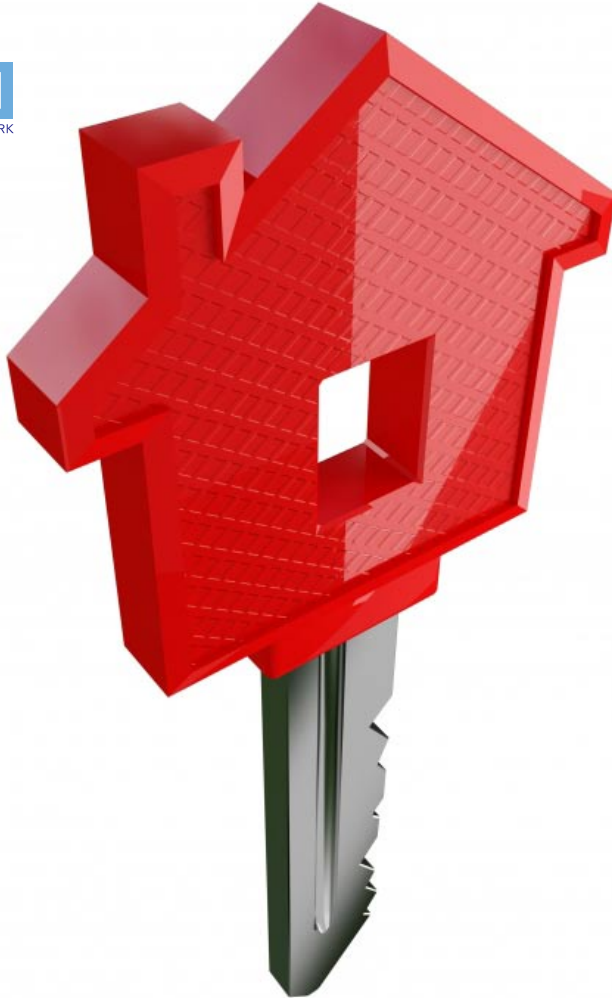


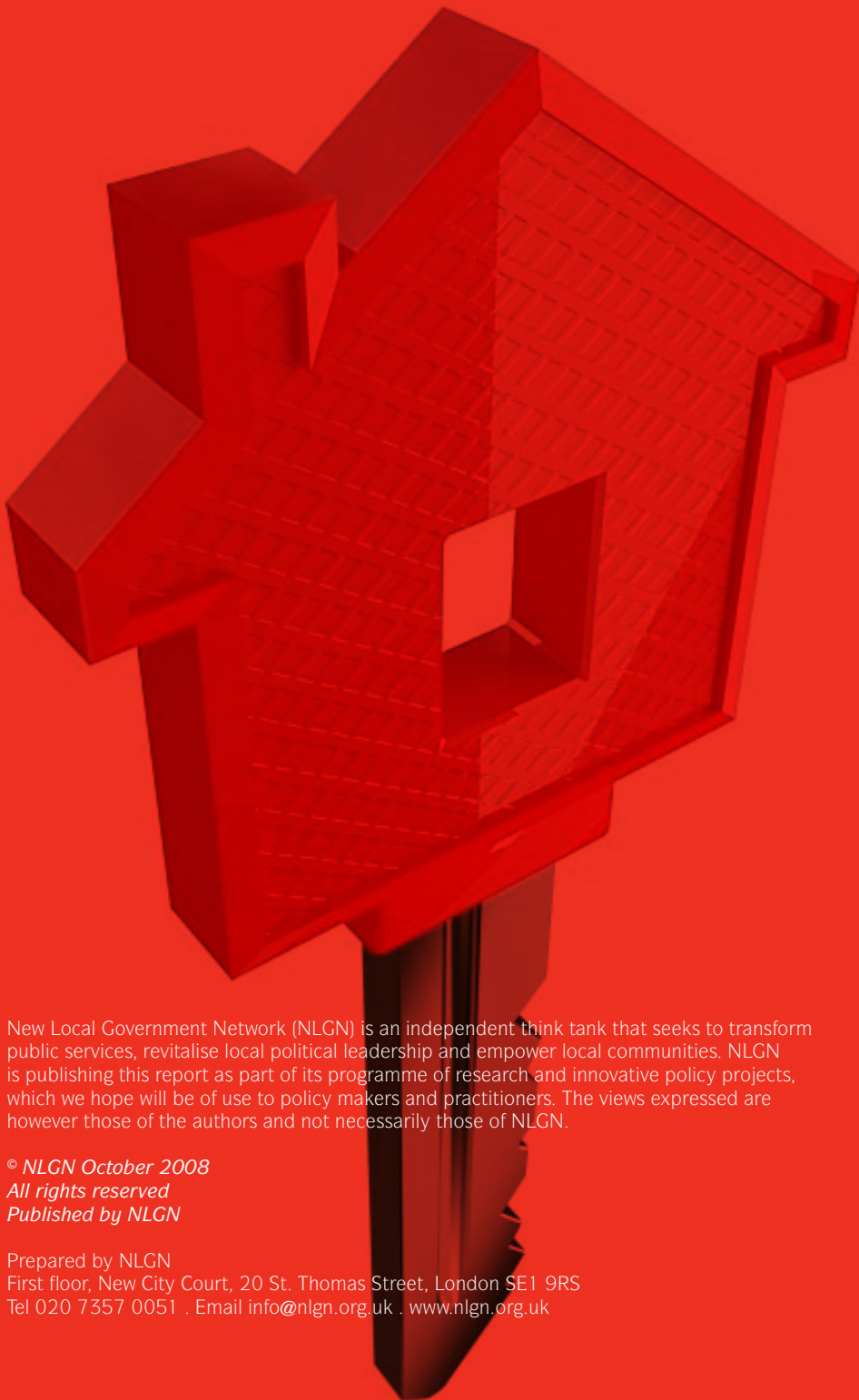
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Tenant Empowerment

