

Housing Scrutiny Panel (HSP)
Scrutiny Report
Tenant Participation Review



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2017

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Glossary/Acronyms

BCC	Bristol City Council
CD	Community Development
EMS	Estate Management Service
HMB	Housing Management Board
HS	Housing Services
HSP	Housing Scrutiny Panel
NP	Neighbourhood Partnerships
SUG	Service User Group
Tenant	The term 'tenant' refers to BCC tenants and leaseholders.
TP	Tenant Participation
TPAS	National tenant engagement experts

1. About the Housing Scrutiny Panel

We are a diverse group of BCC tenants and leaseholders whose role is to take a closer look at Housing Services (The department that manages council housing). We have a wealth of life experience between us and an interest in helping Housing Services improve services to tenants and leaseholders.

Our aim is to help improve BCC Housing Services performance as well as increase tenant satisfaction and involvement.

2. Acknowledgements

This scrutiny project was carried out with the agreement and support of Housing Services Management Team. We would like to thank the councillors, managers and staff of Bristol City Council who attended meetings and provided timely information and documentation that enabled us to carry out this assessment.

We would also like to say thank you to all the tenants and leaseholders who gave their time and shared their views as part of this scrutiny project.

3. Reasons for this review

The current BCC Housing Services Tenant Participation strategy is a three year strategy adopted in 2012, which is now out of date.

The main purpose of this review is

- To establish the current position with regard to tenant participation.
- To identify any gaps and look at what needs to be in place to take tenant participation forward.
- To make recommendations that help BCC housing services evolve its approach to involving tenants.
- To support the development of a new Tenant Participation Strategy going forward.

4. Context

The panel is aware that the Council as a whole and Housing Services is going through significant change, with pressure to cut costs, drive efficiencies and deliver more with less. In light of this the panel believes that the involvement of tenants is more important than ever in shaping services and helping to effect these changes.

5. Background

There is a long history of tenant participation for BCC tenants in Bristol and there are two main streams.

- Opportunities that Bristol City Council has initiated which have involved a range of different activities and structures over the years that have enabled tenants to give their views and get involved.
- The other is at a grass roots level and is tenant initiated, and centred on tenant associations and local groups, which are self-organising and tackling issues that are important to them locally.

6. Methodology

To scrutinise Tenant Participation, the panel adopted the following approach:

- Developing an outline project plan
- Identifying the resources, time-scales and training needed
- Carrying out the project
- Analysing and discussing findings and producing a final report.

During the project the panel produced regular update reports for the Housing Management Team and involved Tenant panels.

7. Independent Expertise

The panel recognised the importance in obtaining independent external expertise, which was commissioned by Housing Services as part of the project. This would provide an impartial assessment of tenant participation and add credibility to the review.

The panel feels that the TPAS independent analysis and recommendations are consistent with and build upon the findings from the panel's review. The panel would like to see the TPAS action plan together with this report used to help shape the development of the new tenant participation strategy.

"I want tenant's feedback to be taken into account in forming policy about things that affect our homes" Tenant quote citywide survey

8. Research Undertaken

The panel used a range of methods to gather information and views. (See appendix 2)

The panel interviewed officers from across various service areas, designed and conducted surveys, spoke with involved tenants at a range of meetings and conducted many out and about discussions with tenants at Customer Service Points, community venues and at other events. The panel also carried out research to make comparisons with other social landlords and looked at good practice nationally.

In total the HSP collected the views of over 500 tenants. This equates to roughly 1.85% of BCC tenant households. Overall findings from citywide tenant's survey & involved tenant's survey see (appendix 3)

9. Overall findings

In evaluating tenant participation, the panel looked at the following areas;

9.1 Formal Tenant Participation Structure

The Council's current tenant participation structure has been in place since 2012 and aims to provide a range of opportunities; from giving views and feedback, getting involved in neighbourhoods, through to taking on more formal roles and responsibilities on panels or boards.

The formal part of the tenant participation structure consists of;

- 2 Service User Groups
- Housing Scrutiny Panel
- Housing Management Board

(These panels have also been reviewed individually (see appendix 4)

Strengths

The formal structure mainly relies on a core group of committed tenants and dedicated staff who donate a significant amount of time to tenant participation. For tenants it offers an opportunity to meet directly with staff and for the service, panels act as a sounding board and a way of consulting directly with tenants on an in depth basis.

