










A Manual to help social housing tenants agree a
“Focus on Delivery Charter”
with their landlord

Welsh Housing Quality Standard



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Welcome

A Manual to help social housing tenants negotiate their local "Focus on Delivery Charter".



Why do social tenants need a "Focus on Delivery Charter"?

Quite simply because there is still much work to be done across Wales before all social tenants will live in homes brought up to the **Welsh Housing Quality Standard**.

In some areas there has been considerable investment but in others progress is slow.

The clock is ticking and the Welsh Government has set a deadline of 2020 for every home to be brought up to this standard.

Stop press – it looks like social landlords will be required by the Welsh Government to more clearly demonstrate how they are doing in relation to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. This is going to be called their WHQS Compliance Policy; hardly the most stimulating of titles.

A jointly prepared Focus on Delivery Charter would be an excellent and timely way for tenants to be at the very centre of this new focus on WHQS delivery.

Tenants have a right to know what is happening (or not happening) in relation to the upgrading of their own homes and to feel confident that their views are taken into account and that promises are kept.

A "Focus on Delivery Charter" is an ideal way in which landlords can commit to their tenants as to what will be done, by when and how. It will provide also a means whereby tenants can monitor progress.

How will this manual help the preparation of a "Focus on Delivery Charter"?

By helping tenants to ask the right questions; the answers to which will give tenants a pretty good idea as to where their landlord currently stands in relation to their obligations under the **Welsh Housing Quality Standard**.

Each Chapter covers key elements that should be covered in a Charter:-

- the "bricks and mortar" realities of improving homes
- which services will be improved and how
- how tenants will be involved
- what milestones must be reached each year from now on?

Once tenants have asked and answered the questions in these chapters, they should be in a good position to know what should be contained in their local Charter.

It would be helpful if their landlord could also ask these questions of themselves and compare answers with their tenants.

This Manual, then, will provide a route-map for landlords and tenants to agree their own "Focus on Delivery Charter".

Chapter 1

Agreeing the key principles for working together

If this “Focus on Delivery” Charter is to be worth the paper it is written on then both the landlord and the tenants need to establish some ground rules upon which they can work together.

These need to underpin everything they do.



The principles set out below were endorsed by the Welsh Tenants at their annual conference in 2013 as the foundation stone for each local Charter.

Tenants/Leaseholders have a right to :-

Know what's going on in relation to WHQS in their area

Shape and agree the proposals

Expect undertakings to be made and kept

Call their landlord to account if promises are not honoured in full and on time

Landlords, in return, have an obligation to :-

Honour undertakings made

Ensure tenants/leaseholders are fully informed and involved in the decision-making process

Make all information available in a clear and timely manner

Ensure tenants/leaseholders are adequately trained and resourced to maximise their input

Value tenant/leaseholder scrutiny and act on any findings

Chapter 2

Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard

This section is about “bricks and mortar”. It will cover what work will be done to deliver the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, to what specification and by when.



Section 1

Green light and money down?

Q - Has your landlord agreed to deliver WHQS in full; is there sufficient money in place to pay for this and over how many years?

Every social landlord has an obligation to deliver the WHQS but some have struggled to find the funds to pay for this.

Some Councils have balloted their tenants with a view to transferring their homes to a new registered social landlord. In such cases it was a condition of transfer that the new landlord had the money to pay for the works in full.

So if your landlord is a new transfer Housing Association they will be able to meet the cost of WHQS in full. If they cannot give a positive answer to the above question then frankly tenants need to raise the matter with their Council and the Welsh Government.

In those cases where the Council is still the landlord, then they still have an obligation to meet the costs. Most Councils have found sufficient funds to do this work although some are taking longer than others.

However there are a few Councils that are still struggling to find the money. In such cases tenants need to ensure that their landlord is prepared to commit to the principle of delivering WHQS in full and then to work with them to find ways in which the shortfall can be bridged.

Checklist

Has your landlord signed up to meeting the Welsh Housing Quality Standard in full for all of their homes?



Have they committed the necessary money to pay for this in full?



Do you know how many years this will take?



If the answer to any of the above questions is no, then do you know the reason why and what is your landlord doing about it?



