions and public agencies can do more to address.

The next section focuses on case studies that highlight how these gaps can be addressed through participatory practice.

---

[108] Supporting Communities, (2022). The Housing Policy Panel: A consultative body to the Department for Communities. https://www.tpsupport.org/housing-policy-panel

Part 2
Case studies

Introduction

This section presents a range of case studies from across the UK and internationally that demonstrate how the gaps in involvement of people who experience poor housing and homelessness identified in Part 1 could be addressed. The scope of the case studies attempts to span the spectrum of participation, with a focus on involvement, collaboration and empowerment. We have focussed on approaches that are designed for the inclusion of 'easy to ignore' groups, but in the cases where that hasn't been the case, we have selected examples of broad and representative participation that tackles systemic issues in housing and homelessness.

Introduction and methodologies

The case studies presented in this section have been selected because they present approaches that address some or all of the gaps identified earlier in this report. We evaluated the case studies through a combination of desk research and qualitative interviews and/ or questionnaires that aimed to identify the following elements:

Stage in decision-making process

- Defining the problem
- Identifying solutions
- Delivering the solutions
- Evaluation and improving

Context for engagement
- Invited space
- Claimed space
- Institutional buy-in

Level of engagement

- Inform
- Consult
- Involve
- Collaborate
- Delegate

Who participated?

- Demographic profile
- Lived experience
- General public
- Reflective sample
- Self selecting
- Technical experts

- Private Tenants
- Social Landlords
- Private Landlords
- Statutory agencies

Other key features

- How issues were framed and agendas were set
- Methods of identifying and recruiting participants
- Availability or incentives and support for participants
- Method of engagement
  - Length of process
  - Duration
  - Frequency
- What inputs were used in the engagement
  - What evidence was made available to participants?
  - Who had the opportunity to request evidence?
- Outcomes and impact
- Resource implications

This framework formed the basis for researching the case studies and the format in which they are presented below. The projects featured vary in the type of work they do, the geographic and institutional context, and the type of organisation and its engagement activities. As a result, some of

the questions were adapted to allow for this variation, while the overarching aim of understanding and learning from good practice examples remained the same.

Poverty Truth Network

Policy cycle stage	Context for engagement	Level of engagement	Who participated?
• Defining the problem • Identifying solutions	Claimed space	Empower	People with lived experience of poverty; senior civic and business leaders

Methodology

The founding principle of Poverty Truth Commissions (PTCs) has been to deliberately involve people with lived experience of poverty at every stage of their work. Thus, from inception they were the ones to become the first commissioners and set the agenda for the Poverty Truth Network (PTN) as it has developed.

As a claimed space, the PTN seeks to bring people together to participate in generating change. This happens in different ways:

- The first commissioners recruited are always those with ongoing direct experience of the struggle against poverty.
- 50% of each local commission is made up of people with lived experience while the other half is filled by business and civic leaders from the local community. Together they identify the themes that each local commission will work on.
- Most of the PTN's trustees are people who have direct experience of living in poverty
- Commissioners shape the work that the PTN works on nationally, focused on amplifying local voices nationally.

PTCs lie at the heart of the network, and the collaboration between people with lived experience and local leaders allows tangible change to happen in their respective areas. Commissions tend to meet regularly and work in small groups on collectively determined themes and how to tackle them. There is limited external input as information and paperwork is minimised ahead of the meetings and trust relies on the commissioners' experience and understanding to address issues.

At the heart of its work lies the principle that "Nothing About Us Without Us Is For Us."

Outcomes and impact

A large event is normally held at the end of each Poverty Truth Commission to share findings and learnings with the wider community and to encourage further action.

Over the last decade, the PTN has noted a significant number of outcomes arising through Poverty Truth Commissions. These can be framed in four interrelated spheres: for individuals; for organisations; in policy; and at a wider society/culture change level.

The PTN is particularly interested in knowing if the relational model it helps to advocate achieves shifts that are harder to achieve with more adversarial and campaigning approaches.

Among the documented impacts of Poverty Truth Commissions are:[109]

- In West Cheshire, one social housing provider has reported a 75% reduction in evictions since it changed its approach to managing tenancies. The organisation moved from a reprimand approach to offering a well-being service which focuses on early intervention and supporting people to sustain tenancies.

- In Morecambe Bay over 100 travellers were saved from potential eviction by working through the Poverty Truth Commission to change attitudes towards loss of a site they had lived on for over 30 years.

- In Scotland, the Commission instigated a mentoring programme for civil servants through which those who have direct experience of poverty coached senior policy leaders. This programme is now being developed more widely.

Recruitment	Time commitment and incentives	Resource implications
The commissioners with lived experience are selected through a 6 to 8 months recruitment process led by a local organisation hosting the PTC. Though there's no requirement for commissions to gather demographic information on their members, during the setting up process and throughout their work they are encouraged to consider the diversity of the group and whether it reflects the variety of experiences in their communities.	The commissions tend to last 12 to 18 months with a 3 to 6 months closing period where the recommendations are shared with and implemented in their communities. Commissioners are expected to commit at least 3 to 4 hours every month or every 6 weeks - this varies between commissions, but the trend is that people will voluntarily commit more time. Commissioners are not remunerated although costs such as travel and childcare are covered to remove any barriers to participation. Commissions seek to find the best ways to appreciate the contribution of commissioners as opposed to incentivising them to take part.	Local PTCs source their own funding to run a commission, which tends to be a combination of local and national supporters. Support from the PTN team is available at no cost to local commissions. Some additional financial support may be available to PTCs from the Network. The network supports the initial setting up process of a commission, but this is ultimately responsible for raising its funds.

---

[109] Poverty Truth Network, (2022). Commission Impacts. https://povertytruthnetwork.org/commissions/commission-impacts/

Hood Project

Policy cycle stage	Context for engagement	Level of engagement	Who participated?
Throughout the policy cycle	Claimed space	Collaborate	People experiencing homelessness

Methodology

HOOD project operates across Europe and includes Turin (Italy), Athens (Greece), Copenhagen (Denmark), Barcelona (Spain), and Lisbon (Portugal). Hood is an Erasmus+ project focused on the training of social workers and the engagement of people experiencing homelessness in developing the services dedicated to them.

It was founded by six partner organisations that were already working in the sector and had a common interest in finding innovative approaches that were radically different from mainstream initiatives. This need emerged in opposition to the sector's tendency to reinforce power relations by providing standardised solutions rather than tailor these to the individual's needs.