"I don't have much spare time to get involved, so I would not want it to be wasted."
Tenant Quote from Citywide Survey

Weaknesses

The formal structure is not joined up, the panels do not consistently communicate with each other or share good practise. Many of the same individuals attend more than one group and the intake of new tenants getting involved has slowed over recent years. Representation on panels as a whole; anecdotally one concern has always been that they do not reflect the views of the majority of tenants as evidence suggests that the profile of people within the involved structure does not reflect the profile of people living in council housing.

Research suggests joining formal tenant panels is not the most popular option for engagement. Digital options, focus groups and meeting with Housing staff locally regarding local issues are preferred. Attending meetings is often inaccessible to the majority of tenants and feedback from the citywide tenant survey reinforces this view.

There is a lack of communication and understanding regarding the difference tenant involvement has made to the service. Feedback from both meetings and the involved tenant's survey reinforces this view. Lots of tenants we spoke to didn't know what 'Tenant Participation' means or that they could get involved.

9.2 How tenants can get involved in their neighbourhoods

The involvement of tenants in their local communities is supported by Community Development & Neighbourhood Management teams. Housing Resources were allocated to these teams from mid-April 2014 to support local involvement. The panel is aware of lots of changes for this service over the coming 12 – 18 months, as Neighbourhood Partnerships are currently under review.

The CD team works across Bristol including areas with Council (BCC) Housing Stock. The team has been developing an asset based approach and work in partnership with the Estate Management Service.

Estate Management staff also have a key role in enabling tenant involvement. This can include attendance at tenant's meetings, working with tenants to resolve tenancy management issues, estate improvements, community cohesion or tackling anti-social behaviour. The panel is aware that this service has also been going through a period of change and that staffing of the service hasn't been at full capacity in the last year. EMS has been carrying out a recruitment drive to fill housing officer vacancies and Housing Services are also introducing mobile working arrangements which will give tenants greater access to housing officers within neighbourhoods.

46% of the tenants who responded to the survey said they get involved in some form of community activities where they live. Tenants also said meeting a housing officer in their area to sort out local issues was one of the highest choices in how they wanted to be involved.

"I would love to be more involved, especially with all the cuts being made to BCC recently" Tenant Quote citywide survey

Strengths

Tenant involvement at a local level is currently being carried out by a range of staff from across the organisation, which is a positive step.

Weaknesses

Anecdotal evidence suggests that historically there has been a low level BCC tenant involvement in Neighbourhood partnerships and forums. Unfortunately there is insufficient profiling data on residents attending NP's and forums to be able to establish how many council tenants actually go to meetings. This also applies to Community Development, where residents are defined in terms of where they live not by who their landlord is; consequently there is no profiling data on how many tenants get involved.

9.3 How tenants give their views and feedback about the service

Tenant engagement activities include ongoing tenant feedback and satisfaction surveys, tenant consultation, ad hoc focus groups, tenant newsletter and social media. Feedback about performance is reported through Housing News and the Annual Report to tenants.

Satisfaction Survey results

Annually the tenant satisfaction survey is sent to a random sample of 5,000 – 6,000 tenants across the city (About 20% of tenants) in order to get a minimum of 1500-2000 responses. (Leaseholders are not currently included)

Qu) Tenants are asked in the survey how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with Housing Services in terms of listening to their views and acting on them?

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Trend
Total	58%	56%	58%	56%	61%	55%	↓

(Indicators show that satisfaction in this area has declined)

Strengths

Housing services has advised that they are in the process of improving their ongoing programme of tenant satisfaction surveys and ways to better understand the tenant experience. Linked to this is the development of a new Improving Tenant Experience (ITE) project that will enable better delivery of services across Housing Services. Findings from our research revealed that tenants are interested in their landlord's performance; this was supported by its ranking within areas of interest in the citywide survey and from anecdotal evidence.

Weaknesses

Feedback from both meetings and the citywide survey suggests that many tenants were not aware they could get involved and have their say. And those that did were not aware of what difference this had made.

