



Participation

The Next Generation



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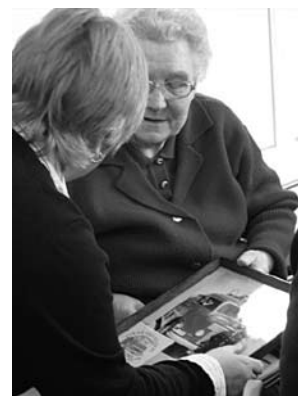
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Participation – The Next Generation

Participation by tenants and more widely citizens is now core to many policies of central and local government, and public services. Improving users' and citizens' involvement in services and in their communities has been a strong consistent theme for many years. In the social housing sector this increased commitment has driven huge improvements to tenant participation practice.¹

Separation between tenant participation and citizen/resident participation and community involvement has become blurred. On many issues tenants are participating alongside residents of other tenures in joint action on community issues such as safety, anti-social behaviour, environmental improvements and other community issues and services. Tenants are part of a range of community partnerships such as Community First, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, community planning.

Our vision for the future has to take account of this wider arena of participation.



¹ Journey of Influence: 20th Anniversary Review of Progress in Tenant Participation – TPAS Cymru and WTF (2008)

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1. Tenant Participation by any other name

There are a range of other terms in use besides tenant participation such as: tenant involvement, tenant empowerment, citizen engagement, community engagement, community development. Some organisations give particular meanings to these terms but they are often used loosely and interchangeably.

‘Community development’ is probably the widest concept of participation and is often used to include all the others. Community development is a process of change where people work together around common issues and aspirations to learn, encourage participation, and develop accountable decision making.²

The purpose of social landlords is not just to provide a building to live in. The purposes of social landlords link to issues of health, welfare, social and financial inclusion, and community regeneration. Tenants and residents have never viewed their lives as divided up according to the responsibilities of public service bodies or landlords but see their lives and communities as a whole. Increasingly landlords have to be involved in all these issues in order to provide effective services to tenants, and increasingly therefore have to work through partnerships with other organisations. The ‘making the connections’ initiative of the Welsh Assembly Government demands that public services are joined up across this wide scope of services.

‘Tenant participation’ is therefore becoming a much wider set of activities that spreads across the scope of services, and which includes involving residents generally in community issues. The skills and methods needed for people to become involved in issues and services which affect them are fundamentally the same regardless of the issue or service. Tenant participation has become a part of wider community development and of a much wider policy of participation and citizen engagement.

While this paper mainly talks about tenant participation (TP) and social housing, the principles and methods discussed can be applied to participation in any public services or community issues.

² National Strategic Framework for Community Development in Wales” – WAG (2007)

2. What is Tenant Participation?

TP has been around a long time so surely we know what it means and what is expected? At one level there is general understanding of what good practice requirements are for participation, for example as set out in the requirements for Local Tenant Participation Strategies (LTPS) NTPS and the Guidance. But there is a lot of older, traditional thinking and expectation still around. Previous practices, and previous experience from those practices, still shape a lot of attitudes and level of commitment to TP. Staff and tenants of social landlords are often struggling to picture what the vision of stronger, deeper participation looks like, and how greater tenant involvement can be generated and maintained.

The traditional practice of tenant participation is viewed as:

- About tenants' activities;
- About making sure tenants are informed and consulted about what the landlord is doing;
- Involving a lot of formal meetings;
- Being based largely on formal tenant organisations whether independent Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) or partnership groups and forums.

This is a limited view of the scope of involvement, the methods of involvement and the level of influence that tenants can/ should have about issues that affect them. However, elements of the traditional view do remain part of the 'next generation' practice of TP.