Section 2

WHQS specification and tenants' choice

Q - Have tenants been involved in determining the specification of the work to be undertaken in their homes. Will there be an element of tenants' choice?

Whilst the Welsh Government have laid down what the Welsh Housing Quality Standard should contain there is room for manoeuvre particularly in relation to the choice that tenants may be given on finishes (such as tiles) and on the choices of kitchen units and work surfaces.

In many cases, groups of tenants have been involved in deciding the actual specification of works; after all it is their homes at the end of the day. This has often been assisted by visits to other landlords and to different suppliers and by opening show-homes so tenants can have a real life understanding of what they can expect.

Checklist

Do you know what work will be done under the Welsh Housing Quality Standard to tenants' homes in your area?



Were tenants involved in agreeing the specification (specific details) for this standard?



Will there be an element of choice (such as tile colours for bathroom and kitchen)?



Is this published anywhere and have all tenants received a copy so they know what to expect?



Section 3

The WHQS programme

Q - Do tenants know which work will be done, where and when and did they agree the basis on which this would happen?

Whilst most tenants are pleased to know that their landlord has committed to meeting WHQS, their real interest is to know when their own home will be improved?

In deciding the WHQS programme, landlord and tenants have to make some key decisions.

Are they going to do some work to every house early on in the process?

Should they approach the work on a worst first estate basis or replace important items - such as windows or roofs - first.

There is no standard approach. Each area will be different and there will be a balance between cost and meeting the legitimate expectations of tenants.

What is more important is that tenants are given the fullest information on the condition of the housing stock and that they are involved in deciding the basis on which the programme of works will be undertaken.

This programme must then be published to all tenants so that they are aware on a year-by-year basis what will be done, where and when.

Checklist

Has the overall programme of WHQS work been agreed over a definite period of years and, if so, is it broken down into which properties will be done each year?



Have tenants been party to agreeing the basis on which the work will be done; i.e. by element (windows), on an estate basis (worst areas first) or a mixture of the two?



Has the programme of work been made available to all tenants?



Q - In some exceptional circumstances, landlords cannot bring some homes up to the WHQS standard. These are called “acceptable fails”. Do tenants know the basis on which this decision is taken by their landlord and how many properties are involved?

Certain properties can be in such bad condition that it is not cost-effective to bring them up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. There may be structural problems, for example, or quite simply the building is “past its sell-by date”. In such a case it may not make good sense to spend money that could be better spent building a replacement home.

In other cases, some tenants because of age or ill-health just cannot face large scale improvements to their home.

The important point is that landlords and tenants have agreed the basis on which “acceptable fails” will be allowed. These should very much be the exception and not the rule.

Checklist

Have tenants been involved in the definition of an “acceptable fail”?



Does their landlord keep a publically accessible overall record of how many there are and for what reason?



Where these “acceptable fails” cover a group of properties are tenants involved in planning their replacement?



Q - Are tenants aware of the budget for “Environmental Improvements” to compliment the works to their homes; have they agreed a basis for this to be allocated and a process by which local communities can determine how it is best used?

As part of achieving WHQS there will be, in every case, an allocation for environmental improvements. This in total is usually the equivalent of £1,000 times the number of homes owned by the relevant landlord.

It is important to note that this work is over and above that proposed to improve homes and their curtilage (such as gardens and fences).

The Welsh Government has taken the view that what this environmental budget should cover is best decided locally. It is fair to say that this has not always received the attention it deserves and has got lost in the delivery of improvements to the properties themselves.

However it does represent a significant opportunity for local communities in the areas concerned to be involved in upgrading their neighbourhoods.

Checklist

Do tenants know the total amount available for improving the environment to the homes being brought up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard?



Have tenants been involved in deciding how, when and where these environmental improvements should be undertaken?



Is there assistance given to local communities to plan the specific environmental improvements to their local area?



Section 4

Selecting contractors and work “on site”

Q - Have tenants been involved in deciding how contracts will be let and contractors selected?

It is important to landlord and tenant alike that the right contractors are used for this work to people’s homes.

Whilst cost is important, the basis of selecting contractors (the procurement process) will need to also reflect quality and the way in which customers will be treated.