The pace of changes within the council means that it is difficult for tenants to keep up to speed. Housing news which includes information about changes to services and how to contact the council is going online.

'I was not aware my views could influence the service' quote from tenants meeting

9.4 Tenant Participation supporting policy and documents

The following supporting policy documents underpin Tenant Participation.

- Tenant Participation Strategy 2012 – 2015
- Tenant Participation Partnership agreement 2012
- Housing Services 'Tenant Involvement & Empowerment' Service Standard

Strengths

The existing strategy is linked to the business plan and sets out clear aims and objectives for the period. The strategy offers a wide range of involvement opportunities and clear structure for involvement. The existing strategy sets out a clear single code of conduct and expectations for all involved tenants and groups.

Weaknesses

The current Tenant Participation strategy is out of date and a number of changes have taken place since its design. The same applies to the Tenant Participation Partnership Agreement which is a lengthy document that is also out of date and includes a number of other key documents which also require reviewing.

9.5 Resources for Tenant Involvement

Tenant Participation activities are supported by 1.5 dedicated staff (0.5 Tenant Scrutiny & Service Improvement Manager, 1 x Tenant Participation Project Officer) and Service Managers. Support is also provided in the form of a dedicated meeting / training space, a resource centre for involved tenants and an annual budget of £70k.

Resources include support for tenant panels, provision of training for tenants, expenses and funding, supporting scrutiny projects, memberships and independent support for tenant panels, delivering training to staff.

Housing Resources are allocated to Neighbourhood Management / Community Development to support the involvement of tenants in their local communities. (See 9. 2)How tenants get involved in their local neighbourhoods).

Strengths

The current Tenant Partnership Agreement (2012) makes specific reference to the allocation of resources for tenant involvement and Housing Services provides a dedicated annual budget, financed from the Housing Revenue Account.

Weaknesses

Resources that support tenant participation including, expenditure, access to training and conferences etc. is not currently reported to or monitored by tenants. The service recognises that currently it has limited dedicated staff resources (1.5 staff for TP).

"I used to go to meetings and they ask you what you think, but you never find out if they do anything" Tenant quote Citywide Survey

9.6 Communication / Provision of information

Housing Services currently use a range of ways to communicate and promote involvement including Housing News, BCC website, Facebook and through staff. Communication came very high as an area the Housing Service tenants were interested in and lots of people said they just wanted to be kept informed. Newsletters, followed by email / e-bulletin were the top ways tenants wanted to receive information and find out about opportunities to get involved.

Strengths

Over the past year BCC has improved its website, introduced digital pages, and other communication channels such as social media. Housing Services are looking at ways to improve its digital offer to tenants in relation to accessing services through the new 'Improving the Tenant Experience' (ITE) Project.

Weaknesses

BCC have closed customer services points, around the city except for 100 Temple St that is near to the centre of Bristol. Customer service points provided a local place where people could go to get information or help with council services. Housing Services Newsletter is going on-line to make savings, and it is unclear how tenants will know when new editions come out; or how they will access a copy if they are not online. The panel has concerns generally that some tenants may be digitally excluded.

10. Good practise research

The panel researched tenant involvement practises nationally and looked at a mix of Social Housing organisations. The panel found that tenant involvement is changing in response to the challenging environment and some housing organisations are incorporating new and creative approaches as well as traditional ones to engage tenants.

Research suggests that the new ways of involving tenants has the potential to offer greater levels of influence to a larger number and more diverse range of tenants. And Increase the efficiency and value for money of tenant involvement.

**“Tenant involvement needs to be part of the culture, understood by all staff”
Involved tenants quote**

10. Conclusions & Final statement

The HSP reviewed tenant participation during a period of change for BCC and Housing Services. Overall the combined impact of these changes means that it's even more important that there are opportunities for tenants to have a real say in the way in which their homes and neighbourhoods are managed. The HSP acknowledge there is a drive in the delivery of services towards a more digital approach and this also needs to be reflected in tenant involvement structures in the future.