What the new regulatory regime must deliver

Ian Keys



New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this report as part of its programme of research and innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

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Ian Keys

Ian has worked in the public sector for more than 25 years. Having trained as a teacher, he went on to become an elected trade union officer, held senior management positions at Reading and Lewisham councils, was a director of Compass Government Services, then Director of Transforming Public Services at the New Local Government Network (NLGN) and, for the last 6 years, has been a Director with Pinnacle.

A keen believer in the necessity for public service modernisation, he has contributed to many of the key pieces of research and public debates over the last few years, most particularly in the procurement, partnership, housing, sustainable communities and e-government fields.

He was a member of the social housing sub-Group that contributed to the Conservatives' 2007 review, '*Restoring Pride in our Public Services*', is currently the Specialist Advisor on the Strategic Commissioning theme to the government's Beacon Council scheme and is also advising DCLG on the development of a commissioning vision for local government.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Phil Morgan, Chief Executive of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) for his input and critiquing of this paper.

Ian Keys

October 2008

Foreword

Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 signals a sea-change in our approach to regulating social housing in England as, for the first time, the interests of the tenant rather than the landlord or service provider will be put centre-stage.

The debates in the Houses of Parliament on the Bill were unusual in generating passion and substantial amendments, many of which the Government accepted. Spanning all three main political parties, the breadth of the debate, particularly in the Lords, was wide and the depth of engagement with tenant and housing representative organisations formidable. I was delighted to have played a part in this, getting back to my previous life in public sector housing and promoting tenant empowerment.

The baton for delivering truly tenant-centred regulation now passes to the embryonic Tenant Services Authority and that organisation, true to the tenor and direction of the law-makers' debates, is inviting contributions on how the aims of tenants, articulated in the Cave and Hills Reviews, can practically be delivered.

This paper, written by one of the driving personalities behind much of the crafting of ideas, drafting of amendments and intensive lobbying, responds to that invitation drawing on the details of the Act, transferred good practice and the articulated tenants' agenda. It is a serious contribution that picks up from where the debates in Parliament finished.

Geoffrey Filkin

House of Lords

Introduction

The passage of the Housing & Regeneration Act (HRA) in July set up the new Regulator, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) for the social housing sector.

Initially affecting only housing associations or Registered Social Landlord (RSLs), the government is committed to extending the regulation regime to cover local authorities as well within 2 years.

The forthcoming statement on the Regulator's function, guidance on the handling of complaints and a Code of Practice (which is similar to the Highway Code and puts into practice the standards required in social housing) will be the principal outputs that tenants will see in the short term and it will be in the Code where most of their aspirations are embodied.

But what do tenants want the regulator to achieve and how can the provisions of the new Act help them? Are there any areas that still require governmental action?

This paper attempts to crystallise the detail that will be needed for the new regulatory regime to work well and most importantly, how residents will be engaged to lend it legitimacy. It has been written as a contribution to the 'National Conversation' on these and related matters about to be launched by the TSA and we hope that all parties will find it helpful.

1 *How the new Act helps*

The Act itself is wide-ranging and it is Part 2 that deals with the objectives and duties of new regulator. Within it there are a combination of specific powers and duties for the regulator and the option to introduce a number of codes of practice or guidance on particular aspects to help in their delivery. It is the interplay between these that will determine whether or not the regulatory outcomes of the Act will be realised in practice.

The Fundamental Objectives for the regulator are set out in s86 of the Act and cover 10 areas of public issues and local problems:

Fundamental objectives

The regulator shall perform its functions with a view to achieving the following objectives so far as possible.

Objective 1 is to encourage and support a supply of well-managed social housing, of appropriate quality, sufficient to meet reasonable demands.

Objective 2 is to ensure that actual or potential tenants of social housing have an appropriate degree of—

(a) choice, and

(b) protection.

Objective 3 is to ensure that tenants of social housing have the opportunity to be involved in its management.