'Next Generation' TP practice includes:

- An organisational culture of partnership between tenants, landlord staff and Board/Committee Members;
- Joint activities by landlords with tenants on all aspects of landlord services and operation, and on wider community issues;
- Involvement of tenants beyond the customer relationship into landlord governance, policy and resources allocation;
- High quality information on landlord services, policies, performance, change and appropriate housing or community issues – tailored to preferences, format needs and languages of tenants;
- Effective consultation with tenants on relevant matters – not just consultation about landlord documents but asking about issues and tenants' views at earlier stages of developments to shape the agenda and direction;
- Tenants' involvement in setting, monitoring and readjusting services standards and having significant influence;
- Use of a range of appropriate and interactive methods to engage and involve tenants including independent, representative tenant structures;
- Tenants working alongside other residents on community issues and in the range of community partnerships.

TPAS Cymru defines tenant participation as *"A two way process involving both tenants and their landlords in the sharing of ideas, enabling tenants to influence decisions regarding the management of their homes"*. TP is about engaging people and enabling them to have influence over issues that affect them. This is entirely consistent with and a part of citizen participation.

3. Implementing Quality Tenant Participation

3.1 Barriers:

Some people are sceptical about the development of TP to higher levels – because it's difficult; because people aren't interested. Whenever TPAS Cymru discusses barriers to TP at an event, both tenants and landlord staff cite apathy and lack of commitment as the most prominent problems.

There are issues and barriers to effective TP, but sometimes so called apathy is a result of the poor way participation is too often carried out and the negative experiences which tenants or staff may have had. It may not be apathy but a logical choice if people choose not to become involved – because the issues don't concern them; they don't have good information; it's not easy to put across their view; or they see no benefit for any effort they might make.

Barriers to participation often arise because of the way the process is carried out, such as:

- Issues being too landlord focused.
- Methods chosen for administrative convenience rather than maximum contact.
- Timescales for consultation being too short.
- Poor communication in language, style and length.
- Inadequate resources provided to enable large numbers of people to be involved.

The resources barrier is an important one. Involving large numbers of tenants in varied ways, and reaching out to them rather than inviting them to come to the landlord, takes time, money, effort and skills on both sides. The crucial question is whether this cost is considered an extra to the real business, perhaps not a priority, or whether it is the core business and a major priority.

3.2 Conditions for Participation:

Participation is a partnership activity; it takes both landlords and tenants to be committed and involved or it doesn't work. Participation doesn't just happen, it has to be worked at: planned, built up and developed, trained for (on both sides) and a repeated process that feeds back on success or problems to inform the continuing process.

There are conditions that have to be met for participation to be successful. Apathy can often be traced to one or more of these conditions not being met:

Conditions for Participation

Tenants Must Have:

- Interest in the issue
 - about 'life' issues for tenants; as local as possible not just landlord wide
- Enough knowledge/information
- Confidence and skills
 - needing access to training for personal development not just concerned with landlord issues
- Ready opportunity to participate
 - at times, places convenient for tenants; with the landlord going to where the tenants are
- Practical benefit for their involvement
 - seeing their views acted on which requires feedback on what tenant influence achieved, or why something was not achieved

Landlord Staff/Board or Elected Members must:

- Value and respect tenants views
- Provide relevant and consistent opportunities for participation
 - ongoing channels of contact not just one-off consultations
- Have confidence and skills to involve tenants and share decision making
 - valuing these skills equally with technical or financial skills
- Have a culture of 'auto-participation'
 - a default setting asking 'how do we involve tenants', and early in processes not just at the end to get endorsement
- Have staffing structure and assessments that value participation
 - giving all staff responsibility for involving tenants and appraising skills and performance in doing so

3.3 A New Model for Participation

The ladder of participation is a long established model which divides activities of participation according to the level of influence that participants have: from information (being told by the power holder) through to control (participants having the power themselves to decide). It is a useful way of thinking about the different levels of participation. However, it is sometimes criticised for implying that higher levels of influence are 'better' and that this should be the direction of travel. This isn't necessarily what the ladder implies or is advocated, but it has to be remembered that all the levels of participation have their place and make a contribution to effective participation.