The project uses Dialogical Practices (from the Open Dialogue approach) and the Enabling Co-Planning approach which aim to devolve power to the people experiencing homelessness so that they can define and lead their intervention strategy with the project and their social worker. Enabling Co-Planning provides social workers with the tools and theoretical frameworks to develop a new kind of intervention, one in which the power shift allows the individual to have control over decisions that will affect their life. Engagement with people experiencing homelessness begins with a process of visioning the future. This vision became the happy aim of the participant's own intervention project. Each participant is engaged to decide on their own vision, and social workers support them without judging the content of the vision. Thanks to these tailored strategies people are supported in exploring life's possibilities.

The project is led by the partner organisations, but the individual initiatives and activities are led by the people experiencing homelessness themselves. The HOOD project has been designed with the Di.VI study centre of the University of Turin, which created the Enabling Co-planning approach in their work with people with disabilities. This approach draws inspiration from Open Dialogue and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. The original idea of HOOD was to adopt (and adapt) the Enabling Co-planning to the work with people experiencing homelessness to develop right-based interventions. Experts, people with lived experience, service users and social workers are all involved in sharing the person's visions for the future, in framing the issues and setting the agenda.

Outcomes and impact

HOOD has a two fold evaluation process: feedback interviews for the participants and qualitative questionnaires for the social workers. The evaluation criteria are:

- The perceived improved knowledge of social workers involved;
- The perceived change in the daily relationship between social workers and participants;
- The availability of social workers;
- Participants' access to their project sheets and any other documentation;
- The participants' overall perception of their intervention;
- The participants' experience of feeling heard and having power over the intervention;
- The participants' perception of what changed from previous interventions.

The idea at the basis of this evaluation framework is that the participants will assess the work of social workers, instead of social workers evaluating their improvements.

Recruitment	Time commitment and incentives	Resource implications
The participants are recruited from the communities of four of the partner organisations with the help of social workers so they are people who have recently become homeless. To promote a dialogical approach, the project avoids asking participants for their demographic information as a first step.	HOOD is a three-year-long project without a pre-established duration for participation of the people experiencing homelessness involved. Engagement is required throughout with a frequency that is different for each case.	HOOD is an Erasmus+ project, co-funded by the European Commission. The total cost of the project is 346.522,00 euros.

Further reading:
https://hoodproject.org/

Expert Link

Policy cycle stage	Context for participation	Level of engagement	Who participated?
- Defining the problem; - Identifying solutions; - Delivering the solutions; - Evaluation and improving	Claimed space	Empower	People with lived experience of multiple disadvantages, including homelessness, mental health issues, substance misuse, offending and domestic violence and abuse.
Methodology			

Expert Link is a peer-led organisation that champions the voices of people with lived experience of multiple disadvantages. They seek to influence national policies and equip local policy-makers, service providers and individuals with lived experience, to work together, designing policies and services that are driven by the voices of people with lived experience.

Expert link works across Great Britain to amplify the voices of people with lived experience, influence change through their expertise and create a space where people can have conversations to create better services.

The founder and Head of Expert Link - David Ford - has had a long history of campaigning and organising after experiencing homelessness. Before setting up Expert Link, he consulted with people who have experienced multiple disadvantages across the country to understand what they would like the organisation to look like. This is the founding principle of Expert Link: treating people with lived experience as equal partners in decisions that may affect their lives.

Expert Link uses a co-production approach which is focused on influencing and creating change. It is a value-based approach built on the principle that the people using a service are best placed to help design it. In this way, people with lived experience, decision makers and service providers can work together to design policies and services that work well for all involved.[1]

At Expert Link a key part of achieving this is taking people on a journey to build relationships and take a strengths-based approach to the work where everyone can use their various skills and knowledge. To do this they focus on training people and fostering the feeling of being in a group which lies on ownership, accountability and trust:

- Ownership. The membership must own it destiny. In Expert Link's experience the majority of user led or lived experience groups that are set up by or within larger organisations rarely have the sense of ownership from within its membership. Where this differs is when the group or network feel that it has authority and control of its own direction.
- Accountability. All members need to feel that they are responsible for their own actions within the group and that collectively they are responsible for the actions and outputs of the group.
- Trust. Members need to trust one another and trust that the actions and outputs of the group are for the good of the group.

Throughout the training, the group focuses on their purposes by developing and using values that operate as a framework to achieve said purpose.

Outcomes and impact
Impact is measured by mapping the network members' journey and carrying out evaluation for grant funding.

Impact in different policy areas such as Expert Link's contribution to the government's rough sleeping strategy for the next 3 years.

Recruitment	Time commitment and incentives	Resource implications
People are recruited through Expert Link's network of 1500 people, the training they do across the country (e.g. local authorities), newsletter, word of mouth and they do direct recruitment sometimes. Expert Link does not normally collect demographic information on participants.[110] Diversity at each level of engagement is considered and encouraged.[111]	The length of the process and time commitment varies based on the topic area and availability of funds. Participants are free to decide how much time they want to commit - as a contingency for dropouts, Expert Link tends to over recruit.	No core funder but a variety of funding streams coming from both national and local projects.

---

[110] An Expert Link representative had the following to say about this practice: 'Within Expert Link we generally know if people have lived experience and more often than not, which multiple disadvantages. We obviously know the basics, M/F, part of the country etc. Although I accept that demographic information is important, NOT labelling people is, at least in my eyes, just as important. If people want to share / declare their personal information then they are more than welcome, and to be honest pretty much all do when in a group setting. All that said, we do and will collect demographic information if required to do so as part of the grant agreement.'

[111] An Expert Link representative had the following to add: 'To ensure diversity and avoid tokenism, when recruiting Expert Link reach out as far and as wide as their resources allow them to and ensure all opportunities are as accessible as possible. This may mean translation of documents or communicating opportunities using video. To date this strategy has meant that the groups that they support are as diverse as they could be.'

All in for Change

Policy cycle stage	Context for participation	Level of engagement	Who participated?
• Identifying solutions; • Evaluation and improving	Claimed space	Involve	People with lived and/or professional experience of homelessness

Methodology

All in for Change exists to help end homelessness in Scotland as a movement for change that will challenge the system that currently exists around homelessness where this is needed.

The programme was launched in 2019 to help close the gap between policy & planning, and action on the ground, to ensure Scotland's positive policy intentions are realised for everyone, in all parts of Scotland. It is an inclusive programme where, through clear messages and information sharing, a collaborative effort to end homelessness in Scotland is driven.