Objective 4 is to ensure that registered providers of social housing perform their functions efficiently, effectively and economically.

Objective 5 is to ensure that registered providers of social housing are financially viable and properly managed.

Objective 6 is to encourage registered providers of social housing to contribute to the environmental, social and economic well-being of the areas in which the housing is situated.

Objective 7 is to encourage investment in social housing (including by promoting the availability of financial services to registered providers of social housing).

Objective 8 is to avoid the imposition of an unreasonable burden (directly or indirectly) on public funds.

Objective 9 is to guard against the misuse of public funds.

Objective 10 is to regulate in a manner which—

(a) minimises interference, and

(b) is proportionate, consistent, transparent and accountable

There is a general provision in s195 of the Act for the regulator to issue a Code of Practice (CoP) which relates to a matter addressed by a standard and amplifies the standard. This means that details of what is expected of social housing managers will be contained in the Code of Practice.

Standards are defined under s193 of the Act as:

- a.** criteria for allocating accommodation;
- b.** terms of tenancies;
- c.** levels of rent (and the rules may, in particular, include provision for minimum or maximum levels of rent or levels of increase or decrease of rent);
- d.** maintenance;
- e.** procedures for addressing complaints by tenants against landlords;
- f.** methods for consulting and informing tenants;
- g.** methods of enabling tenants to influence or control the management of their accommodation and environment;
- h.** policies and procedures required by section 218A of the Housing Act 1996 (c. 52) in connection with anti-social behaviour;
- i.** landlords' contribution to the environmental, social and economic well-being of the areas in which their property is situated; and
- j.** estate management.

Additionally, the regulator can issue guidance under 3 provisions in the Act: (i) s97 to advance the Fundamental Objectives of the regulator; (ii) s215(1)(a) concerning Registered Providers performance and (iii) s215(1)(b) on how the regulator intends to use its Regulatory and Enforcement powers under Chapters 6 & 7 that deal with the TSA's regulatory powers and its enforcement powers against a Registered Provider.

2 *The tenants' agenda*

Tenants are as much swayed by the undercurrents and developments in our country as we all are as citizens. Accordingly they, too, have developed the same kinds of expectations around customer service, engagement and service flexibility and responsiveness. However, with less economic power, they have fewer opportunities for demonstrating it.

Moreover, tenant campaigners such as TPAS have, for many years, powerfully advocated thorough-going involvement at the heart of their landlord's activities, only to be held at arms-length for most of that time. With the Hills and Cave reviews of social housing in the last 2 years, the momentum of the tenants' campaign has crystallised into received wisdom, much of which has been incorporated into the Housing and Regeneration Act and consequently in the objectives and responsibilities of the Homes and Communities Agency and Tenant Services Authority it set up.

The societal undercurrents carrying tenants and the rest of us along have been the subject of much research and the 2006 NHF¹ Tenant Involvement Commission² surveyed and identified those undercurrents for social housing:

1. Get the basics right and go the extra mile
2. Give us a choice
3. Make involvement personal
4. Be accountable

A full summary of the findings appears in the Appendix.

These are not just things landlords and suppliers do, but rather something they are. Landlords and suppliers must build on the basic premise that customers are interested in outcomes, not processes. This means creating and sustaining a corporate culture that is passionate about customers in order to deliver a balanced exchange of value between suppliers, partners,

1 National Housing Federation

2 http://www.housing.org.uk/Uploads/File/Campaigns/TIC_report.pdf

authorities, tenants and employees. It is not a destination, but a state of mind that requires constant innovation to remain relevant to the tenant.

To be relevant to tenants, therefore, the new TSA regulation regime needs to be driven by outcomes and the 4 undercurrents (above) that contribute to them.

The outcomes desired by tenants and the communities of which they are part fall into two broad categories; public issues and local problems. The former relate to the interests of the state looking down on social housing whereas the latter relate to the interests of tenants looking up. They are qualitatively different and, consequently, people's expectations are different. Public issues need rigour, accountability and a deliberative approach whereas local problems need responsiveness, problem solving and somewhat less rigour.

As a result, this paper argues for a different approach to regulation in the two categories.

Public issues in need of attention

There are a range of potential issues of public confidence and concern that the new regulator needs to be involved in:

- Delivering a sufficient housing supply
- Ensuring landlord financial viability and sound management
- Encouraging investment in social housing
- Ensuring that the burden on the public purse is sustainable
- Guarding against the misuse of public funds
- Conducting its activities with minimal interference and in a manner that is proportionate, consistent, transparent and accountable
- Registered Provider governance
- Reducing the regulatory burden on Registered Providers (post the Elton Report)

Local problems in need of a solution

Tenants, of course, have an interest in the public issues but more often than not their concerns are more locally and day-to-day issue based. In particular, they will want the regulator to deliver:

- Tenant choice and protection,
- Tenant involvement in management,
- Efficient, effective and economical provider performance
- The landlord's contribution to environmental, social and economic well-being
- The practical balance between national standards and local arrangements within the Registered Provider

This paper focuses on tenant empowerment and, so, it will focus on the '*local problems in need of a solution*' and how the Act may help.

