



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

information sheet

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Tenant Participation in Design & Development

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TENANT PARTICIPATION IN DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

There is no standard way of involving tenants in the design and development of their homes. There are different levels of involvement for different projects. What is demonstrated by tenant involvement in design and development is that a wide variety of approaches can be very successful.

For tenant participation in design issues to work, housing officers, architects etc., must want to hear the tenants' views, must be flexible and be willing to be persuaded. Tenant participation in design issues also requires staff and tenants to commit themselves to considerable amounts of their time and effort and they therefore must feel this is worth doing.

Landlords are obliged to inform and consult their tenants on design and development projects, but do not have to involve them. However, many development projects now have a high public profile and involving tenants is often an important component. Government regeneration schemes (for example new Deal for Communities (NDC) and housing market renewal (HMR) projects all include tenant involvement as a key requirement for funding.

Barriers to participation

Landlord's attitudes

Some landlords still think they know best and approach design and development from a "top down" viewpoint. This view can sometimes make tenants more determined to confront their landlord and demand greater involvement in projects. If landlords do not encourage involvement generally they are unlikely to do so on design issues.

Funding and timescales

Involving tenants almost certainly costs more than the "top down" approach to design. Funding would also need to be flexible from the outset to cover the costs of any agreed revisions to design plans. Timescales also need to be flexible so that any alterations to design etc., can be implemented.

Lack of confidence

Lack of confidence from tenants and staff can form a barrier to successful participation. If tenants are already involved in housing management issues, through various tenant participation structures, or have campaigned on issues as a tenants' group, this can help make their involvement easier.

If the landlord's team of development workers and architects have no experience of working directly with tenants, they are unlikely to see tenant involvement as important. Getting staff with the right skills and attitude for the job is therefore important.

Benefits of participation

Cost effectiveness

Where tenants are aware of budget restrictions and have full involvement, then they can be very responsive and pick the best value for money options that suits them and the landlord.

Tenants promote high quality, imaginative and pleasing designs and bring individuality to their own estates. Because they have been involved in designing their own scheme, they have more knowledge of which decisions were made and why, which means they are well placed to protect the scheme and make sure it remains a good advertisement for the choices they made. This usually means there are less complaints in the future, lower levels of repair, reduced levels of

vandalism and crime, less tenancy turnover and therefore less voids to deal with, which all mean less housing management costs.

Tenant Satisfaction

Tenant involvement in design will usually mean higher quality schemes and schemes tailored to meet tenants' needs. This means estates are created where people want to live.

Community facilities such as playing areas, sitting out areas and landscaping can be planned exactly according to what the tenants want to have and are prepared to look after.

Tenants having choices over individual fixtures and fittings and colour schemes also gives greater satisfaction and a tenancy that is likely to be long lasting. All this creates more stable communities. Getting tenants involved from the outset gives tenants experience and confidence. It can encourage tenants to work together generally, even after the process is finished, giving a better community spirit.

Ways of involving tenants in design and development

Involving tenants in design and development can involve various techniques. The backbone to good tenant involvement must always involve information, in the form of newsletters, publicity, reports, use of the local press and media, etc., to keep all tenants, whether they are actively involved or not, informed of the stages of the process. The use of photographs, videos and good graphics are all very important in providing information on design issues.

Surveys and Questionnaires

These can cover environmental features such as traffic problems, open space requirements, crime and vandalism issues, as well as identifying the priorities of

different groups of tenants and their opinions on different design ideas.

Surveys and questionnaires provide an understanding of the area and the community, its problems, concerns etc., which should underpin any participation in the design of the project.

They can also be used for tenants to choose individual items, colour schemes and layout for their particular property.

Public meetings

These are a way of involving all the people in one area. They should not be the only form of tenant involvement, but if they are used in conjunction with other forms of involvement they can be very effective.

Community planning weekends/design days/open days

These are useful for focusing tenants on a particular problem or issue. They can be structured around seminars, workshops exhibitions and estate visits. These can provide quick decisions, but also need good publicity and information to promote them and quick report backs to all tenants, to be effective.

Project groups/committees/working parties

These usually consist of local representatives from tenants' associations, and other community groups. These can act as advisors to the landlord's team, or as a sounding board for general design or management ideas. Their involvement and commitment, however, should never isolate the wider community who still need to be informed and consulted.