The HSP has identified the following priorities:

- o How we ensure tenants are at the centre of service and business improvement. A good proportion of our involvement has been based in the past on a traditional, meeting based, structure. We feel this could be strengthened with more influence from other tenants by capturing as much feedback as possible using a range of ways.
- o How we communicate with tenants and ensure they have enough information to be able to make the choice to get involved and give their views and in a way that suits them.
- o How we monitor and feedback about the difference tenant involvement has made.

In carrying out this review there are a number of recommendations that the HSP feels could be taken relatively easily to improve the effectiveness of tenant involvement. However the HSP recognises that longer term or more fundamental changes to the structure may be more difficult until the impact of BCC and Housing changes are known.

Future aspirations of Tenant Participation

The HSP is keen to support Housing Services to pioneer new ways of working to engage with even greater numbers of tenants. As a result, the panel's aspiration for BCC Housing Service, as one of the largest social housing landlords in the country, is to become a leader in the housing sector, recognised for delivering the very highest levels of tenant engagement and involvement.

**“Tenant participation works when people can see it makes a difference”
Councillor Paul Smith, Bristol City Council April 2017.**

Appendix 1

Priority Area	Recommendations	Addressing which issue	Objective
<p>1.Tenant Participation supporting policy</p> <p>TP Report page 8 section 9.4</p>	<p>Due to the current changes produce an interim strategy and statement that sets out the core principles of tenant involvement for the next 12-18 months. Following this produce a TP strategy which reflects the new working environment and incorporates tenant-led scrutiny and co-regulation requirements.</p>	<p>The current strategy is out of date and a number of changes have taken place since its design. The council and Housing Service are going through a period of transformation and the current structure and mechanisms for involvement are not well connected and need to link better to decision making processes in the council.</p>	<p>To provide a clear approach for tenant involvement that delivers positive outcomes and value for money and can be understood by tenants, staff and other stakeholders. And sets out how BCC Housing Service is meeting the regulatory requirements for tenant involvement.</p>
<p>2. Formal Tenant Participation Structure</p> <p>TP Report Page 5, 9.1</p>	<p>To carry out a self-assessment exercise with Service User Groups (SUGs); and come up with new ways of working, which link more effectively into the scrutiny and governance structure.</p> <p>To provide suitable opportunities for tenant membership at board level, ensuring tenants can continue to have a recognised role, influencing and shaping council housing at the highest level.</p>	<p>It is unclear what role SUGs now have in monitoring and scrutinising the service. Evidence suggests SUGs are no longer fit for purpose nor have the same impact.</p> <p>The new mayoral system has led to the role of the HMB being unclear as decision making occurs outside of the board’s jurisdiction. To meet regulatory requirements co-regulation arrangements need strengthening.</p>	<p>To ensure there is tenant involvement in setting, monitoring and achieving service standards and provide tenants with stronger, tenant led roles in scrutinising and influencing Housing service.</p> <p>To involve tenants in governing the service, shaping BCC housing business plan, co-production of policy, and standards.</p>

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<p>3. Widening Tenant Participation</p> <p>TP report page 5, section 9.1</p>	<p>To investigate online channels to increase participation and cater for the expectations of younger tenants. For e.g. a virtual group or online 'Your View' panel which could act as a sounding board.</p> <p>To also look at other ways tenants can get involved like short term topic specific task and finish groups, one-off focus groups and workshops.</p>	<p>Only a small group of tenants attend formal meetings. Research suggests joining formal panels is not the most popular option for tenant engagement and attending meetings is often inaccessible to the majority of tenants.</p>	<p>To widen and modernise tenant participation and involve a more diverse range of tenants at all levels in ways that suit them.</p> <p>To increase the number of tenant's views that are taken into account in shaping and designing services.</p>
<p>4. How tenants can get involved in their neighbourhoods</p> <p>TP report page 6 section 9.2</p>	<p>To build upon partnership working between Community Development (CD) & Estate Services (ES) to get tenants more involved in their communities. Particularly when a tenant moves into an area / starts a tenancy.</p> <p>Moving forward, CD must produce annual reports for Housing Management Board/ Housing Scrutiny Panel to show how they are working/supporting local Communities.</p>	<p>HRA money was transferred over to Community Development and evidence suggests Housing Services may have lost sight of what is happening locally to involve tenants.</p> <p>The links between TP, CD work and ES roles in promoting tenant involvement and sustainable communities is unclear.</p> <p>Anecdotal evidence suggests that in the past there has been a low level of BCC tenant involvement in Neighbourhood partnerships & forums.</p>	<p>To encourage and Increase tenant participation at community level. To make sure tenants have a greater say in improving local services and neighbourhoods.</p> <p>To work in partnership with other resident involvement teams in the council and other social housing landlords to support and encourage tenants to get involved in their local communities.</p>