All in for Change is led by a Change Team of people from across Scotland committed to ending homelessness. Every Change Lead brings unique knowledge to the team: a variety of expertise in what homelessness looks like within their networks, for the people who are most affected. They meet in-person as a group monthly and engage informally outside these meetings and via email for certain requests.The issues and agenda are always framed by both people with lived experience and those with frontline experience.

Outcomes and impact
We have an evaluation partner who collects information from Change Leads and programme partners.

Regular reports.

Recruitment	Time commitment and incentives	Resource implications
Change Leads are recruited on a yearly basis with a recruitment pack and brief application form.	Participants who are not currently in employment are supported through an Associates programme provided by Homeless Network Scotland. They are offered one to one and group support.	N/A

Change Leads are provided with training and introductory sessions. Some demographic information is collected.	Participants in frontline roles are sponsored by their organisations to be involved. This is an ongoing programme. Participants can be involved for as long as they want to be. Change Leads are required to give up to 8 hours of their time a month, but some get involved in more opportunities so this is looked at on a case by case basis.	

Further reading: https://homelessnetwork.scot/change-team/

45 ideas on the future of housing

Policy cycle stage	Context for participation	Level of engagement	Who participated?
● Defining the problem ● Identifying solutions	Invited space	Consult	General public
Methodology			

The Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium (*Parlament der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens)* organised a Citizens' Assembly (a randomly selected, demographically representative group of ordinary citizens) on housing between October 2021 and February 2022. The deliberative process was structured like most citizens' assemblies with plenary sessions and smaller group discussions.

The question put to the Citizens' Assembly was "Housing space for everyone! How can politics create sustainable and affordable housing for everyone?"
The Citizens' Assembly spent time learning about the issues from a range of speakers, discussed the topic together, and adopted a series of policy recommendations which were presented to decision makers in a public committee session.

Their recommendations covered:
- Housing for young people
- Living in shared flats and alternative forms of housing
- Making private housing affordable
- Social housing
- Housing in rural areas

The full report on the Citizens' Assembly is published in German only on the website of the citizens dialogue (www.buergerdialog.be). The public committee sessions can be found on the website of the Parliament (www.pdg.be/parlamentTV). The final committee session will take place in 2023.

Outcomes and impact

The members of the responsible committee and the relevant ministers met to give feedback on the recommendations, the outcomes of which were discussed in another public session. An additional public committee meeting will be held one year after the ending of the Assembly in March 2023. Here the assembly members will be informed about the progress made by decision makers to implement their recommendations

Impact is also measured by the degree of implementation of the recommendations by policy makers.

Recruitment	Time commitment and incentives	Resource implications
The members of the Citizen Council and the Citizen Assembly were randomly selected; they were drawn by lot.	Participants were incentivised and support is available on request. The citizens' assembly met six times to discuss the issue of housing.	The citizens dialogue programme of which the Citizens' Assembly was part is included in the internal budget of the parliament.

Further Reading:

https://www.buergerrat.de/en/news/45-ideas-on-the-future-of-housing/

Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust, Liverpool, England

Policy cycle stage	Context for participation	Level of engagement	Who participated?
• Identifying and delivering solutions; • Evaluation and improving	Claimed space	Empower	General public
Methodology			
Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust (CLT) exists to create a thriving mixed community in a specific neighbourhood of four streets in Toxteth, Liverpool. The area was identified for demolition and reconstruction between 2002 and 2010 under the Housing Market Renewal Initiative. However, due to the change of UK government in 2010, work never began, leaving significant numbers of the homes without residents and the area suffering from underinvestment in the public realm.			

Granby Four Streets CLT was set up by local residents in 2011, seeking to restore pride in the area and regenerate it for local people after a lack of both government and private investment. It was also designed to give residents collective control over key decisions about their neighbourhood.

A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a not for profit community-based organisation run by volunteers that delivers and/or manages housing and other community facilities at permanently affordable levels for local people. It does this by holding the land in trust, separating its value from that of the building that stands upon it, and leasing it to homeowners on long leases or letting it out at an affordable rent. Any increase in the value of the land will be locked in by the CLT for the permanent benefit of the community. Any member of the defined community is able to join the CLT and play a role in its governance, justifying the claim the organisation is 'community-led'. Key decisions are made by a Board, elected by members at an Annual General Meeting.

Since its inception, Granby Four Streets has re-developed and ensured occupation of 11 affordable homes, six for low cost homeownership, five for affordable rent. They have also renovated a further and two as a 'Winter Garden' community space.

Outcomes and impact
The primary outcomes are new homes being delivered and managed by residents and their neighbours, and a strengthening of social capital.

Recruitment	Time commitment and incentives	Resource implications
CLT members are largely identified through word of mouth and local relationships.	Members are not incentivised to attend these meetings - they attend based on a desire and ability to commit time and effort to improving their local community.	Different stages of a CLTs existence required different forms of resource. While the setting up and participatory elements are often done on a limited budget, the design, delivery and management of homes and community spaces have significant resource implications and require effective financial management capacity and procedures.

Housing Rights in Practice

Policy cycle stage	Context for participation	Level of engagement	Who participated?
● Defining the problem ● Identifying solutions	Claimed space	Collaborate	Residents of specific housing area
Methodology			

In 2015, the Scottish Human Rights Commission began to work alongside a group of residents in Leith, Scotland, who were living in poor housing conditions, including damp, mould, ineffective or broken heating, pigeon, rodent and insect infestations and a lack of maintenance. Following a model developed by Participation in the Practice of Rights (PPR), in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the Commission sought to support residents to use their right to an adequate standard of housing in international law to improve their housing. The right to housing sets out a range of standards which need to be met on issues such as habitability and availability of services, among others.

One of the ambitions of the plan was to pilot an approach to empowering people experiencing human rights violations through social exclusion and poverty, drawing on the expertise of PPR. The PPR approach involves ensuring that rights holders are key participants in measuring and monitoring the extent to which their rights are upheld and using this information to hold public authorities to account.

The majority of residents in the area were social housing tenants, whose landlord was the City of Edinburgh Council. The housing is made up of two high rise blocks of 76 flats each, and one low rise block of 30 flats. At the start of the project, the area lay within the most deprived 10% in Scotland, according to statistics from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The work began in August 2015 by inviting the participation of residents in an assessment of their housing conditions. Following this, residents recognised that they needed to find out more about the conditions across all of the flats and developed a survey for this purpose in October 2015.