Obviously contractors will need to have the relevant experience and capacity but, critically, they will also need to have an excellent record of customer care and dealing with complaints. It is important, therefore, that the way they are selected adequately takes issues of quality and customer care into account.

There are many examples of where tenants have actually been involved in the selection process; something which ensures contractors get the message early on that tenants are, in effect, “paying their wages”.

Checklist

Are tenants involved in selecting contractors (the procurement process)?



Have they received the relevant training?



Have they agreed the criteria for selection (e.g. quality, cost and customer care)?



Are tenants involved in monitoring the contractor’s performance?



Q - Do your WHQS contracts include “community benefit clauses” and have tenants had an opportunity to define what this means?

More and more when letting WHQS contracts, landlords are looking for added value from the contractors appointed. This is called “Community Benefit” and this may influence the final choice.

What this may be will vary. For example, some contractors offer trainee places, others may propose to provide funding for local community groups.

It makes sense for tenants themselves to decide what is meant by “community benefit” and then it is for the contractors to say how they can deliver this.

Checklist

Does your landlord require contractors to include “community benefits” as part of their tender?



Have tenants been involved in deciding what the term “community benefits” should cover?



Are these “community benefits” monitored in the same way as other aspects of the contract (such as the quality of work and meeting contract deadlines)?



Q - Is there a Contractor Protocol in place to ensure the contracts go smoothly; that tenants are kept fully informed and that there is in place a speedy process to resolve complaints?

Improvement work to somebody's home is most welcome but it can be a minefield if not managed properly.

Tenants need to know in good time when the work will start and how long it will take. Who is the contractor and who to contact if something goes wrong. Will they need to move out (decant) and, if so, where to, for how long and who will meet all the costs?

Who better to monitor what happens on the ground than the tenants themselves; to this end the introduction of trained Tenant Inspectors is an excellent way to support site supervision.

Checklist

Has a Contractor Protocol been agreed with tenants?

Does it make clear how contractors should behave in tenants' homes?

Are tenants fully aware of when the work will start, what it entails and how long it will take?

Is there a proper system for complaints to be dealt with speedily?

Are tenants involved in overseeing the quality of the work (e.g. Tenant Inspectors)?

Section 5

Leaseholders

Q - Are leaseholders aware of the programme of works to their homes and have they been involved in its preparation? Has the landlord considered steps to offer assistance to those leaseholders who may face financial difficulty by phasing works or financial contributions?

Leaseholders have an obligation to pay for those works for which they are responsible under their lease. This is important to leaseholders and tenants alike as their homes are often part of the same structure and it is in the interests of all concerned that necessary repairs are done when required and to a good standard.

However, it is only proper, and a legal requirement, that these leaseholders are given adequate notice of these works and that they are satisfied that the cost is reasonable and the work undertaken by a proper contractor.

In those cases where clear financial hardship may be experienced it is only fair that landlords look to ways to help these leaseholders to meet their obligations but in a way that does not put any extra costs on the tenants.

Checklist

Have Leaseholders been involved in the planning for delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard?



Do they know what work they will have to do to their homes, and by when?



Has the landlord considered ways in which leaseholders with limited means can be assisted to meet their obligations?



Section 6

Improving the local economy

Q - Has a plan been agreed to ensure that the money spent in achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard will be of benefit to the local economy and, in particular, those neighbourhoods where the improvements take place?

One of the main claims made about the huge investment in delivering WHQS was that it would bring significant benefits to each local area.

There are many positive examples of how this has been achieved across Wales (see an example on page 18). However this has often happened on a one-off basis and not because there has been a clear plan of action. Moreover, there is not much evidence to hand that shows that this has significantly helped the communities affected in terms of increased training and on-going job opportunities.

At the least, tenants could expect to see that their landlord and relevant local agencies have plans to maximise the impact of WHQS at a very local level. It is proper that tenants should be involved in both the preparation and the delivery of such plans. A key part of this will be ensuring that wherever possible tenants and their families are given the opportunity to train and to apply for the job opportunities that will be created. Local should mean just that in these communities where levels of unemployment are often so high and benefit dependency so great.

