

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Tenant Services Management Board – 19 December 2011

National Tenant Training Programme – Growing Together, HotHouse Training Event, November 2011.

Report of Tenant Services Development Officer

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Jean Adkins)

1. Executive Summary

This report provides the Tenant Services Management Board with an update on the Growing Together 'HotHouse' Training Event held on the 17th November 2011.

2. Background

The 'Growing Together' 'HotHouse' event was free training available to tenants on co-regulation and scrutiny. The training was funded by the national Tenant Empowerment Programme and was delivered by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) in partnership with The Tenants and Residents Association of England (TAROE) and Housemark.

The event was attended by tenants of registered providers across the south west, including members of the Board Mrs Drage, Mr Hellier and Mrs Urquart. Members of the Tenants' Forum Mr Beaman and Mrs Duddridge and Officers Martin Price, Tenant Empowerment Manager, and Rosie Reed, Tenant Services Development Officer, also attended.

The day was facilitated by Michael Gelling, the chair of TAROE, Val Alker from TPAS and Carole Halfacre from Housemark with guest speakers including a tenant of Soha Housing and the Tenant Involvement Manager from Exeter City Council.

The training day covered many areas of co-regulation and scrutiny including:

- The Proposed New Regulatory Framework
- Consumer Regulation

- The Localism Bill & The Revised Involvement & Empowerment Standard
- Tenant Panels
- Tenant Scrutiny
- Tenant Led Inspection
- The Future of Tenant Empowerment and Regulation

3. The Proposed New Regulatory Framework

The current regulator of social housing, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), is to be abolished and its functions transferred to a statutory committee of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The Localism Bill, now the Localism Act, allows for this change to occur. Other changes to the regulatory framework will be implemented through the revision to the TSA national standards which will remain in place.

4. Consumer Regulation

Consumer regulation is the term that the Government uses to describe the core of its approach to regulation. Consumer regulation puts emphasis on the tenant as an individual being able to make choices and to comment on services. It also puts emphasis that co-regulation should be local in nature and the regulator should be a very distant partner and should only be involved in very exceptional circumstances. An exceptional circumstance refers to a matter essentially where someone's life is at risk, for example a consistent failure by a landlord to undertake gas servicing and not just poor performance by a landlord.

5. The Localism Act & the Revised Involvement & Empowerment Standard

The Localism Act covers a wide range of measures to transfer decision making to local communities; this includes a range of changes to social housing such as:

- The introduction of flexible tenancies
- Changes to the duties to the homeless

These measures are in the Localism Act because they need primary legislation in order to be introduced.

6. Tenant Panels

Tenant panels are planned to be introduced as a way of making co-regulation consumer focused. Tenant panels will not be imposed on housing providers and there will not be a standard approach on how tenant panels should be used. Each housing provider will need to develop with tenants the most appropriate approach that meets tenants' needs in their area.

7. Tenant Scrutiny

The scrutiny role may be carried out by a specific group designed for the scrutiny function or carried out within existing tenant panels. The Government is unlikely to prescribe a single approach to scrutiny but have provided ideas on how scrutiny should be:

- Scrutiny is a process of holding decision makers within housing providers to account for their decisions.
- It can contribute to policy making up to the point of decision making.
- It can look at the performance of an organisation and ask the hard questions about why performance is weak and why improvements are not being made.

8. Tenant Led Inspection

Inspections have always been used in social housing; however the TSA placed a lower priority on 'traditional' inspections and favoured short notice inspections. Since the introduction of the Coalition Government very few inspections have been carried out and the Audit Commission with its housing inspectorate is to be abolished.

Under the new consumer based regulatory regime the role of inspection will effectively end. The idea is that performance and accountability will be overseen by tenant scrutiny groups and panels. The gap left by the ending of inspections will be filled by housing providers developing tenants as inspectors as a key performance review tool.

9. The Future of Tenant Empowerment and Regulation.

The new consumer regulation will start to become a reality now that the Localism Bill has become law and the revised involvement and empowerment standard is being agreed. The challenge arising from consumer regulation is to ensure that tenants are empowered and able to play a full and effective role through consumer regulation.

10 Finance Comments

There are no finance comments for this report.

11. Legal Comments

There are no legal comments for this report.

12. Links to Corporate Aims

Although there are no specific links to Corporate Aims the whole area of co-regulation enables tenants to scrutinise the actions of TDBC to identify whether priorities are being met.

13. Environmental Implications & Community Safety Implications

There are no specific environmental or community safety implications for this report.

14. Equalities Impact

For effective co-regulation to take place all tenants must have access to the formal and informal routes of scrutiny.

15. Risk Management

There are no risk management issues for this report.

16. Partnership Implications

The training day provided an opportunity for tenants and staff to create contacts with other housing providers and learn and share experiences on co regulation and tenants' scrutiny.

17. Recommendations

The Tenant Services Management Board is asked to:

- Note the report.

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