Analysis of the data provided from this survey showed that residents had a range of concerns, including, poor drainage and plumbing, broken down lifts, damp and mould, inadequate or defective heating and ageing and inadequate kitchen and bathroom facilities. Residents also expressed concerns that complaints and requests for help were often slow to be answered or were never resolved. These findings were presented back to a group of residents in spring 2016. Residents discussed the results, selecting issues embedded in the right to housing, such as

heating, damp/mould and maintenance standards to be monitored through the development of a set of indicators.

Armed with this information, residents began to approach and engage with duty bearers with responsibilities to implement solutions, including both elected members and officials at local and national level. They spoke at the Scottish Parliament's event to celebrate International Human Rights Day in December 2016 and screened a film which documented the conditions and their attempts to engage power. In early 2017, the Council committed to working collaboratively with residents to invest in the buildings and began a programme of investment.

 In May 2018 at a meeting with Virgínia Brás Gomes, then Chair of the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee, the Council shared that the total financial investment in the blocks up to that point had been £2.3m. The final survey completed by residents in 2018 demonstrated improvement on all of the issues which they had chosen to monitor.

Outcomes and impact

The Commission's work in Leith has been recognised and commended by the First Minister's Advisory Group on Human Rights Leadership, Leilani Farha, former Special Rapporteur in the Right to Housing and Virgínia Brás Gomes, former Chair of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Commission continues to call for public authorities to adopt rights based approaches to their work which prioritise the participation of rights holders in decisions which affect them. The Commission has also regularly called for economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to housing to be put into Scots law, to provide greater accountability for rights holders. The Scottish Government has committed to incorporate the rights enshrined within the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and others, into Scots law.

Recruitment	Time commitment and incentives	Resource implications
Participants were reached through door-to-door engagement in the flats; smaller group reached through connection with Edinburgh Tenant's Federation.	The project duration was around 12 months, with monitoring of the response by statutory agencies extending beyond that. Time commitment for individuals was flexible, from simply responding to the survey to being involved in the project board, meetings with Council, as well as carrying out surveys.	Consultancy support from PPR; Scottish Human Rights Commission support in communications, participation officer (pt), strategy, training in human rights, management costs; Edinburgh Tenants Forum support in part time outreach worker, strategy support, management costs.

Housing Rights Prison Peer Project

Policy cycle stage	Approach to participation	Level of engagement	Who participated
Implementation	Invited space	Collaborate; empower	Experts by experience
Methodology			

Significant numbers of people who are in prison have experienced homelessness and housing problems, either prior to committal and/or post release. Prison peer advisors are recruited from that prison population to deliver housing advice through the prison peer advice service. The project is coordinated by Housing Rights, who have a dedicated Prison Peer Coordinator who recruits and trains selected people to become peer housing advisors within each of the three prison establishments in Northern Ireland; Maghaberry, Magilligan & Hybebank Wood College (Young Offenders Unit and Women's Prison).

The purpose of the project is threefold:
1. To meet the demand for housing advice in prisons
2. To cultivate better engagement with people in prison, who are more likely to engage with and trust a service delivered by someone who is also in prison
3. To provide people in prisons with development opportunities; peers involved have the opportunity to develop skills in providing advice, delivering training and mentoring new peer advisors. The Prison Peer Coordinator also helps to identify professional development opportunities for peer advisors upon release. Involvement in the project also helps to give peers a sense of purpose while in prison and helps to improve self-esteem.

Prison peers deliver an induction session to people entering prison soon after committal; providing general housing advice to ensure people entering prison know the necessary steps they need to take to sustain their tenancies while they are in prison, and to prevent and alleviate homelessness and housing problems upon release. Peers are involved in designing these initial induction sessions, bringing their expertise in terms of the information people are likely to need, and what they might misunderstand, about their housing situation on entering prison.

Housing Rights staff coordinate and set up clinics for peer advisors to give one to one advice to people who are also in prison. Peer advisors provide advice on the individual's specific circumstances, help them to complete necessary forms, and refer on to Housing Rights caseworkers for advocacy and representation in more complex cases.

Peer advisors are not only involved in providing housing advice and support to people in prison but they also help to design the paperwork used in the project, such as casework sheets and other proformas. They provide insight into what information is important to collect and what wording should be used in the forms to ensure they are easy to understand.

Peer advisors also identify trends in the issues faced by the people they are advising in order to identify their own training needs. The Prison Peer Coordinator then provides training to peers on this basis. Trends identified by peers also influence policy and practice, in the past these have included issues such as abandonment notices being issued on people's homes while they are in prison. This led to the development of a proforma to provide evidence to social landlords that people have not abandoned their homes while in prison.

In addition, prison peers are involved in designing and shaping the service by identifying barriers to access faced by other people in prison. For example, peer advisors identified the need for additional clinics in prison landings so that they can be accessed by people in prison who are subject to security checks. Similarly, the peer advisors identified the need for sweatshirts and fleeces so that they can be identified as peer advisors when they are moving from one area of the prison to another. They were subsequently involved in designing this clothing, as well as designing the posters which are displayed in the prisons to signpost people to the clinics. Outcomes and impact

In order to monitor and evaluate the project peer advisors fill out an evaluation survey with opportunity for feedback. Surveys are also issued to clients using the peer advice service to gather their feedback. Project targets are monitored by recording the number of induction sessions carried out and the number of people who attended, as well as the number of clinics held and the numbers attending. Impact is further measured by monitoring the number of cases in which homelessness was prevented through the peer advice clinics as well as the number of housing issues addressed. Quality audits are carried out on each case completed by the Prison Peer Coordinator who reviews each case.

Recruitment	Time commitment and incentives	Resource implications
People in prison volunteer to be peer advisers, Housing Rights considers suitability and clarifies requirements of the role, prison security clearance is also required.	From point of recruitment, an 18-month time commitment is required from prison peers prior to release. Peers may provide weekly clinics, or more regularly if they volunteer to do so.	Housing Rights provides a full time staff member to Coordinate this work.