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<p>5. How tenants give their views and feedback</p> <p>TP Report page 7, section 9.3</p>	<p>Measure the value of tenant involvement, in order to show the difference tenant involvement has made.</p> <p>Publicise and give feedback so tenants know how their opinions have helped shape policy and services 'You said we did'.</p> <p>Include leaseholder's views in the annual satisfaction survey.</p>	<p>Evidence suggests many tenants are not aware they can get involved and have their say, and those that did were not aware of the difference there involvement has made. Overall tenant satisfaction with Housing Services in terms of listening to tenant's views and acting on them has declined in recent years. Evidence suggests more needs to do be done to capture and monitor tenant involvement activities and outcomes better. Leaseholder's views are not currently collected in the annual satisfaction survey.</p>	<p>To communicate with tenants and feedback where and how their involvement has made a difference.</p> <p>Improve tenant confidence and satisfaction levels.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for leaseholder's to have their say and influence services.</p>
<p>6. Resources for tenant involvement</p> <p>TP Report page 8, section 9.5</p>	<p>Continue to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to tenant participation including dedicated TP staff and that resourcing is reviewed and monitored annually to ensure it enables the delivery of a new strategy. Including communication, promotion and support to tenants and guidance and training for staff to bring staff up to date and enable more staff to involve tenants as part of their job.</p>	<p>The service has limited dedicated TP resources.</p> <p>Capacity of staff to deliver new initiatives including supporting mayoral priorities.</p>	<p>To ensure there are enough dedicated TP resources to deliver new initiatives whilst maintaining existing arrangements and supporting BCC Housing Services to meet the regulatory requirements and service standards.</p>

Appendix 2 - Research undertaken

As part of the project the panel used a range of methods to gather information, look good practise and collect the views of council tenants, leaseholders, staff and other stakeholders.

- The panel met with Housing Service Directors and executive member for housing.
- Carried out a desk top review of performance information, including the Annual tenant's satisfaction survey results.
- Looked at publications, leaflets, newsletter, web pages and other methods of communication currently used to promote tenant involvement.
- Carried out interviews - Speaking to senior managers, staff from Housing Services and the Neighbourhood Management service including Neighbourhood Partnerships and Community Development.
- Met/ interviewed Leaseholder Team Leader and Support to Older People manager.
- Designed surveys to get the views of involved tenants and tenants citywide; this was promoted on the council's website. Information also went into Housing News and on Tenant participation Facebook pages.
- Held roadshows promoting the survey and talked to tenants and leaseholders around the city, in customer service points.
- Gathered views from board members, SUG members, and individual tenants, through attending meetings and our involved tenant's survey.
- Sent out an email to the involved tenants and leaseholders on the Tenant Participation database.
- Attended TPAS tenant networking event to meet and gather good practise.
- Visited with other local authorities and Housing organisations looking at good practice and researching new ideas around tenant involvement.
- Through the core cities network asked for info on how others are carrying out involvement.
- Attended a selection of Neighbourhood Partnerships and Forums during February / March 2017.
- Visited a selection of tenant groups / coffee mornings to promote the survey and discuss tenant involvement across the city during January and February.
- Publicised info in other places like libraries and community spaces to encourage tenants to get involved.
- Designed a poster to promote the survey to go up in housing blocks and schemes citywide distributed via the Caretaking Teams, Supported Housing Team, Housing advisors.
- Visited a number of other community organisations which were suggested to us as examples of good practise.

Appendix 3 - Tenant Participation Review – Survey findings

From October to mid-March 2017 the Housing Scrutiny Panel (HSP) conducted two surveys as part of a review of tenant participation; one with already involved tenants who were members of recognised panels and the other with tenants citywide. Throughout this report the word 'tenant' refers to both tenants and leaseholders of Bristol City Council (BCC).