3 *The role of the TSA*

Regulation can play an important role in the partnership between the landlord, the housing manager and the tenant and the community of which they are a part.

The independence of the TSA can help to ensure that there is both a challenge to what may become the collusive nature of some relationships and the examination of performance, outcomes and use of resources. This can include testing the value for money and contribution that the partnership arrangement itself makes and whether the costs are proportionate to the outcomes being sought.

To maximise these contributions the TSA will need to ensure that it understands the nature of the local arrangements and their objectives; and they will need access to core data and information from all the parties involved. Tenants may secure additional data and information locally. At the same time, there should always be some tension between regulators on the one hand and the regulated on the other. Too cosy a relationship will destroy the whole point of independent oversight: something of a worry as the TSA is funded by social housing landlords.

The TSA should publish reports which are clear about performance and where possible make comparisons with similar services and, where services are delivered and/or commissioned through a partnership arrangement, should hold both the partnership and the partners within to account.

Regulation reports offer tenants and tax-payers benchmarks by which to judge the services which they use or fund through rent or taxation.

Whilst trust between landlords, housing managers and tenants is critical, there will often be some tension between them if service outcomes and value are to be maximised as, for example, when different means for securing desired outcomes are being assessed. Regulation can and should be mindful of such tensions and seek to ensure that their activities do not undermine trust and relations between stakeholders. Such trust, and trust in the TSA, requires time to be developed and embedded; and care needs to be taken by

all stakeholders to protect the conditions where this is positive, provided that it leads to added public value.

It is essential that regulation does not pervert service focus. Such difficulties may arise if the regulators concentrate too closely on centrally imposed targets which do not resonate with local conditions. Proper attention must naturally be paid to central targets but regulators, in particular, should consult and engage with staff, service users and other local stakeholders to ensure that there is proper understanding of their requirements and preferences, as well as of local circumstances.

Value for money studies by the TSA could provide much useful and important information and data to inform policy review and development; commissioning and procurement practice; and service design and operational delivery. Landlords, housing managers and tenants should have access to this data and information and be helped to use it effectively.

Regulations should be proportionate and preferably the degree of the exercise agreed with the regulated, within the legal framework which governs them. As regulations become more risk based, it will be vital to encourage and develop the means for self regulation, which should apply as much to partnerships between landlords and housing managers as to other forms of service delivery and public spending activities.

Regulation processes should consider commissioning, procurement and governance arrangements and not only service outcomes and value for money considerations.

4 *How the code of practice works*

A CoP operates like the Highway Code: it is not law in itself, but is rather a benchmark against which actions can be judged by the TSA and, should it come to that, by the Courts. It draws its popular legitimacy from the combination of the Act that originates it and from the intensity of the engagement process that informs its content.

The draft CoP will be drafted by the TSA and then subject to formal consultation with interested parties. It will have a number of sections that will likely cover:

- The aims of the CoP in delivering the standards set out in the Act;
- The general duties placed on landlords and the TSA by the Act;
- The role of the CoP in promoting good practice and tenant engagement;
- The responsibilities of landlords in delivering the CoP, including barrier removal;
- The responsibilities of housing management providers in delivering the CoP;
- The part that tenants have to play in delivering its objectives;
- The specific processes that are recommended to deliver each of the 10 standards it advances;
- The potential consequences of failing to abide by its provisions;
- Organisations that can provide support to landlords, management providers and tenants.

There is no current timetable for the publication of the draft, but it is unlikely to be before 2009 and will follow on from the 'National Conversation' launched this autumn by the TSA. The draft will be formally consulted upon and the likelihood is that the Code will come into force in mid-2009.

5 *What the code of practice should cover*

The CoP needs to address each of the matters in the section above, be based on the Tenants' Agenda principles and give practical guidance to tenants, landlords and housing management providers on how each standard is to be delivered and monitored. Enforcement is via different sections of the Act, ss218-269.

The CoP will be most helpful where it identifies good practice processes to deliver meaningful outcomes for each of the standards set out in the Act. In this way, it can advance the achievement of the aim of tenant empowerment that was so clearly articulated in detail in the Cave review of 2007.

Taking account of that review, and looking at each standard in turn, our view is that the following are the desired outcomes for tenants and the key processes, systems and interventions that will be needed to deliver them:

(a) criteria for allocating accommodation

Desired outcome

Properties allocated according to personal financial circumstances, family need and the enablement of economic participation

Processes, systems and interventions

- An agreed approach between local landlords and tenants that will create a greater mix of incomes and tenures on ghettoised estates;
- Putting in place a coherent and pro-active advice service – 'housing mentors' – that not only assists with a periodic assessment of people's housing needs but also their ability to achieve sustainable employment, independence from benefits and market housing. Housing mentors would work closely with local social services. The service should be delivered by a grouping of local lower-income landlords and scrutinized by local tenants and the National Tenants' Voice;

As John Hills said in his report:

“For existing tenants, a system of regular review every few years could run through whether someone’s circumstances had changed to allow them to take up a different part of the “offer.”