Control	Tenants have delegated authority to directly control the landlord's services
Partnership	Tenants jointly share responsibility & decision making with the landlord
Participation	Tenants are involved in reviewing policies, services etc & help design activities
Consultation	Tenants are asked their views about a decision before landlord makes it
Information	Tenants are provided with information from landlord

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Another more recent visualisation is the 'wheel of involvement' which has an outer circle of different methods of involving people and an inner circle of stages in the process of participation. The wheel emphasizes the need for a range of different methods to involve participants and that they can be used flexibly at different stages of the process.

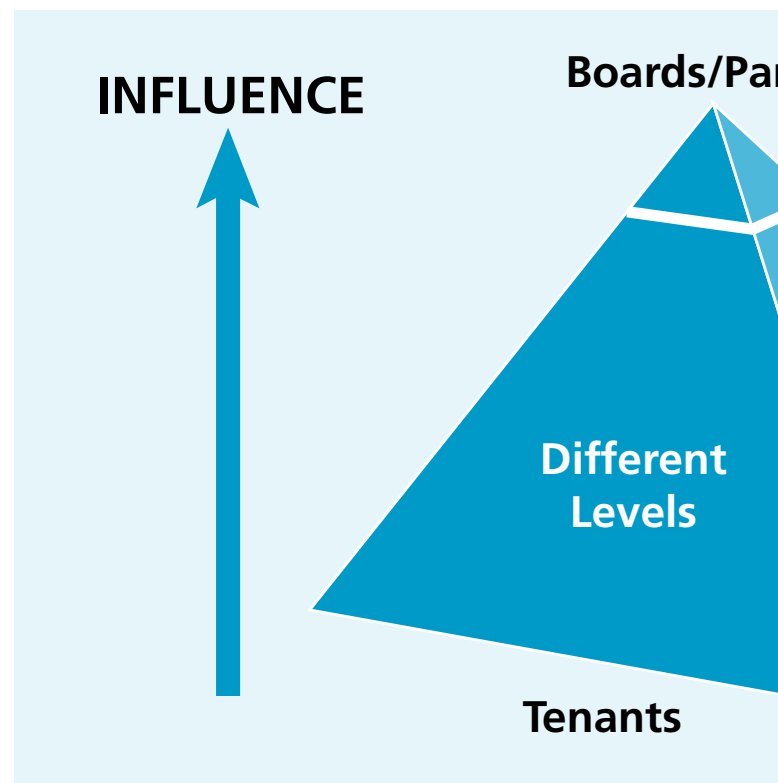
Both these pictures of participation are limited and TPAS Cymru has developed **a new model, the pyramid of participation**, which demonstrates a range of important aspects of participation:

- A pyramid because there needs to be a broad base of different activities with different participants, to cater for the range of different issues and interests, locations, and degree of commitment of different participants.
- The height of the pyramid recognises different levels of influence, like the ladder, but it has more than one side and also recognises that higher levels of influence demand higher levels of knowledge, skills and confidence from participants. Higher on the pyramid does not mean 'better'; all levels of the pyramid support each other.
- No rungs up the pyramid reflecting that effective information, consultation, participation and partnership are necessary components of activities at all levels of influence.
- The narrowing of the pyramid to its top reflects that fewer participants are likely to be willing and able to contribute at the higher levels, and equally that the wide base is needed to provide feeders of participants with different views and representing different locations or interests.

- Both landlords and tenants are included in the pyramid as participants; it doesn't just apply to tenants.

A healthy structure of participation has to be like a pyramid – with a wide base of different people involved in many different activities through which people become better informed, confident and experienced, so feeding up to the higher skill demands and levels of influence at the apex of the pyramid.