The purpose was to:

- Find out if tenants were aware they could get involved and have their say, and what areas of the Housing service interest them.
- Find out how tenants would prefer to get involved and give their feedback.
- Find out how groups/ panels that are part of the formal tenant participation structure within Housing Services are currently working in practise.

Citywide Survey

127 tenants completed the survey (0.47% of tenant households). Although a lot of different methods were used to publicise the citywide tenant's survey there was a relatively low response. However these surveys were only part of the review process. The HSP also collected feedback and comments from talking to tenants. In total the HSP collected the views of over 500 tenants. This equates to roughly 1.85% of BCC tenant households.

Results - Tenants were asked:

- 1) If they knew they could get involved and have their say in improving the housing service.

51% said yes

48% said no

- 2) What subjects they were most interested in.

The top 3 choices were

- 1) Repairs
- 2) Improving my local area
- 3) Tenant communication

Followed closely by

- 4) Tackling Anti-social behaviour
- 5) My landlord's performance

Other suggestion included; rehousing, parking, and services to older people

- 3) How they would prefer to engage.

The top 3 choices were

- 1) Internet / online surveys / Email surveys
- 2) Meeting a housing officer in my local area to sort out local issues
- 3) Workshop or focus group

4) The amount of time they could spare to get involved.

The top 3 choices were

- 1) Once a month
- 2) Just like to be kept informed
- 3) 3-4 times a year

5) What support or incentives would be helpful in return for their time.

Most respondents said out of pocket expenses to attend meetings (including travel costs).

6) If there was anything that would prevent them from getting involved.

57% said yes
43% said no

Comments included; work, looking for work, health, transport, confidence, carer's responsibilities, college, childcare, language barriers, and apathy/ not interested, council doesn't listen, not online.

7) If they get involved in their local community.

46% said yes
47% said no

Activities included; Coffee mornings, trustees of local groups, volunteering, community group, mums group, bingo, church groups, helping out neighbours, delivering local newsletters, community bus, gardening groups.

8) How they would prefer to find out about opportunities to get involved.

Top 3 choices were

- 1) By newsletter
- 2) By email / e-bulletin
- 3) From local places, library, supermarket, community centre etc.

9) If they had any other ideas and suggestions about how they would like to get involved.

Suggestions included:

- Get people involved who are on the waiting list.
- Tenants helping the council to write in plain English
- Community networking / Connecting with others building possible support
- Help to set up community groups, gardening groups etc.
- Tenants who have internet can help others and share info
- Computer classes / help people to get online
- Online think tank or a facility to bring up ideas and make comments which others can see and respond to
- Better info when people move in

10) If they had access to the internet.

74% said yes

26% said no

11) If they had an email address.

70% said yes

30% said no

12) If they would be interested in joining the BCC Tenant Participation involvement database.

42% said yes (These will be followed up directly by Tenant Participation)

58% said no

Findings;

- About half of respondents didn't know they could get involved and have their say.
- The way BCC Housing Services communicates with tenants and provides information is important to them.
- The top choice for finding out about opportunities to get involved was a newsletter.
- Many respondents just wanted to be kept informed.
- Joining formal tenant groups or panels is not the most popular option for engagement
- Digital options, focus groups and meeting with Housing staff locally regarding local issues are preferred.
- Over half of respondents said there were things that would prevent them getting involved.
- Around half the respondents got involved in their local communities.
- Roughly two thirds said they had access to the internet and had an email address.
- About half were interested in being involved themselves and the majority of those were tenants who have not been previously involved.

Involved tenants survey

23 involved tenants responded (Approx. 76 % of tenants actively involved in formal panels)

The HSP asked tenants to answer the questions by ticking boxes marked 1-3. 1. Low - Not confident / little knowledge. 2. Medium - Some understanding, but not very confident. 3. High - Fully understand, feel able to fully participate. Some questions also contained a commentary box for tenants to write their thoughts.

Results – Involved tenants were asked the following.