- A system of choice based lettings to empower individuals and raise mobility.

However, It is pointless to introduce a ‘choice-based letting’ scheme in an area which cannot support choice, i.e. where there is insufficient supply. To do so simply passes the frustration from landlord to tenant rather than addressing the root problem;

- Landlord and tenant scrutiny of the outcome delivery of the allocations system to ensure that it meets its objectives and is sensitive to both the needs of presenting prospective tenants and to the availability of social housing and other lower-income housing products in the locality .

Current developments

The forthcoming Housing Reform Bill (November 2008) may address this issue.

(b) terms of tenancies

Desired outcome

The smooth passage of an individual or family through each stage of their life, to match their present needs and circumstances

Processes, systems and interventions

- In areas of insufficient supply, the use of tenancy agreements that allow tenants to remain in a (larger) property even though their family has reduced in size or for their children to ‘inherit’ their agreement irrespective of their family circumstances is a major blockage to tenants with larger families, who have to put up with cramped conditions as a consequence
- Many local authority and RSL landlords have switched to rolling Assured Shorthold Tenancies to remove this problem over time³

3 Further work is needed to establish whether this practice delivers its desired outcomes and also whether it adds or detracts from broader matters of importance, such as community cohesion, as identified in the Hills Review

- Also, many landlords also offer financial incentives for tenants to downsize and this, too, should be encouraged.

Current developments

The forthcoming Housing Reform Bill (November 2008) may address this issue.

(c) levels of rent *(and the rules may, in particular, include provision for minimum or maximum levels of rent or levels of increase or decrease of rent)*

Desired outcome

A diversity of affordable housing products with rent levels that reflect the local commercial market for similar properties less the public subsidy invested in the social housing property.

Processes, systems and interventions

The current Housing Revenue Account review is addressing this matter.

Current developments

The current Housing Revenue Account review is addressing this matter.

(d) maintenance

Desired outcome

Homes that are fit for the purpose they were designed for.

Processes, systems and interventions

- There should be a cap on lease-holder repair bills
- Will be part of the 'National Conversation'

Current developments

Will be part of the 'National Conversation'

(e) procedures for addressing complaints by tenants against landlords

Desired outcome

For complaints that are upheld, appropriate redress and an apology within a brief period of time. For complaints that are not upheld, a reasoned explanation within a brief period of time.

Processes, systems and interventions

- The TSA will publish Guidance on the management of complaints made to registered providers by tenants, s215. This will cover the procedure to be followed, the criteria for investigation and the period within which the registered provider must inform the complainant of the result.

Current developments

The forthcoming discussions between the TSA, the Independent Housing Ombudsman and the Local Government Ombudsman may inform this matter.

(f) methods for consulting and informing tenants

Desired outcome

The appropriate information available in a timely fashion, to enable engagement with tenants in a form or forms that they find most convenient and useful.

Processes, systems and interventions

- The TSA will publish a Statement covering promoting awareness of the Regulation function amongst tenants, consultation on the exercise of the function and how tenants are to be involved in the exercise of his function, s 98.
- There should be a move away from the current emphasis on tenant involvement to one which puts a duty on the landlord/manager to put in place and externally validate active tenant scrutiny and review that can look at the operational aspects of a landlord/registered providers organisation.

- In a locality, all landlords and their chosen registered providers should publish service performance information that will enable tenants to compare the performance of the different providers on the key services important to them. This is likely to include: the rent collection level as a proportion of rent roll, the time it takes to get a non-urgent repair done, how long a property takes to re-let and the costs of management and maintenance.
- In the event that a landlord plans to merge all or part of their stock with that of another landlord, then tenants of the affected properties will be formally consulted at the earliest opportunity.

Current developments

The Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code covers this area and amendments (by the TSA) will be needed to cover the above issues. There is a current CLG review of Tenant participation Compacts within Local Authorities and ALMOs.

(g) methods of enabling tenants to influence or control the management of their accommodation and environment

Desired outcome

Tenants being satisfied with their housing management provider and the standard of environmental maintenance that surrounds them.