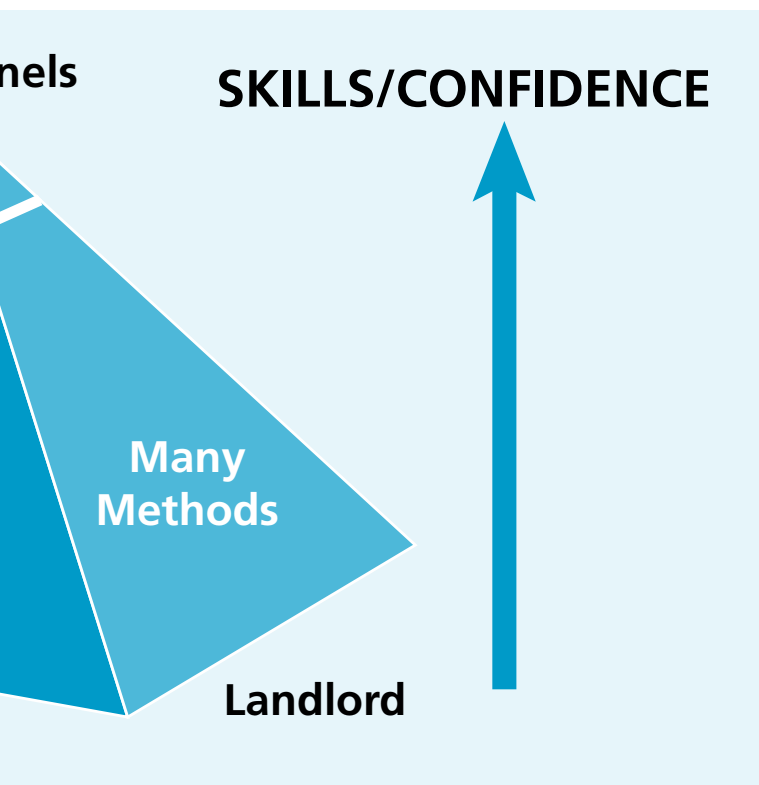
The Pyramid of Participation



Both landlords and tenants are included in the pyramid as participants; it doesn't just apply to tenants.

Many landlords have tenant board members and a tenants' panel or forum as major methods for engaging tenants views, but many of these do not have a supporting pyramid of participation activities to feed and inform this highest level involvement. As a result many tenants' panels have small numbers of members, without representative credibility, and tenant board members may have inadequate accountability to wider tenants.

f Participation



3.4 Maximising Participation

It is always likely to be the case that the majority of tenants or residents will not want to take part in TP activities, at any given time. We have to be realistic about this and accept that it's just fine for people to choose not to be involved. They have lives to lead: families, jobs, social and leisure life, other community or voluntary activities besides TP; they may have other more important issues to tackle. This isn't something to bemoan, and even less to use as an excuse not to try to involve people; but it is part of the context that we have to work within and take account of.

The question becomes how do we involve as many people as possible in the housing and community issues that affect them. The answer lies mainly in meeting the conditions for participation set out above, but it is useful to plan in terms of 4 broad categories of TP activities that all need to be in place:

- 1. Ongoing, long term activities** which can involve different people in a variety of ways on a variety of issues, including activities like: social events group, disability group, newsletter group, service standards setting and monitoring groups, estate walkabout teams, tenant inspectors, trained tenant surveys team, tenants' panel or forum.
- 2. One off consultations or events** such as: annual services satisfaction surveys, community mapping exercises, fun days, tenant consultation 'clubs', policy consultations, complaints/compliments procedure, repair/improvement satisfaction check.

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3. Every day points of engagement:

all tenants will have a variety of contacts and interaction with their landlord over time – each of these occasions is an opportunity to engage tenants more positively. Whether picking up the keys for the first time, paying the rent, reporting a repair or a problem, seeking financial advice, or other purpose – each of these can be an opportunity to informally seek tenants' views or issues, and to provide information. Not the chance to give a long lecture but to have a conversation that builds the relationship with each tenant, increases knowledge of the landlord and services available, and establishes that the landlord listens to and values tenants' input. A prompt response and/or being kept informed encourages tenants to engage again. It's essential to record and to systematically consider and respond to issues that tenants raise and to feed back what happens as a result (see *good practice example below*).