Further reading:
https://www.housingrights.org.uk/news/research/rethinking-rehabilitation-prison-system

Recommendations

Principles for the meaningful involvement of affected groups in decisions made about housing and homelessness in Northern Ireland

In the previous sections, we described how this report took a democracy lens to examine the involvement of groups affected by poor housing and homelessness in decisions about housing policy and services in Northern Ireland. We observed that affected groups are often united by experiences of poverty and social exclusion, which intersects with other personal circumstances and experiences, institutional practices and structural factors that make them vulnerable within the current housing system. Many of the characteristics that make people vulnerable to the experience of poor housing and homelessness are also factors that a lot of current public participation (consultation, involvement, and collaboration initiated by decision makers) fails to take account of, creating barriers to participation, and excluding the voices of those most affected by decisions from the evidence used to make those decisions.

We looked at current practices within the formal 'invited' spaces of government and statutory agencies, and in the 'claimed' spaces of charities, the community and voluntary sector, civil society groups, campaigns and activism, and other forms of associational participation. We identified that there are three main gaps that could be addressed by improving the capacity, resources and practices of decision makers to better involve affected groups.

Those gaps are:

1. An inclusion gap, which is the result of even well established participatory structures failing to include people with diverse identities and experiences, because they have created or reproduced barriers to inclusion.
2. An empowerment gap, which is the result of participation that does not share power to influence, make, or scrutinise decisions about policy and services with participants.
3. An impact gap, which is the result of poor evidence of the difference made by participation and involvement on policy and service design.

This report then presented a range of case studies that demonstrated ways in which those gaps could be addressed.

This final section sets out a series of recommendations for decision makers in Northern Ireland to improve the involvement of affected groups, and to democratise decisions about housing and homelessness so that they are closer to the needs of affected groups.

1. Involvement makes a difference

Involvement should make a difference - to participants, to decisions, to policy, and to services. The reviews of existing engagement has illustrated the ways in which current engagement either fails to meaningfully impact on the outcomes of decisions, or the impact engagement has is not clearly articulated by decision makers. We looked at the overreliance on formal consultations quite late in the decision making process, and at the barriers to participation that can occur within the formal spaces of the housing sector. We found examples of the ways in which the feedback loop, through which decision makers respond to the people they engaged with to inform them how their contribution made a difference to decisions, is not always closed.

The experience of poor housing and homelessness often correlates with disempowerment in other ways, and tokenistic participation, even when initiated with good intentions, can be especially harmful for affected groups. Decision makers must ensure that the involvement of affected groups can make a difference to the outcome of decisions before engagement begins.

The following conditions can help decision makers avoid tokenism.

- Involvement is never undertaken if a decision has already been made, if there is no room for change, or if the involvement is not considered an important part of the decision making process.
- Involvement has clear objectives. The scope, context and purpose of involvement is clearly declared at the beginning of the process, including what can and cannot be changed as a result of involvement. Senior decision makers must be aware of the scope of participation and be committed to giving conscientious consideration to the input of participants.
- The process occurs at a stage in the decision making process in which change is still possible, and the overall design of the process reflects this stage.
- The process engages with the right people; the recruitment of participants is carefully planned and, where appropriate or needed, incentivises participation as a means to remove financial and resource barriers to participation.[112]
- Participants learn about how decisions are made, as well as learning about the topic with which they are engaging.
- The methods and process design of involvement allow for informed, meaningful input, including, in some cases, opportunities for mutual learning between participants.
- Decision makers listen and take account of people's involvement in good faith and exercising the 'principle of charity' in which the contributions of participants are subject to the best and most generous interpretation.[113]
- The feedback loop is closed, by telling participants how their contribution has influenced the final decision. There should be clear evidence of how decisions and policy or service outcomes have been influenced by the involvement of participants - this should be made as explicit as possible, for example in a 'we asked, you said, we did' format. Contributions from participants that end up not being implemented should also be responded to, with a clear

---

[112] Lightbody, R., Escobar, O., Morton, S., Seditas, K., (2017), 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement.

[113] The principle of charity means interpreting people's statements as generously as possible. It is a tool for productive dialogue, and is especially important in situations where there may be unequal technical knowledge, as is often the case in participatory processes.

explanation of why that is the case. Funding structures should account for ongoing oversight and scrutiny of implementation as part of the decision making process.

2. The statutory environment supports participation by default

Institutionalising participation so that it is a default feature of policy development is an approach that is evolving around the world, as participatory approaches to decision making become more normalised as part of the machinery of democracy.

Participation is institutionalised when it happens to a high quality by default as a normal and unquestioned component of the decision making process, rather than something that happens on an ad-hoc or occasional basis. Embedded practice is where the decision of whether and how to engage is routine and built-in to the process, rather than being at the discretion of the decision maker. Putting participation on a legal or statutory footing could act as an important precursor to changing the behaviour or practice of institutions.

There is some basis for this in Northern Ireland, such as the Tenant Participation Strategy, but much more could be done to both broaden participation so that it is more open, deverse, and inclusive, and to deepen it, so that more complex issues can be dealt with more effectively in partnership with affected groups. The New DecadeNew Approach Agreement set out a commitment that the new Executive would ' introduce reformed measures to put civic engagement and public consultation at the heart of policy-making, recognising the vital role that wider society plays in supporting effective and accountable Government.'[114] In the OECD's Public Governance Review of Northern Ireland in 2016, it made a series of recommendations for the improvement of engagement with people for policy, for service design, and for transparency and scrutiny of public services. It made a number of recommendations to 'foster a culture change to strengthen citizens' engagement and improve dialogue with key stakeholders.'[115]

There are other examples from the UK, such as the provisions in the Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament (https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/26514.aspx), provisions in Scotland's Community Empowerment Act (2015), commitments in Scotland's Open Government Action Plan 2018-2020, which also created the context for a government-wide participation framework.[116] In Ireland, public participation at local government level has been embedded in legislation and has led to the creation of Public Participation Frameworks in each local authority area.[117] In other jurisdictions, defining a 'Duty to Involve' can help focus resources and capacity on the

---

[114] Smith, J., and Coveney, S. (2020). The New Decade, New Approach Deal. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade__a_new_approach.pdf, page 13

[115] OECD, (2016). Northern Ireland (United Kingdom): Implementing Joined-up Governance for a Common Purpose. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/northern-ireland-united-kingdom-implementing-joined-up-governance-for-a-common-purpose_9789264260016-en#page1, page .228

[116] Scottish Government, (2019). Scotland's Open Government Action Plan 2018 to 2020: detailed commitments. https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-open-government-action-plan-2018-20-detailed-commitments/documents/

[117] Section 46 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014

inclusion of communities and citizens in specific policy contexts, as well as with governance more generally.