Processes, systems and interventions

- The landlord and housing manager encourage local responsibility by providing information to tenants that enables them to properly scrutinize the activities of them both [links with second bullet point under (f) above]
- The landlord and housing manager must agree with their tenants and to the satisfaction of the Regulator clear collective engagement arrangements that will be the formal mechanism by which tenant-led issues are progressed. The Regulator will not specify a single system, but will rather set the criteria to which a satisfactory system must conform so as to encourage the development of different, and locally relevant, forms of representation and accountability (e.g. a minimum number of tenants consulted in a ballot or a representative body to which elections are held)

- Encouraging the development of self-management options such as local management or estate agreements whereby tenants and residents take on responsibility for direct delivery of some elements of the service to an agreed cost and quality specification; or where they take on the overseeing and evaluation role from staff, for example the contracting and monitoring of caretaking or gardening services.
- Where self-management or landlord management are not desired by tenants, a clear process that allows them to exercise real choice about who their manager should be and justifiably replace an existing manager. This needs to include access to current performance information and then engagement in the key decisions surrounding the selection of a new manager including: setting the timetable, determination of the outcomes required, the provider approach desired, the selection of the appropriate cost/quality balance point, potential provider shortlisting and participation in the final selection panel.
- Once a decision to change managers has been taken, how this will be delivered by the landlord and in what time frame.
- In the delivery of a new housing manager, the landlord will conform to the principles of competitive neutrality: (Competitive neutrality means a commitment to fair markets which ensures a level playing field between public, private and voluntary providers of goods and services).

Current developments

Will be part of the ‘National Conversation’.

(h) policies and procedures required by section 218A of the Housing Act 1996 (c. 52) in connection with anti-social behaviour

Desired outcome

The reduction of ASB down to levels that apply generally in all communities.

Processes, systems and interventions

- Implementation of the ‘Respect’ standard for housing.
- Will be part of the ‘Nation Conversation’.

Current developments

Will be part of the 'National Conversation'.

(i) landlords' contribution to the environmental, social and economic well-being of the areas in which their property is situated

Desired outcome

Popular support for the Local Strategic Partnership's delivery of well-being in the area, with all social landlords playing an active part in its realization through the process of 'commissioning'.

Processes, systems and interventions

The LSP's delivery will involve landlords and their housing managers in:

- A "whole system" approach to delivering improved outcomes which links strategic objectives, the intermediate outcomes required from individual services and specific outputs required from delivery arrangements.
- Working across the public, private and community economies to secure the public interest regardless of who provides the management and funding.
- Focusing upon understanding and acting upon "the whole system" in which different services operate whether that involves understanding what needs are to be met or what supply is to be put in place.
- A shift in commissioning focus from structure and process and spending on services towards investing in people and community outcomes involving prevention, promotion and the raising of aspirations.
- A recognition that securing better outcomes for individuals, families and communities cannot be dealt with on a single service basis. Rather it requires a strategic, coherent and integrated approach that addresses agreed outcomes and factors through not only the contributions of a number of public services and interventions but also the contribution of individuals and the affected communities themselves.
- That commissioning at all levels will need to move away from contemplating minor re-configurations of service provision and instead focuses on longer-term goals and aspirations

Current developments

Public bodies will have a Statutory 'duty to engage' with their communities from 2009 and Statutory Guidance, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities* – CLG July 2008, gives additional detail as to how this is to be delivered.

(j) estate management**Desired outcome**

A local environment that meets tenants' aspirations and sustains the designed appearance and functioning of the estate.

Processes, systems and interventions

Will be part of the 'National Conversation'

Current developments

Will be part of the 'National Conversation'.

6 *How the code of practice can deliver*

The Act provides for housing managers, “Registered Providers”, go through a formal accreditation process, s217, and we see the standards above and their desired outcomes and processes, systems and interventions being a vital part of that accreditation. It must be for the aspiring Registered Provider to satisfy the TSA through evidence that they will deliver the reasoned aspirations of their tenants in these areas of sound management practice.

Additionally, the Act also provides for the TSA to conduct reviews, inquiries and investigations and these can be used to check on the practical application of the local processes that the registered provider committed themselves to during the Registration process.

7 *Conclusion*

The Code of Practice is a key component in the TSA's delivery of the range of tenant-desired outcomes and key inputs and outputs including:

- engagement with tenants, staff and other interested stakeholders;
- tenant access to all partners involved in the provision of their homes and the services that support them;
- transparency of performance;
- access for tenants to trigger landlord or TSA action where there is a prime facie cause to believe that are probity or performance issues;
- landlords and their registered providers playing a full part in the delivery of local community well-being;
- self-regulation by landlords and the encouragement for them to grow the capacity to undertake it;
- the balancing of resource investment by landlords and their housing managers with the resulting community and personal outcomes.

The Regulatory aspects of the new Housing and Regeneration Act have the capability of delivering a step-change in the empowerment of tenants that will match both the recommendations made by Cave and Hills and the long-standing aspirations of tenants.

However, there is one remaining structural barrier of real substance to tenant choice: the differential application of VAT to RSLs but not to local authorities. This effectively means it will remain unlikely that tenants will have the choice over their housing management provider in many circumstances as it will be unlikely that external providers will prove to be better value overall. This is an area for government action.