Checklist

Has your landlord a plan to make the most of the money spent on improving your homes to benefit “the local economy”?



Have tenants been involved in the preparation of such a plan?



What will such a plan produce and when (e.g. jobs, apprenticeships, help to community groups, new facilities etc.)?



Is this plan being monitored and are tenants involved?



What are others doing?

Assessment of WHQS tenders - Merthyr Valleys Homes

Merthyr Valleys Homes trained tenant representatives to participate in tender assessments. A group of eight attended a 2-day course to understand all elements of the tender process, from European regulations through to site visits and interviews, with a particular emphasis on Community Benefits. Two representatives went on the panel to assess the major gas servicing contract for MVH.

Contact - **Victoria Slade, Director of Housing, Merthyr Valleys Homes, Martin Evans House, Block 2, Riverside Court, Avenue de Clichy, Abermorlais, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8LD**

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Tenant monitoring Contractors “on the ground” - NPT Homes

As well as playing a part in the recruitment process of contractors, the tenant group POWER monitor the satisfaction levels among tenants via Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, which tenants complete when their work is finalised. The group then offers them the opportunity to speak in depth about how they found the experience to tenants on the POWER group to help maintain best practice and improve the services.

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Delivering inclusion through our Major Improvement Programme - RCT Homes

RCT Homes involved tenants at all stages of the WHQS Improvement process including:-

- Tenants forming a third of the contractor evaluation panel
- Establishing an “in-house” Tenant Liaison Service providing the link between tenant, contractor and landlord
- Tenant Inspectors to report on tenants’ experiences and levels of satisfaction
- Allocating social inclusion to account for 30% of the scoring in assessing contractors’ tenders

In 2010 RCT Homes and its constructor partners became the first partnership in the UK to achieve TPAS Pinpoint accreditation for the way in which tenants were fully engaged with the delivery of major improvements works in their homes.

Benefitting the local economy - Melin Homes

Melin Works was established in 2010 as a result of the increase in our work around worklessness, training and employment .

After an initial successful bid to WCVA for funding to provide an Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) project in Monmouthshire, Melin Homes developed its own process for engaging with unemployed people in our communities which could be implemented on all our funded projects.

Over the past few years we have been awarded funding for and implemented successful projects for ILM, Engagement Gateway (4 projects), Arbed I and II and Jobs Growth Wales Supported Employment. These have secured Employment, Education or Training placements for over 1300 people. Melin Works has also developed a Five Stage Model of employment progression to support our residents into work and to tackle the impact of welfare reform changes.

Contact - **Tom Broadhead, Assistant Director of Communities and Enterprise, Melin Homes, Ty’r Efail, Lower Mill Field, Pontypool, Torfaen, NP4 0XJ**

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Chapter 3

Improving Services

For many landlords delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standard has also provided an opportunity to improve their services to tenants.

In doing this, they recognise that housing is more than just bricks and mortar; it is somebody's home and part of a community.

The new transfer landlords (set up following a "yes" vote from tenants) will have already included their proposals for service improvement within the "Offer Document" which was the basis on which tenants cast their vote.

Other Landlords may have not yet made such a commitment in writing to their tenants



Section 1

Is your landlord fully committed to improving services?

Q - If you have a new landlord - following a ballot of tenants - are they meeting the promises on Service Improvements that will have been made in the "Offer Document"? Do you know what these undertakings were and when and how they will take place? Most important of all, have tenants been fully involved in planning these improvements?

Of course, many transfer landlords will undoubtedly have already gone some way to doing this. Others will have seen these undertakings as only the start and will be forging ahead with further improvements.

But two things are clear:-

Firstly, if service improvements were the basis on which tenants voted for transfer then they must be delivered by their new landlord; there should be no argument. These promises will have formed part of a legally binding agreement with your local Council.

Secondly, such improvements must be based on what tenants as the customers feel is reasonable and their input is crucial.

Checklist

Is there a list of the service undertakings (guarantees) made in the Offer Document?



Have discussions been held with tenants post-ballot on how, and when, these promises on service improvements will be delivered?