- Involvement is supported by the rules and practices of the decision-making institution. Explore statutory instruments, legal provisions, institutional designs, and policy guidance that can embed participatory practice.
- Participation is embedded across departments to avoid the siloing of expertise, to ensure consistency for stakeholders, and enable peer-to-peer learning and collaboration. Existing units within the Northern Ireland Civil Service such as the Innovation Lab within the Department of Finance, could be expanded to develop and hold public participation expertise and support departments to deliver quality public engagement.
- Good practice guidelines for policy development are created by the Executive Office to reflect evolving innovations in public participation
- The Tenant Participation Strategy is updated to reflect best practice and consideration is given to its scope across the housing and homelessness sector
- There is a dedicated strategy for reaching 'easy to ignore' groups, including, explicitly, people who are vulnerable to poor housing and homelessness in tenures other than the social rented sector. The strategy is supported by training and capacity building for all staff responsible for its implementation.
- Stakeholders and affected groups contribute to frameworks and guidance with the aim of embedding participation. Good participatory practice has to work for all parties involved, and the wide range of groups, organisations and groups interested in housing and homelessness policies and services should be given the opportunity to meaningfully influence how participation happens.

3. There is capacity for participation within decision making structures

Embedded practice doesn't always require institutionalisation, but it does require a commitment to build capacity within decision making processes to open up to more participation. High quality public participation requires skills, knowledge and experience to be able to respond to different policy contexts and to develop opportunities for people to participate that are inclusive and accessible. This is especially true in policy areas such as housing, where there is significant overlap between the experience of poor housing and homelessness and the experience of barriers to participation, which we elaborated on above. Current practice within the formal 'invited' spaces of the housing sector, the dominance of consultation as an engagement method, the absence of diversity within established involvement frameworks within the social rented sector, and the systematic barriers to participation we observed above, all indicate that there is a capacity and skills gap within the housing sector.

- There are clear, co-created standards for public participation that are useful for public sector workers, elected representatives, community and voluntary and civil society organisations and individual citizens in the planning, implementation and evaluation of public participation across all policy areas, and that connect and underpin specific involvement strategies in housing .[118]
- Staff are well trained in participatory practice, including in the planning (knowing when and how to involve people based on the scope, context and purpose of involvement), design

---

[118] Scottish Community Development Centre, (2022). What are National Standards for Community Engagement and who are they for? https://www.voicescotland.org.uk/national-standards

(recruiting participants, developing methodologies), and implementation (facilitation, evaluation and follow-up) of participation.
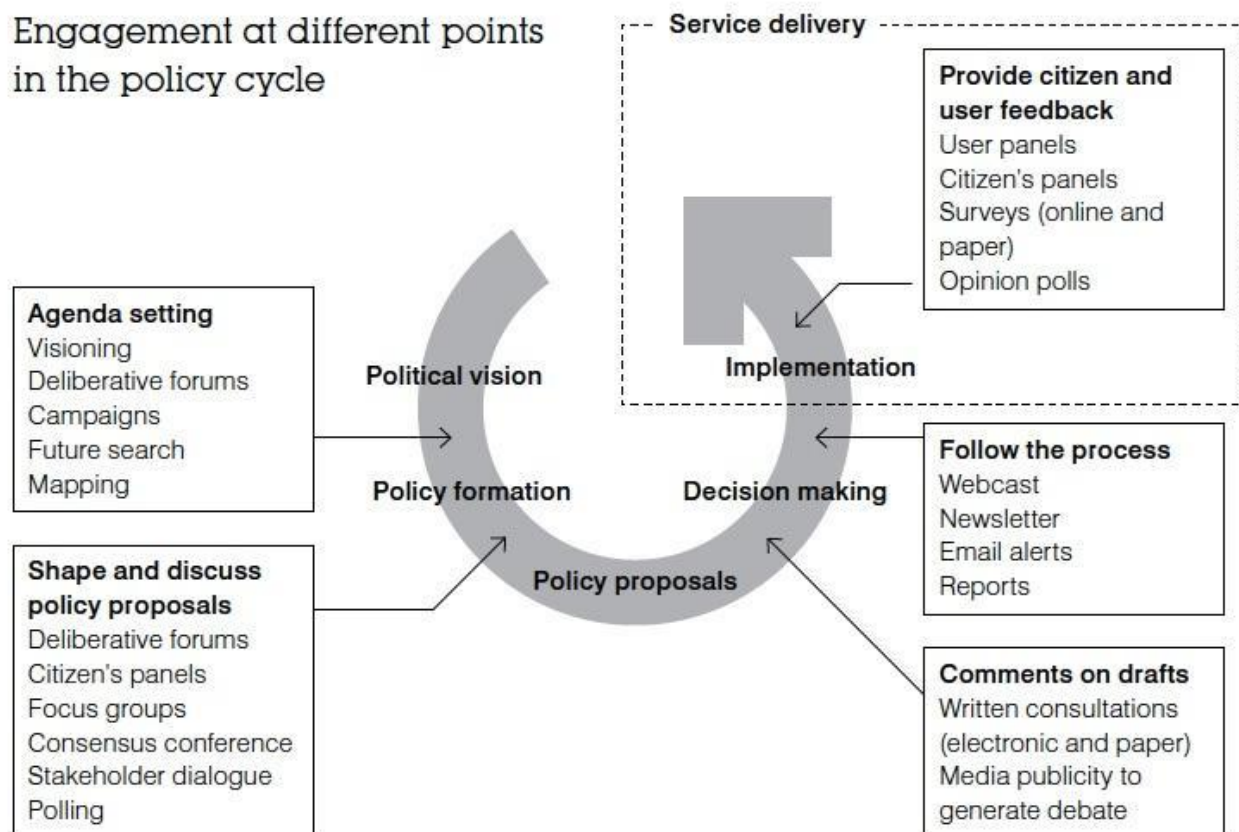
- Staff are 'intelligent commissioners' who understand when and how to procure independent engagement services to support the design, facilitation, and evaluation of participatory processes
- Sufficient resources are allocated to support high quality participation. Participation requires investment. Engaging with 'easy to ignore' groups may require additional resourcing, including sometimes the services of specialist practitioners, incentivising participation, addressing physical barriers to participation, ensuring interpretation and translation, and other supports to ensure that the participation meets the needs of people who experience barriers. However, the impact of participation, by leading to policies and services that more closely meet the needs of affected groups and citizens more broadly, can help to avoid wasteful mistakes and represent better value for money over time.

