

# Tenant Voice Report – Initial Draft

## 1. How do we make the regulation of social housing more tenant-focused?

Co-regulation works well when the landlord is willing and keen to meaningfully involve their tenants as with the case of Rotherham Council but is a dreadful failure with landlords who believe tenants views are not a priority particularly when driving to bring costs down. Unfortunately, there are some landlords who eschew tenant involvement not seeing tenants as partners and stakeholders in their own homes but simply recipients of a service. Whilst there is some fantastic social housing landlords who see tenants as real partners and invest widely in their tenants and properties, there are others who's focus on surplus make them less accountable to their tenants.

Rotherham Council acts as an excellent social housing landlord both resourcing an independent tenant federation that represents and stands up for tenants but has a dedicated and resourced involvement strategy creating transparency and openness in governance and decision making.

One of the tragic outcomes to the Grenfell fire has been the belated recognition of the importance of tenants voices, not just in terms of good practice in community development but on key issues such as health and safety.

Critically Rotherham Federation believes the Housing Ombudsman needs to have more powers and tenants need to have rights and influence in decision making on their homes. These rights need to be set in law rather than as dependent on the whim of the landlord. We particularly believe that the Housing Ombudsman Service should widen its scope for its definition of complaints to issues where landlords have contravened the existing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. We also welcome a greater role for the service in dealing with complaints regarding private landlords and tenants.

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## 2. How do we best ensure a voice for tenants in national standards and policy-making?

Government and landlords should both recognise and finance an independent national tenant voice. The National Tenant Organisations<sup>1</sup> all support the creation of a national tenant voice and Rotherham Federation support the steering group that has been set up to make this a reality. This initiative will need Government subsidy and recognition to ensure its sustainability.

The Federation believes that tenants should be recognised as leaders within such a voice, democratic structures of accountability and transparency to social housing tenants throughout England need to be created. Opportunities for tenants to meet and work together from different parts of the country should be supported. As well as involving individual tenants, a national tenant voice should recognise the importance of collective local organisation, including the role of Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) and Tenant Federations. The right to campaign and lobby for tenants should be facilitated and protections put in place to prevent undue influence by specific political parties of all persuasions.

The Housing Ombudsman should be given more teeth and greater control over the regulation of social housing. Co regulation only works when landlords take it seriously. We believe that tenant interests are not furthered by weakening national regulation of standards. As previously said, we would welcome widening the scope of the Service to include complaints regarding contravention of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard. We welcome improved systems in place to resolve complaints locally but do not believe that having to wait 8 weeks before a tenant can take a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman is of help. Without real teeth, the

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<sup>1</sup> The National Tenants Organisations consist of the Confederation of Cooperative Housing (CCH), Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations (NFTMO) and Tenants and Residents of England Trust (TAROE).

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Federation's recognised Designated Tenant Panel (DTP) has not made much difference in resolving complaints locally.

## **3. How do we ensure an effective voice and role for tenants with their landlords, including on estate regeneration?**

Tenant involvement should be recognised in all its forms including recognition and support for tenant organisations including Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs) and Tenant Federations. Locally, tenant organisations are recognised and supported with financial resource through either a levy (Sheffield), contract (Rotherham) or grant (Barnsley). In some parts of England however, tenant organisation has been marginalised and discouraged by landlords.

Proposals on a sustainable way forward could include:

- Introduction of a levy on all rents to be aside to support independent tenant organisations
- Landlords to recognise independent tenant organisations and voices

We recognise that more housing is needed particularly social housing and champions of new high quality social housing is important so that everyone has somewhere to live. Tenant voices should be central to key strategic decisions affecting the future of their homes. Tenants views should be at the heart of all decision making on estate regeneration, at the start of and through the whole process. Any initiative destroying communities in the name of regeneration helps no one and tenants need to be involved early on throughout key decisions affecting both their homes and their communities.

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