- 1) Their understanding of the role and responsibilities of the groups they were involved with.
61% said 3 – High
39% said 2 – Medium
- 2) Their understanding of the role and responsibilities as a member of a group.
61% said 3 – High
39% said 2 – Medium
- 3) Their understanding of the area of Housing service the group looks at and how the service is currently being delivered.
52% said 2 – Medium
44% said 3 – High
4% said 1- Low
- 4) If they feel able and confident enough to express opinions as a member of the group at meetings?
61% said 3 – High
39% said 2 – Medium
- 5) If they feel able and confident enough to challenge the Housing service and others in an appropriate way.
48% said 3 – High
44% said 2 – Medium
9% said 1 – Low
- 6) If they feel they have a good understanding of the environment in which the Housing service and council operates.
61% said 2 – Medium
30% said 3 – High
9% said 1 – Low
- 7) If they have an understanding of what performance monitoring means.
48% said 3 – High
48% said 2 – Medium
4% said 1 – Low

8) If they know how the Housing service is currently monitored and how this is reported.

48% said 2 – Medium

43% said 3 – High

9% said 1 – Low

9) If they understand the opportunities for tenants to participate in the decision making process and where the group they are involved with fits in.

61% said 3 – High

39% said 2 – Medium

Comments included:

- Not sure anymore how the Service user groups connect to the other groups.
- It's important for tenants to be involved to enable changes to be made for their benefit.
- Don't really understand how tenants influence decision making or how this is reported or monitored.

10) If they are aware of the councils equal opportunities policy and standards that apply to groups.

52% said 2 – Medium

48% said 3 High

11) If they felt they have been offered the appropriate training and support to take an active part in the group.

57% said 2 – Medium

26% said 3 – High

17% said 1 – Low

Comments included:

- More information on scrutiny and performance monitoring
- Training on the role of the chair / vice chair.

12) If they had received feedback about how the group has influenced the Housing service area.

65% said 3 High

26% said 2 Medium

9% said 1 Low

Comments included:

- It would be good to know how tenants at meetings have made a difference
- Yes we receive feedback but it's confusing
- Reports have been received back from a BCC department where a project has been done. However some reports have taken a long time to be received.

13) How long they had been involved in tenant participation activities.

- 44% said over 10 years
- 13% said over 5 years
- 26% said 1-3 years
- 17% said less than 1 year

14) If they have access to the internet and have an email address.

- 87% said yes to internet access
- 13% said no to internet access
- 78% said yes to an email address
- 22% said no to an email address

Findings

- Nearly two thirds of those who responded said they fully understood the role and responsibilities of the groups they were involved with.
- Nearly two thirds said they felt they had some understanding but were not confident about the environment in which the Housing service and council operates.
- Over half said they didn't feel confident enough to challenge the Housing service and others in an appropriate way.
- Over half said they had some or little understanding about performance management or the way in which the Housing service area is monitored.
- Over half said they had some understanding but were not confident about the council's equal opportunities policy and the standards that relate to the groups they are involved with.
- Over 50% said they had been involved for more than five years.
- Over half said they felt they had been offered training and support but did not feel fully confident.

Appendix 4 - Formal Groups and Panels

Monitoring and scrutinising services

1. Service user groups (SUGS)

SUGS role is to provide a monitoring and scrutiny function that is an essential element of BCC Housing Services self-assessment/ co-regulatory requirements. There are currently two SUGS. These two SUGs focus on Estate Management and the Repairs Service, and encompass rents, Support to older people, ASB, caretaking and planned programmes.

Strengths

A steady group of tenants attend each SUG, monitoring and scrutinising service performance on a quarterly and annual basis. These tenants also get involved in service improvement projects. Tenants who attend are mainly longstanding involved tenants and are typically trained, engaged, and experienced.

The managers we interviewed told us SUGs help to challenge the service and hold it to account and provide a reality check and insight into how things are working on the ground.

Weaknesses

There is a static group of tenants involved, and many attend both SUGS. The intake of new tenants has also slowed due to a number of factors, including lack of active recruitment. In 2012 the typical numbers attending SUG meetings was between 10 – 20, and we are informed the average is now between 5 – 10. Both tenants and managers said they would like to see some new people coming along.