4. Involvement happens throughout the decision making process

Involvement can take place at any stage in the policy process, as long as there is room for change as a result. However, the stage in the policy process is a key element of the context for involvement, and will impact on the types of methods that are appropriate. Involving people early in the process can help identify issues, generate a shared vision, and shape the agenda so that it is close to the needs of people most impacted by the decision. The call for evidence early in the development of the Department for Communities Housing Supply Strategy is an example of this approach. Likewise, involving people after the decision has been made and during its implementation can provide oversight and scrutiny on how services are delivered and ensure that they meet the aims of the policy and address the needs of service users.

The policy process is a way to describe the key stages necessary to take a government, agency, or Minister's vision or goals and turn it into real-world outcomes. There will be opportunities throughout this process, at all of the different stages to invite and encourage participation. However, the approach and the methodologies used should take account of the stage the decision making process is at to ensure participation can add value and to avoid manipulative or tokenistic engagement.

Engagement at different points in the policy cycle

Service delivery

Provide citizen and user feedback
User panels
Citizen's panels
Surveys (online and paper)
Opinion polls

Agenda setting
Visioning
Deliberative forums
Campaigns
Future search
Mapping

Shape and discuss policy proposals
Deliberative forums
Citizen's panels
Focus groups
Consensus conference
Stakeholder dialogue
Polling

Political vision

Policy formation

Implementation

Decision making

Policy proposals

Follow the process
Webcast
Newsletter
Email alerts
Reports

Comments on drafts
Written consultations (electronic and paper)
Media publicity to generate debate

While each situation is unique, the diagram above proposes that policy work can be understood as comprising six key stages:

- **Visioning** – the process of defining the agenda by identifying and understanding the need to be addressed or the problem to be solved, and the wider context surrounding the process;
- **Development** – the process of exploring the scope of the issues and generating options, recommendations or potential solutions;
- **Appraisal** – the process of reviewing and evaluating the options to measure support, identify problems and/or seek suggestions for amendment;
- **Decision** – the point where a commitment is made to a particular policy or implementation strategy;
- **Implementation** – Putting into place the services, strategies, policies or changes resulting from the decision;
- **Evaluation** – the process of assessing the impact of the policy/decision on addressing the original need.

Different levels of participation, such as consulting, involving, and collaborating, will provide different types of information to policy and decision-makers at different stages of the delivery cycle.

Being clear about what the current stage of the policy making cycle is when considering opportunities for participation can help ensure that the most effective approaches and methods are used to meet the needs of policy makers and affected groups.

5. Decision makers have strong connections with others who are already involving affected groups

The landscape review earlier in this report demonstrates that there is significant expertise and practice in civil society, with organisations involving and collaborating with people who have experience of poor housing and homelessness for whom other spaces of participation present barriers. In some cases, those groups may already work closely with decision makers, in others, their relationship may be more adversarial. However, the onus is on decision makers to build those connections and support civil society groups to continue to do their vital work.

- Provide funding and support, such as information, staff time and other resources, and regularly evaluate whether this is meeting the needs of organisations.
- Draw on the expertise of when involving 'easy to ignore' groups in decision making.
- Make their involvement, and the involvement of their stakeholders meaningful, to avoid overburdening organisations with limited resources and causing consultation fatigue.
- Ensure open channels of communication for input, oversight, feedback, and scrutiny in the development of policies and services, as well as in their implementation.
- Make space for disagreement - civil society criticism of government is a normal part of a healthy democracy. Disagreement, opposition, and contestation from campaign and advocacy groups is an important mechanisms for oversight and accountability, which in turn can make public services better. Building connections with groups that seek to hold institutional power to account involves listening respectfully to good-faith critiques without defensiveness, and working to understand the basis of disagreement.

6. Understand what works

Evaluation is important for ensuring that engagement meets its objectives, and for ongoing learning and improvements to how engagement happens. Good evaluation can provide a deep insight into the strengths and weaknesses of planning, implementation, inclusiveness, participant experience, impacts on decisions, policies and processes, and can capture learning of what works and what does not, so that improvements can be made.

- Evaluation is planned early in the engagement process. Thinking through how the process will be evaluated at the beginning of a project can help to surface assumptions and clarify the overall purpose and objectives of the engagement, and what kind of outcomes can be expected.
- Evaluation captures the experiences of participants, including whether or not they felt able to participate, whether they understood what they were being asked to do, if they had sufficient information to participate, if they felt respected by the process.
- Evaluation captures information about who took part. Recruitment of participants should be based on a clear understanding of who needs to be involved. Depending on the purpose of the involvement, this may require capturing demographic information to understand if participation reflects the population impacted by the decision, and to help understand if barriers to participation have been created by the design of engagement. It is worth reiterating that this report discovered a significant evaluation gap, and even in the social rented sector

where involvement is most embedded, there is very little information on who participates and who is excluded.

- Evaluation assesses the difference involvement has made, based on the purpose and objectives identified at the beginning of the engagement plan. Purpose might include improved governance or better relationships between stakeholders and decision makers, more inclusive engagement, improved services, and/ or capacity building and learning. The identified purpose of involvement will determine the indicators of success, and the kinds of data needed throughout the process to measure the extent to which involvement has had the intended impact.
- Evaluation identifies lessons for future involvement. Evaluation should lead to a greater understanding among those commissioning and carrying out the involvement of the benefits and the challenges of engagement, and should be used to input into training, capacity building and investment to continuously improve involvement over time.