Appendix *The NHF Tenant Involvement Commission – summary findings*

Getting the basics right and going the extra mile

- Tenants want their associations to “get the basics right” as a landlord before broadening the scope of their service
- Community is important to many tenants and there is good scope for action by housing associations. But this must not distract from their service as a landlord.
- The dream landlord provides a strong, basic service and goes the “extra mile” in offering choice to tenants and listening to their needs
- In contrast, housing associations are often perceived to be paternalistic or, even patronising, in their approach to tenants. Some tenants speak of a “get what you are given” culture within their association and the contractors it employs.
- Black and minority ethnic tenants are significantly less satisfied (67%) with the overall service of their landlord than white British tenants (78%).
- Tenants are far clearer about their responsibilities than about their rights. They struggle to name the rights they have, beyond the right to occupy and the right to exchange.
- Very few tenants know how their housing association compares to others or how to find out. But they are interested in this, and finding out can help them set their expectations and gauge their satisfaction with what they get..

Give us a choice

- There is a huge appetite for choice. Many tenants feel that they have few choices. More than nine out of every ten, drawing on those present at the Tenants’ Forum, say that they would like to have more choice in the service that their landlord provides

- Housing associations tend to focus on choice based lettings, and are cautious about wider choice. Tenants, in contrast, have lots of ideas on the choices they would like, from appointment times and picking contractors through to choice based kitchens.
- Tenants recognise the resource limitations and are not asking for it all. They stress that customers should not pay extra for what should be the core service, but some would like the choice to pay more for additional services. Popular choices for this are opportunities to buy a stake in their existing home or to purchase another home, additional security, and more modern and individualised kitchens and bathrooms. Others would like the option but think in reality they would be unlikely to pay for extras, often because they think they would be unable to afford it.
- Some housing associations want to adopt more sophisticated pricing mechanisms to charge for additional individualised services. Tenants and housing associations want to see this done in a way that does not marginalise vulnerable groups.

Make involvement personal

- Tenants are interested in becoming involved and see the value of it 'on paper'. However, many report apathy about doing anything in reality, unless their housing association can convince them that getting involved matters and can make a difference.
- A minority of tenants are keen to be actively involved in decision making. Many more want to be involved when there is a key decision to be taken that will affect them directly.
- Tenants want opportunities to be involved that are convenient to them and give them a personal as well as a collective say.

Be accountable

- Tenants know how to complain to their housing association – even if few of those who have complained are satisfied. But few know how to complain to an external body about their housing association, or, know what to do if their complaint to their landlord is not addressed

- The key performance indicators set by the Housing Corporation are considered to be very good. Tenants also suggest that associations monitor how well they communicate with tenants and incidents of anti-social behaviour and complaints
- Tenants believe that it is important to have tenants on the management boards of housing associations. They are seen to bring a tenants' perspective to the discussions of the board.

A new relationship

Tenants want good quality services, but the relationship they want with housing associations goes beyond normal customer service as it opens up an element of partnership. There is a need to renew and refresh the relationship between landlord and tenant, based on customer service, mutuality and business success.

The headline recommendation we have for housing associations is to take up a new ten-point Customer First Plan. Many are already well on the way, but we ask all associations to re-examine the quality of their relationship with their customers.

Pinnacle

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- **Respect Standard for Housing Management**
- **Charter Mark** from 1999 (including the Company-wide Award and award for Excellence in Customer Services in 2005)
- **ISO14001** since 2001
- **Business in the Community ‘Big Tick’** in 2004



