

Note and actions from the 9th May 2019 Tenant Advisory Panel Meeting

Together with Tenants feedback

1. The Panel considered how to balance a desire for more sector consistency with the need to allow space for tenants and residents and landlords to agree an approach that works for them?

- The Panel recommended that to achieve a nationally consistent standard that all tenants can benefit from, no matter where they live, the Together with Tenants Charter should take prominence, with any local commitments added to this version.
- The Panel believed significant change will only happen if power was ceded to tenants. Housing associations need to see the value and benefits in this, rather than just compliance. The Panel asked the Federation to consider how they would take this on board in the way the Together with Tenants action plan is developed in the short and medium term.
- The Panel shared their experiences of how to create an effective partnership with tenants (good and bad) and how important it is for this way of thinking and working to run from the Board, to an organisation's values, to customer services, and every aspect of the business. The Panel asked the Federation to consider how the proposed plan would encourage this to happen in all housing associations.

2. The Panel discussed how the National Housing Federation ensures the plan has teeth, sign-up is maximised, and when there are problems there is a route to escalate them.

- The Panel asked the National Housing Federation to consider whether a commitment to the updated Governance Code and the Charter should be mandatory for housing associations to gain National Housing Federation membership.
- The Panel shared their views on how to maximise sign-up in terms of communicating the benefits and promoting those organisations who have signed-up, on the basis that this will encourage others. They were clear that sign-up must be more than to generate a 'plaque on the wall'. They agreed that the current plan of changing the governance code and making a clear link to regulation are important levers to encourage real change, but more may need to be done.
- The Panel discussed that it will be important to support organisations to understand what 'good' looks like in relation to working in partnership with tenants, how to transfer power to tenants, what counted as good scrutiny, etc. They recommended that some national expectations of what good looks like would need to be developed and guidance would be needed.

- They recognised that the sector was keen to take the lead in improving standards and not rely on government regulation which would take time. They recommended that there should be a clear read-across from the governance code and charter to regulation, either through revised consumer standards or a different mechanism. This would show that the plan has teeth if sanctions can be imposed as required.
- In terms of escalation, the Panel agreed there should be consequences for those organisations not committing to, making improvements or reaching desired standards in relation to all aspects of working in partnership with tenants and being able to evidence the impact this has had. This should be the responsibility of the Regulator. They asked the Federation to consider how best to progress these discussions.

3. The Panel considered if the National Housing Federation should be explicit in the charter about the need for clear meaningful communication between landlords and tenants and if the language in the charter need to change to make it feel more of a partnership?

- In discussing these questions, the Panel Members overwhelmingly agreed that there should be an explicit expectation about the need for meaningful communication. In particular they recommended that the wording of the Charter needs to focus on being in partnership with tenants, promoting better communications and relations. The current wording feels like it is too landlord controlled.

4. The Panel discussed the proposal for tenant oversight of progress and performance against the Charter locally.

- In discussing the inclusion of tenant and resident oversight and reporting in the plan, they welcomed this approach as the most effective way to ensure tenants' voices were sought, heard and had impact. They did however believe that suggested approaches to oversight of the Together with Tenants Plan and the Charter may not be sufficient, particularly if housing associations continued to work with a small number of people who are already very engaged.
- They asked the Federation to consider how to encourage housing associations to work with a wider group of tenants to review and renew their plans to take an evidence-based approach to oversight and scrutiny, which may involve independent support. In implementing any new oversight plans, they asked the Federation to consider how to promote the fact that investment in tenant support and training, and possibly independent support, will be essential to make this work successfully.

5. The Panel considered whether the plan will it make a difference to the experience of tenants and residents?

- The Panel advised that the Charter should include metrics where appropriate or indicate what good would look like through examples.