References

*websites are dated year accessed

Bauer, M.A., Wilkie, J.E.B., Jim, J.K., Bodenhausen, G.V., (2012). Cuing consumerism: Situational Materialism Undermines Personal and Social Well-Being. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956797611429579

Boyle, F., (2021). Homelessness Service User Journeys. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Homelessness/Homelessness-Service-User-Journeys.aspx?ext=

Boyle, F., (2021). The Impacts of Chronic Homelessness for Women: A report for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Homelessness/Impacts-of-Chronic-Homelessness-for-Women.aspx?ext=

Boyle, F., and Pleace, N., (2021). Experiences of Youth Homelessness: A report for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Single-Downloads/Experiences-of-Youth-Homelessness.aspx

Department for Communities, (2021). Housing Supply Strategy: Call for Evidence Summary Report. https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/communities/dfc-housing-supply-strategy_0.pdf

Department for Communities, (2022). A new housing supply strategy. https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/new-housing-supply-strategy

Dobson, C., (2022). Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation. https://www.citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, (2017). Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland: Full Statement. https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/HousingCommunities-KeyInequalitiesStatement.pdf

Hickman, P., and Frey, J., (2021). Understanding Approaches to Tenant Participation in the Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland: A Scoping Report. https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Understanding-Approaches-to-Tenant-Participation-in-the-Private-Rented-Sector-in-Northern-Ireland-v4.pdf

Homeless Connect, (2022). DACTS. https://rsun-ni.org.uk/dacts/

Homeless Connect, (2022). The empowering voice of people who use substances. https://homelessconnect.org/rsun/

Housing Rights, (2018). Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023. https://www.housingrights.org.uk/sites/default/files/Strategic_plan_1823_web.pdf

Housing Rights, (2021). Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry into the experiences of ethnic minority and migrant people in NI.

https://www.housingrights.org.uk/sites/default/files/policydocs/Housing%20Rights%20written%20evidence%20NIAC%20Inquiry.pdf

Housing Rights, (2022). Leaving care. https://www.housingadviceni.org/leaving-care-0

Housing Rights, (2022). Renters Voice for Private Tenants. https://www.housingrights.org.uk/renters-voice-private-tenants

IAP2 International Federation, (2018), IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

Involve, (2005), People and participation. https://involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/People-and-Participation.pdf

Involve, (2005). The True Costs of Public Participation – Full Report. https://involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/True-Costs-Full-Report2_3.pdf

Landemore, H., (2013). Deliberation, cognitive diversity, and democratic inclusiveness: an epistemic argument for the random selection of representatives. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11229-012-0062-6

Lightbody, R., Escobar, O., Morton, S., Seditas, K., (2017), 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement. http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/WWSHardToReachOrEasyToIgnoreEvidenceReview.pdf

Mac Flynn, P., and Wilson, L. (2018). Housing Provision in Northern Ireland: Implications for Living Standards and Poverty. https://www.nerinstitute.net/sites/default/files/research/2019/neri_working_paper_housing_final.pdf

Miller, R., (2022). Homelessness is many different problems. https://scopeni.nicva.org/article/homelessness-is-many-different-problems

Muir, J., & McMahon, M., (2015). Involving Everyone: Including 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland. https://www.housingrights.org.uk/sites/default/files/policydocs/Easy%20to%20Ignore%20Full%20Report%20-%20June%202015.pdf

Mullins, D., Shanks, P., Sacranie, H., (2017). Tenant Involvement in Governance: Models and Practices Final Report. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/ea2b026c-e05a-481b-9114-f6d7da1b6020/tenant_involvement_in_governance.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

NI Youth Forum, (2022). https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=NI+youth+forum+pinball

North Ireland Youth Forum, (2022). kNowhere to Go? report – a peer approach to preventing homelessness in NI. https://www.niyf.org/2022/02/07/knowhere-to-go/

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2018). Community Involvement Strategy 2018 – 2023. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/About-Us/Corporate-Strategies/Community-Involvement-Strategy

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2020). Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy 2020 – 2025. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Consultation-Irish-Travellers-Accommodation-Strate/Irish-Travellers-Accommodation-Strategy-2020-25.aspx?ext=.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2021). Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey 2019: Summary of Key Findings. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/CTOS-Reports-2019/2019-CTOS-Summary-of-Key-Findings

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, (2022). Ending Homelessness Together: Homelessness Strategy 2022-27. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness-Strategy-2022-2027/Ending-Homelessness-Together-Homelessness-Strategy.aspx

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, (2004). Northern Ireland Survey of Activity Limitations and Disability, 2006 - 2007. http://doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/7236/mrdoc/pdf/7236_methodology.pdf

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, (2021). Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2020-21. https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/ni-housing-stats-20-21-full-copy.pdf

O'Doherty, J., and Rowledge, R. (2014). Through our eyes: The housing and homelessness experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans people in Northern Ireland. https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getmedia/a0eb8f0d-6e0e-4d15-a037-329af560eab3/through-our-eyes.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

OECD, (2016). Northern Ireland (United Kingdom): Implementing Joined-up Governance for a Common Purpose. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/northern-ireland-united-kingdom-implementing-joined-up-governance-for-a-common-purpose_9789264260016-en#page1

Organizing Engagement, (2022), Models: Ladder of Citizen Participation. https://organizingengagement.org/models/ladder-of-citizen-participation/

Poverty Truth Network, (2022). Commission Impacts. https://povertytruthnetwork.org/commissions/commission-impacts/

Powercube, (2011), Spaces of Power. https://www.powercube.net/analyse-power/spaces-of-power/

PPR (2022). A Place to Call Home? – Refugees in Belfast's Housing System. https://www.nlb.ie/investigations/FOI/2021-12-nihe-places-vulnerable-refugee-families-in-private-rentals-in-areas-of-the-highest-housing-need-in-belfast

PPR, (2020). Right to a Home. https://www.nlb.ie/campaigns/right-to-home

PTP Loans and Lending, (2022). PTP Loans and Lending: Financial information and loan guides. https://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/

SafeLives, (2018). Safe at Home: Homelessness and domestic abuse. https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe_at_home_Spotlight_web.pdf

Scottish Community Development Centre, (2022). What are National Standards for Community Engagement and who are they for? https://www.voicescotland.org.uk/national-standards

Scottish Government, (2019). Scotland's Open Government Action Plan 2018 to 2020: detailed commitments. https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-open-government-action-plan-2018-20-detailed-commitments/documents/

Local Government Reform Act 2014, Section 46. Available at:
https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/1/enacted/en/html

Smith, A., and McLaughlin, E., (2009). *Delivering equality: equality mainstreaming and constitutionalisation of socio-economic rights* in Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly 61(2).

Smith, J., and Coveney, S. (2020). The New Decade, New Approach Deal.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade__a_new_approach.pdf

Supporting Communities, (2022). The Housing Policy Panel: A consultative body to the Department for Communities. https://www.tpsupport.org/housing-policy-panel

VOYPIC, (2022). VOYPIC: Voice of Young People in Care. https://www.voypic.org/

Wallace, A., (2015). Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland.
https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/HousingInequalities-FullReport.pdf

Wallace, A., Rhodes, D. and Roth, F., (2018). Home-owners and poverty in Northern Ireland.
https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/home-owners-and-poverty-northern-ireland