If not, agree with your landlord how, and when, tenants will be involved in the planning of these service improvements



Q - If you remain as a Council tenant – whether because of a vote by tenants or because your Council did not need to ballot tenants – then has your Council landlord pledged to improve services? If so, which are the services effected, by when and how will these reviews take place and how will tenants be involved?

Some Councils are well on the road to delivering these improvements. In such circumstances, it will be good to formalise these in a Focus on Delivery Charter.

Other Councils will have given undertakings during the ballot process which helped their tenants to decide that staying with them was the best option. In these circumstances, it is entirely proper for tenants to have the same level of confidence that these promises will be honoured as if their homes had been transferred. The Focus on Delivery Charter will fill that gap.

Checklist

In the case of a vote by tenants to keep their Council as their landlord, did your Council agree to match the undertakings made in the Offer Document?



If not did they make their own written undertakings?



Have these been published?



Q - If you are a tenant of a traditional Housing Association then do you know what plans your landlords have to improve services?

It may be that there are already plans in place; in which case fine as long as tenants know what they are and are involved in the process.

However it could be that your landlord sees their responsibilities under WHQS to be purely about improving the condition of your home. That is a good start but it is reasonable for tenants to expect that their landlord is also as determined to ensure that the services tenants receive are equally of a good standard.

Tenants need to be confident that their landlord (whether a Council, a newly formed transfer Housing Association or an existing Housing Association) is fully committed to working with them to improve services.

Checklist

Have tenants been told what plans their landlord has to improve services?



Have tenants been involved in preparing these plans?



Section 2

How to improve services?

Once tenants have reached agreement with their landlord as to which services are to be improved then the next step is for them to work together with their landlord to ensure this happens.

Examples of services that could be covered by such agreements are, for example:-

- how houses are allocated and managed
 - how repairs and maintenance is provided
 - services to older persons (such as in sheltered housing schemes)
 - dealing with anti-social behaviour.
-

Q - Have you agreed a clear action plan with your landlord as to which service reviews will take place in which year, when they will start and finish and to whom will they report?

It may be that there are several service areas to be reviewed. So decide an order of priority. Start with those that are the most urgent and remember that those tenants involved in these reviews are volunteers and that their time is limited and precious; so use it wisely.

Checklist

Are tenants clear as to which are the services are to be reviewed/ improved?



Have they agreed which are the most important and put them in priority order?



Q - Is there a joint agreement as to how these reviews will take place with clear terms of reference and full involvement of tenants with appropriate levels of support, including training and administrative assistance?

Firstly agree the purpose of the review, who is to be involved (e.g. staff and tenants), the timescale and to whom the recommendations will be made.

From the outset ensure that those involved (staff and tenants) fully understand their role and that any training is given before people are expected to take decisions.

Remember those tenants involved will need to have appropriate levels of training and support throughout the review. Any paperwork should be in plain English and available in good time to allow tenant members to read and understand.

From the outset, be clear about what the service is meant to do, who is it for and what do those people receiving the service (i.e. the tenants) feel is reasonable.

Unless you know what is an acceptable service standard how can you tell whether it is being delivered. The best way to decide this is to ask those for whom the service is intended.

The next stage is to then look at what is currently being provided; the good parts and the less good elements. What are others doing elsewhere and learn from their experience.

Involve fully those who are responsible for delivering the service as well as those for whom it is intended.

Checklist

Firstly, agree the services to be reviewed and their order of priority.



Secondly, agree when the reviews are scheduled to start and to be completed.



Agree what part tenants will play in this process e.g. as part of a steering group.



Ensure those tenants are given relevant training to allow them to make the fullest contribution.



Be clear as to the purpose of the review.



Look at good practice elsewhere.



Look at the weaknesses of the current system as well as the strengths.



Set out ways in which an improved service can be measured in future.



Q -Are you confident that the findings of any review will form part of a wider consultation with all tenants before any final decisions are taken?

Whilst some tenants may be fully involved in any service review doing, as it were, the hard work, remember to try and test out your ideas with the wider body of tenants as much as possible.

Certainly make sure that all tenants have a chance to respond to any proposals that may change the service they receive, before the “die is cast”.