The regularity of meetings has also varied over the years and sometimes clash with other panels meetings, because of the limited number of tenants involved, tenants sometimes find themselves stretched.

The SUGs have an important role in monitoring and tracking performance and can highlight any issues with a service to the HSP; however this is not currently happening. The SUGs used to do an annual report where they reflected on the difference the groups involvement had made. This has not been carried out in recent years and it is currently unclear how the impact of tenant involvement is monitored or evaluated. The managers we interviewed raised questions around whether the groups are still effective and fit for purpose as they are.

Planning for the future

The HSP recognise that SUGs are currently the only face to face opportunity that tenants and the Housing service has to regularly meet with each other and review the performance of services. However evidence suggests that they may no longer have the same impact or be fit for purpose in their current state.

Housing Scrutiny Panel Report – Tenant Participation Review

As Housing are going through a period of change the HSP recommends that SUGs continue to act as a sounding board for the present time, but carry out a self-assessment exercise and consider new ways of working. As part of this SUGs need to look at how they are 'working with' services to monitor performance, track progress against tenants' priorities and trace the SUGs interventions to any improvements.

Any changes to the way SUGs are currently working will also need to be reflected in the terms of reference and be made clear so tenants, staff and managers understand their roles and the purpose of these groups.

2. Housing Scrutiny Panel (HSP)

The Housing Scrutiny Panel, established in 2012, takes an independent and objective view of the performance of Bristol City Council Housing Services. The panel operates on behalf of all Bristol City Council tenants to review, assess and challenge, ensuring that Bristol City Council provides tenant-centred landlord services of the highest standard. The Panel considers all areas of service performance against agreed local and national standards and makes evidence based recommendations for on-going service improvements.

TPAS met and interviewed the panel as part of the independent review of tenant participation. The findings are summarised below, and are supported by evidence collected from staff and by HSP own self-assessment.

Strengths

The HSP is an Independent panel and carry out regular recruitment as part of succession planning to ensure membership of the group. The panel have seen the evidence of scrutiny's impact on service delivery; the HSP has carried out a number of reviews and produced reports with recommendations which have been adopted by the council.

Weaknesses

Housing scrutiny panel is not well linked with the wider involvement structure and a lot of tenants may be unaware of what scrutiny means/does. Scrutiny projects can sometimes be lengthy and require a big commitment from the tenants involved.

Planning for the future

The HSP recognises it needs to ensure that projects are outcome focused and continue to monitor the impact (what has changed) as a result of scrutiny. The panel also need to consider the recommendations made by TPAS as part of the review.

3. Governing the service

Housing Management Board - HMB

The HMB is integral to the tenant participation structure. Its role is to be a strategic body overseeing the direction of the business. There are places for six tenant representatives on the board. The group should meet on a 6 weekly basis.

Strengths

Allocating spaces on the Housing Management Board to tenants helps to ensure that transparency extends right to the top of Housing Services and provides opportunities for partnership working between, tenants, councillors and senior managers. The HMB provides a reality check, tenant perspective and information from the ground. In the past the HMB has helped housing services agree high level objectives.

Tenants on the board go through a rigorous recruitment process and volunteer as individuals bringing their own skills, experience and knowledge and provide a 'tenant voice' on the board. Opportunities have in the past been well publicised citywide and any tenant who is interested is invited to apply.

Weaknesses

The new mayoral system, has led to the role of the Housing Management Board being unclear as decision making occurs outside of the boards jurisdiction. Communication links between the HMB and the rest of the structure has weakened. Meeting regularity has also varied over the last 12- 18 months and tenant attendance has been waning.

Planning for the future

The HSP are aware that plans are in place to revise the role of the Housing Management Board to make sure it works more effectively, and links better to the rest of the structure.

The Executive Member for Housing met with the HSP and shared his aspirations for the HMB, which include being linked to the Homes board.

The HSP understand the homes board brings together representatives from different areas of the housing sector to look at issues relating to housing generally in the city.

The HSP is keen to ensure tenants can continue to have a recognised role at the highest level in governance and decision making about council housing, and want to keep an open communication with the Executive member and Senior Management Team around any new model.