4. Independent tenant groups and structure:

it is essential that tenants have the opportunity and the resources to consider their issues collectively and independently from landlord operated forums and methods. Tenants may feel more confident expressing their views without landlord staff present; they may need the knowledge and support of more experienced tenants; issues may affect groups of tenants or areas and need a co-ordinated response. Independent tenants groups will not always agree with their landlord, and it is part of their purpose to be able to challenge occasionally; but the mature landlord will maintain the resource support to enable this to happen.

Cynon Taf Community Housing Group

Day to day feedback recording

Cynon Taf CHG staff use a simple service feedback form to record any feedback on services during day to day contact with tenants. Information from completed forms is collated and reported to the Operational Management Team which discusses any trends, agrees remedial actions and any policy developments that are required. The feedback informs the development and continuous improvement of the organisation.

This simple approach can be used for any comments from tenants when in contact with the landlord. The recording ensures tenants' comments are heard and a formal, follow up process ensures they are acted on. Tenants often feel they have 'told the landlord' even if the comment was part of an informal conversation.

The examples of TP activities above are by no means comprehensive but there are other sources of examples and advice for different methods and initiatives for TP in the useful resources section at the end of this document.

3.5 Staff and Mainstreaming Participation

To create the conditions necessary for effective TP and to operate the pyramid of participation requires all staff of a landlord to be involved. Mainstreaming means that tenants are involved in all areas of a landlord's service and decision making, and that tenant participation is not a separate activity for tenants and specialist support staff (e.g. just for Tenant Participation

Officers) outside the main business of the organisation. In many landlords this will require changes in organisational culture, and staffing structure and procedures, to integrate TP throughout the organisation.

More information is provided in a TPAS Cymru 'Solutions' paper about mainstreaming.

Is Tenant Participation Mainstreamed in your Organisation?

How does your organisation match the points below?

- All staff have an awareness and understanding of the benefits of tenant participation.
- Training in tenant participation is available to all staff.
- Senior management support the development of tenant participation.
- A commitment to tenant participation is incorporated in the major documents for your organisation, including; the business plan, departmental plans, individual work plans and job descriptions.
- Nominated members of staff from across all departments have responsibility as 'champions' for tenant participation.

3.6 Engaging 'Hard to Reach' Groups

'Hard to reach' is a commonly used phrase but we need to be clear what this means and what we are trying to achieve. It usually refers to groups of disadvantaged and/or vulnerable people, or people who often suffer discrimination. They may have particular needs or requirements which are

not being expressed, or not being heard. More recently 'hard to reach' has been described as "inaccessible to most traditional and conventional methods for any reason" (Home Office).

An essential starting point is for landlords to have an accurate profile of their tenants in terms of: age, size of household, disability, ethnic background, preferred languages and formats. Also, to have community profiles or mapping to provide a context of where tenants live and in what type of homes. This will enable landlords to identify which groups to target i.e. which are underrepresented and what the barriers are to participation. These might include cultural, racial, linguistic barriers or they might be practical barriers like accessible venues or timings of events and meetings.

The key objective is to ensure ways in which the preferences and requirements of such groups are gathered, considered and met. Two complementary approaches are needed to do this:

- Including all groups within mainstream participation: All main participation activities need to be planned with thought for specific needs of different groups.
- Special activities or approaches aimed at specific groups to establish relationships and trust, gain knowledge of particular needs in order to better link hard to reach groups with mainstream participation eg. locating activities in clubs, associations, and places where the groups attend; developing contacts with voluntary organisations, faith groups etc that work with the groups.