Checklist

Make sure that all tenants affected by this review know that it is happening and have a chance to input their views in good time.



Ensure that all parts of the tenant involvement structure have an input from the strategic level through to local tenant associations on the ground.



What are others doing?

WHQS – Service Monitoring (Bron Afon Community Housing)

The Service Monitoring and Development Team are a group of approximately 15 volunteers who ensure Bron Afon delivers excellent services across the organisation.

They are responsible for scrutinising services, making recommendations and improvements and holding the services of Bron Afon to account on behalf of the communities within Torfaen.

They have the authority to make recommendations to Bron Afon Community Housing, have direct access to staff and carry out reviews using a variety of methods including telephone and face to face questionnaires, estate visits and testing customer response standards through a “mystery customer” approach.

Services to be reviewed are chosen by the team, clear terms of reference are agreed, any necessary training is undertaken, recommendations are made and the changes are reviewed after implementation.

Examples of reviews undertaken include Anti-Social Behaviour, Bron Afon Community Housing’s procedure for dealing with Complaints and the internal refurbishment process.

Contact - **Jennifer Brankley, Community Involvement Officer, Ty Bron Afon, William Brown Close, Llantarnam Industrial Park, Cwmbran NP44 3AB**

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Chapter 4

Putting tenants at the heart of the process

Tenants Involvement is not like a tap that can be turned “on” and off” as, and when, required. It is something that landlords should see as influencing and informing everything they do.

Tenants are more than just customers; important though that is. They have a stake in the future of their homes; that is what makes social housing so important and tenant engagement so essential.

WHQS offers a unique opportunity for tenants to become involved at a time of considerable change.

However, tenants need to be ready to face this challenge. They need to raise their game; to organise themselves better and to be much clearer as to how they can become involved in a way that is informed, fair, and open to all tenants.



Section 1

Information is the key

Q - How can tenants know what is going on in relation to WHQS in their area?

Landlords must keep tenants fully informed on all matters relating to their homes and the information provided should be timely and easy to understand.

Encourage new ways of communicating that are easy to access and that tenants of all ages will find acceptable.

Remember that information is two-way; it's about keeping tenants "in the loop" but it is also about letting them have their say.

Pull all this together into a "Communications Strategy" that is agreed by the landlord and the tenants.

Checklist

Do tenants receive relevant, and clear, information on time?



Are they encouraged to give feedback?



Is there a "Communications Strategy" agreed with tenants?



Section 2

How can tenants shape and inform the WHQS proposals?

Q - Do you have a tenant engagement structure that is “fit for purpose”? Does it allow all tenants the fullest opportunity to become involved?

There are many different ways in which tenants can become involved but like all jigsaws each piece needs to fit. The Tenant Engagement Structure needs to be clearly set out, with each group having terms of reference and a proper reporting mechanism to the wider tenant body and regular opportunities for “new faces” to join and play an active part.

Remember, not all tenants are the same. Some are prepared to dedicate many hours working with their landlord to improve homes and services. Others are more interested in what happens at a local level or in relation to their own home.

So any Tenant Participation Strategy has to be flexible and realistic, involve as many tenants as possible in ways that are acceptable to them and recognise that all tenants have a right to know and to contribute.

Critically, there will be a need for tenants to work strategically with their landlord and be party to all the big decisions. In a real sense this is the top of the pyramid of those ways in which tenants can contribute. Their role here is to see the wider picture and to co-ordinate and pull together all tenant activity.

Checklist

Is there in place an agreed structure in place for informing and involving all tenants?



Does this structure show clearly the different roles and responsibilities for tenants involved in the process?



Are tenants involved in the overall planning and co-ordination of the WHQS programme and delivery (sometimes called the strategic level)?



Some tenants may be asked to support their landlord on specific projects such as repairs and maintenance or a service review such as reducing anti-social behaviour.

Tenant involvement on such groups can have a significant positive impact on service quality and planning. Those involved need to be trusted by the wider tenant body to “get on with the job” but, in return, must feedback regularly.

There may be a role for individual tenants to monitor the quality of services provided by their landlord. Tenant Inspectors are an example of this as are tenants acting as “Mystery Shoppers”.