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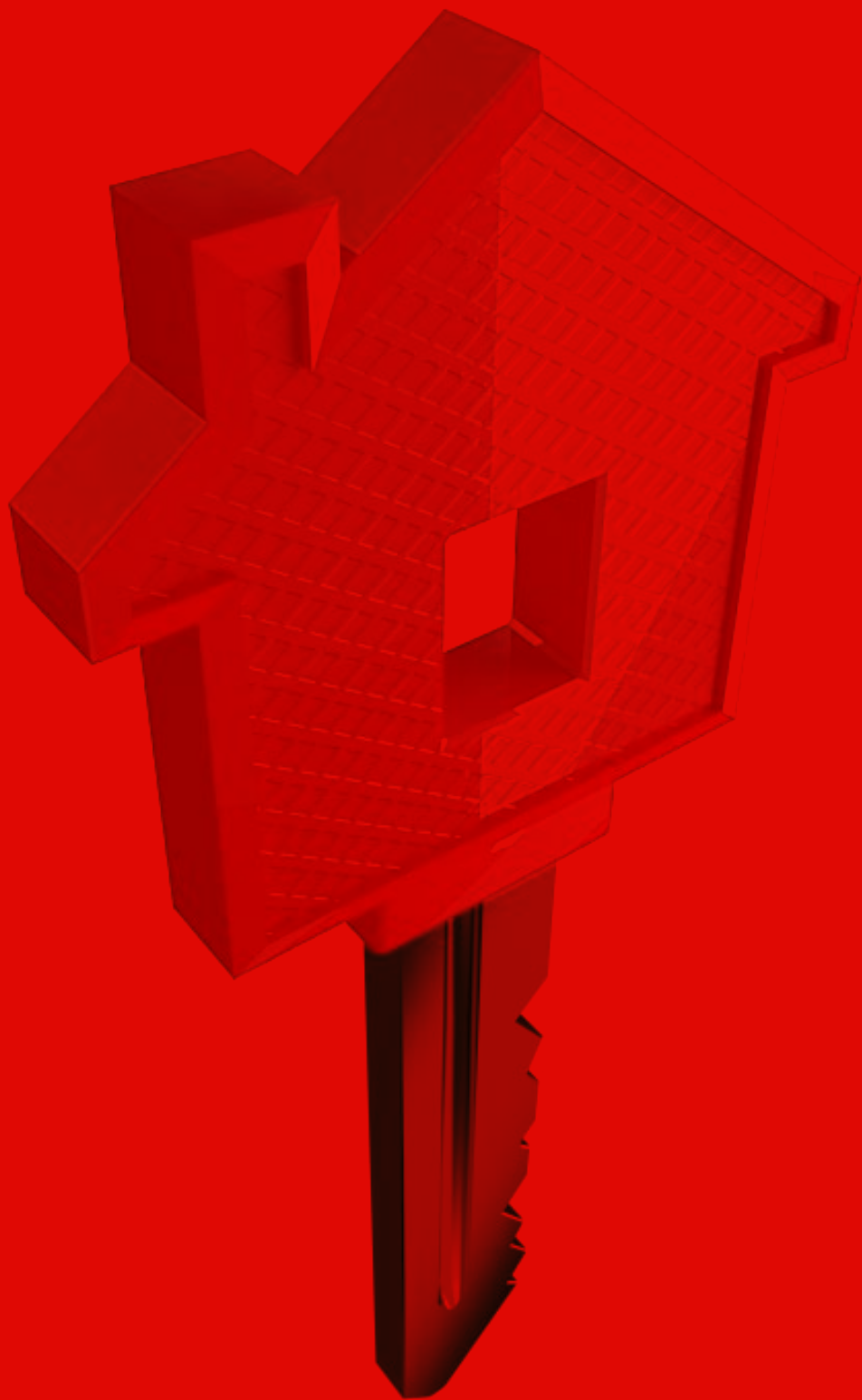
The New Local Government Network (NLGN) was founded in 1996 by a group of senior local government figures whose aim was to make local government more relevant and credible to local people. A not-for-profit making, independent think tank, NLGN seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is also the primary advocate of New Localism.

NLGN works closely with individual local authorities, national agencies, central government and the private sector to promote ideas about how our objectives can be achieved in practice. NLGN has also been a key proponent of directly elected mayors, something reflected in the ongoing work of our Mayoral Forum.

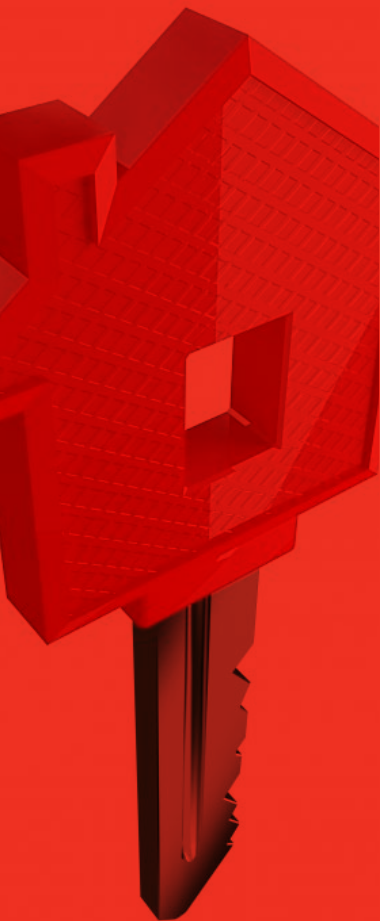
In 2001, NLGN established an Innovation Network, creating a space for ambitious local authorities to experiment with new ideas, share learning and influence public policy across all levels of government.

NLGN works with key agencies and opinion formers to shape and support the development of modern local government where it matters most - on the ground, in local communities.

NLGN was awarded 'Think Tank of the Year, 2004/5' by the political and cultural journal, Prospect.



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The forthcoming statement on the Regulator’s function, guidance on the handling of complaints and a Code of Practice (which is similar to the Highway Code and puts into practice the standards required in social housing) will be the principal outputs that tenants will see in the short term and it will be in the Code where most of their aspirations are embodied.

But what do tenants want the regulator to achieve and how can the provisions of the new Act help them? Are there any areas that still require governmental action?

This paper attempts to crystallise the detail that will be needed for the new regulatory regime to work well and most importantly, how residents will be engaged to lend it legitimacy. It has been written as a contribution to the ‘National Conversation’ on these and related matters about to be launched by the TSA and we hope that all parties will find it helpful.