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Most tenants do not participate so arguably the great majority of tenants are 'hard to reach'. There probably isn't a large section of tenants who are 'ordinary' and not hard to reach; there will be a wide range of interests, concerns and capabilities, as well as a range of differing local contexts. The dual approach still applies – making local and specific contact as far as possible about issues and preferences, and taking these into account when implementing mainstream activities.

3.7 Effective Methods

To effectively involve people it is essential to use a wide range of methods according to the preferences of tenants and according to the effectiveness of different methods for different purposes. It isn't useful to take a scattergun approach which chooses methods randomly from a general 'menu of options'. Methods to involve tenants need to be chosen according to the purpose of the activity.

It is certainly true that tenants have different preferences for methods of contact and involvement, but there are some aspects that all tenants prefer:

- Methods that come to them rather than tenants having to travel significant distances;
- Methods that are convenient in time as well as place;
- Methods that don't involve wading through paper and complex information.

There are some obvious factors to bear in mind when planning how to involve tenants and residents, and what methods to choose:

- People's motivation to get involved will vary directly according to the degree of change involved:



- People's willingness to get involved will vary directly according to the level of their self interest; and there is often a strong link between self interest and how local the issue is.

Choose methods that take account of these factors and likely motivation; methods probably have to be more imaginative, local and accessible if the likely motivation or interest is lower.

A good principle to remember is that 'Any activity can be carried out at any level of participation'. Look for ways to increase tenant influence in each TP activity so that there are higher level opportunities and not just information and consultation levels, if that is what tenants want. For example, a landlord can produce a newsletter and it is just information going one way, or could involve tenants in deciding content for the newsletter, writing articles, checking articles for plain language, being part of the editorial group, or even producing their own tenants' newsletter independently.

4. Why Do We Need Participation?

The answer is that effective participation improves services. The Audit Commission³ identifies three purposes for tenant participation:

- To improve services or housing stock;
- To enhance accountability to users;
- To build social capital and community capacity

These purposes would apply to improving any service or to achieving an effective outcome on a community issue. All participation activities should be planned with these underlying purposes in mind so that they enhance services, but also as a process increase accountability and develop confidence and knowledge of participants.

Tenant participation needs to take account of the wider arena of participation in relation to community development and public services participation. In return tenant participation has a depth of experience and success in involving tenants (and residents) through innovative structures and methods which can be a valuable resource in the development of participation in other services and issues.



³ "Housing: Improving Services through Resident Involvement" – Audit Commission and Housing Corporation (2004)

5. References and Useful Resources

- Audit Commission and Housing Corporation (2004) "Housing; Improving Services through Resident Involvement"
- TPAS Cymru (2007) "Resourcing Tenant Participation in Wales"
- TPAS Cymru and WTF (2008) "Journey of Influence: 20th Anniversary Review of Progress in Tenant Participation"
- TPAS Cymru (2007) "Solutions 9 – National and Local Tenant Participation Strategies"
- TPAS Cymru (2008) "LTPS Guidance and Model Action Plan"
- TPAS Cymru (2009) "Solutions 10 – Mainstreaming"
- Welsh Assembly Government (2004) "Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services in Wales"
- Welsh Assembly Government (2007) "National Strategic Framework for Community Development in Wales"
- Welsh Assembly Government (2008) "National Tenant Participation Strategy and Guidance"

How can TPAS Cymru help you to improve participation?

- TP Quality Assessment Review
- Contractor or Partnership Accreditation
- Monitoring and Evaluation Training
- TP Support Package for Supported Housing providers
- Tenant Inspector Support Package
- Housing Management for Anti-Social Behaviour Support Package
- Local Tenant Participation Strategy Support Package

TPAS Cymru is the leading tenant participation organisation in Wales. TPAS Cymru exists to make effective participation a reality throughout Wales.

TPAS Cymru provides a range of services to Tenants and Landlords:

- Training, Seminars and Conferences accessible to all
- Impartial Advice to Tenants & Landlords
- Research, Surveys and Policy Development
- Support to independent Tenant and Resident groups and their Landlords

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