Exhibitions

These can be a very useful information tool. They can be combined with other events or can be mobile, travelling to different local venues, part of open meetings etc., or on permanent display in a "drop in centre" etc.

Scheme visits

These can be very useful for stimulating ideas or for checking out specific details, e.g. layout of houses, choice of brickwork etc.

Modelling Techniques

Three dimensional models are a very important design medium, which are very easy to understand. These techniques are used to help design the layout of estates generally.

Planning for Real is an approach that uses a hands on model technique as a way of de-mystifying the planning process and encouraging active involvement. The modelling materials tend to be simple card or foam and are designed so that tenants themselves can pick and choose cut-outs representing the types of buildings that there are in their own neighbourhoods. People can move the pieces around, demolish what they hate and build a new estate! The approach facilitates group discussion, a communal understanding of the issues and a strategy for decision making.

'Virtual reality' is a three-dimensional moving image created on computer to show something that does not exist in reality. Virtual reality (VR) can be used to give residents an impression of what homes, buildings and the environment will look like after improvement and can be very useful for looking at specific layouts, facilities etc., when remodelling estates. VR is also useful for allowing individual residents to choose from a palette of colours and finishes for walls, floors, fittings and furnishings.

TPAS has a separate information sheet 'Virtual reality – a model for community consultation' that covers this model in more detail.

Examples of tenant involvement in design and development

Hartlepool New Deal for Communities (NDC)

Hartlepool NDC covers 4000 properties with problems of falling values, private investment companies buying up empty homes, crime and anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and a poor environment. The NDC partnership is run by a steering group with a resident majority. The residents represent the three neighbourhoods in the area and are elected each year by a ballot of all residents.

The partnership Chair is a resident and no decisions are made without the full support of the resident representatives. Residents also chair all but one of the sub-groups.

The main focus of the partnership's work is on housing regeneration. A £30 million community housing plan was completed following a series of 60 street by street ballots on a variety of options. The proposals in the plan were based on the ballot results. 1200 residents were involved in the workshops and nearly 50% of households voted in the street ballots.

Colchester Borough Homes ALMO – computer aided design software for kitchens

For kitchen upgrades a kitchen company visits the tenants and uses a laptop and computer aided design software to discuss design issues and to demonstrate how the kitchen will look. Tenants can view samples of the range of choices of colours and finishes provided. The resident is left with computer-generated pictures of how the kitchen will look and signs to confirm their approval and agreement of the layout.

Northmoor Home Zones – Manchester Methodist Housing Association (MMHA) and Manchester City Council (MCC)

MMHA and MCC decided in 2000 to try to establish a 'home zone' in the Northmoor area of South Manchester. Community involvement was at the heart of the project and an innovative approach to involving residents was adopted in the initial design process. A full size mock up of the design for the home zone was laid out in one street as part of a fun day and residents were encouraged to: -

- Try out different parking arrangements
- Comment on designs for landscaping, including details such as colours, materials and planting schemes
- Get involved in selecting the contractors who carried out the works

Questionnaires and regular resident's meetings were also used to ensure that the design for the home zone took account of residents' views. The housing association and City Council also employed (with the assistance of a Housing Corporation I & GP Grant) an ethnic community link worker specifically to ensure the BME households, which made up 30% of the local population, were involved. The officer set up an Asian women's group, and established a core group of residents who were willing to attend focus groups and other events.

Contact Jim McMillan, Regeneration Manager, Manchester Methodist housing association tel: 0161 786 1805

Bromford Housing Association – improving contractors' performance

At Elm farm in Cheltenham, Bromford Housing Association residents were involved in setting standards for the contractors employed to install new kitchens and gas mains, and in drawing up their 'code of conduct'. A pilot run was carried out in the house of one resident representative. This allowed other tenants to view the layout of the new kitchen and

the tenant concerned commented on the conduct of the contractors as the work was being done. Adjustments were made to improve both the process and outcomes for the rest of the residents.

Portsmouth Housing Association – Tenants involved with the 'Design team' for building maintenance

The Association is training a small group of tenants to read technical drawings so they can work with the design team. Five tenants are undergoing training to read technical drawings and other work to understand building maintenance of housing. The development team listens to the tenants' feedback. For example, tenants pointed out the lack of storage space. Built in wardrobes have now been added to specifications, other extra space and garden sheds.

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