Tenants, however, often have a more local focus; they may sit on a Tenants and Residents Association or be part of a community initiative. These have been traditionally the mainstay of tenant involvement and a means for tenants to have their say on local issues.

Now with the extra funding that comes to improve neighbourhoods - as a result of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard – such local initiatives take on a new significance in being the focus for community improvement.

Checklist

Are tenants involved with staff on those various working groups set up to deal with specific issues such as the appointment of contractors or the review of services?



Do tenants monitor standards such as in the case of Tenant Inspectors?



Are tenants groups supported at “grassroots level”?



Section 3

Tenant training leads to real empowerment

Q - What skills and training do tenants need?

Put simply every tenant should be offered the level of training and support appropriate to allow them to play as full a part as possible in their chosen activity. Specifically what this is will depend on their role and their existing level of ability and knowledge.

This can often be assessed by means of a Training Audit which defines the skills and knowledge required and the specific training needed for tenants to reach this level.

More and more landlords are providing training in a way whereby tenants who have completed the course can gain appropriate certificates or accreditation; a useful way to recognise their efforts and help their career prospects.

The training can be general such as how to undertake meetings right through to specific and detailed sessions on, for example, how to select contractors.

This then can be put together into a Tenants Training Plan which should set out how and when the training will take place.

Checklist

Has your Landlord undertaken a Training Audit based on the skills required by tenants to fully participate in the various roles within the Tenant Engagement Structure at the various levels?



Has a training programme been prepared and delivered?



Are these training programmes accredited in anyway; for example will those successfully completing such training receive a certificate or qualification?



Section 3

Effective tenant engagement needs adequate investment on an annual basis

Q - Is your tenant engagement structure properly resourced by your landlord?

There will be costs associated with the process of fully engaging tenants. These need to be recognised by the landlord and a suitable budget agreed with the tenants.

Examples of appropriate activities include:-

- mileage and transport costs for tenants attending meetings
- arranging meetings including hiring rooms, refreshments and childcare provision
- provision for Annual Conference
- translation facilities (where required)
- computer, printing and broadband costs for tenants on Strategic and Working Groups
- a training budget
- provision for costs associated with Communication Strategy such as printing newsletters, publicity and information material
- a base/resource facility to be accessible for all tenants engaged in this process
- grants to Tenant and Resident Associations.

This budget should be on an annual basis and tenants at a strategic level should be accountable for its effective and transparent use.

Over and above this, most good social landlords will have a team of staff to support tenants and community engagement. They should be paid for out of the landlord's staff costs and not the above budget. That being said, these staff will be critical in ensuring that tenant engagement is given priority and supported.

Checklist

Do you know what budget, if any, is allocated for tenant engagement and what it covers (such as the examples given on this page)?



Are tenants given the responsibility for spending this budget in a proper manner?



What are others doing?

Tenant Engagement – Newydd Housing Association

Newydd Housing Association recognised that the majority of tenants want to be able to raise particular service issues in a forum that focuses on their service of interest as opposed to an open generic tenants meeting. Therefore, over the past few years, Newydd has developed a network of service specific groups, including a maintenance specific group with an informal membership to directly address operational and individual service issues which are then fed back to an overarching “Community Panel”. Any themes or concerns can then be discussed at the Panel and, if necessary, fed back to the main Newydd Board.

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Chapter 5

Committing to progress

Actions speak louder than words. No plan, however well thought out, is worth the paper it is written on unless its proposals are:-

- *delivered on time*
- *to the agreed standard*
- *in the agreed format*
- *and are capable of being measured.*

Tenants need to know that progress is being made and, if not, why not.

Furthermore, the Welsh Government are becoming increasingly concerned that all social landlords should have a clear plan for delivering the WHQS and that this plan can be measured year on year.

To this end they are considering making it a requirement that each landlord has to prepare a WHQS Compliance Policy to clearly show how they will deliver WHQS, to what standard and by when.

What better than a Focus on Delivery Charter - prepared in partnership with tenants - to be the way in which such a WHQS Compliance policy can be implemented?



Q - So how will you know if the WHQS undertakings to tenants are delivered on time and to standard?

Firstly, your landlord should have as up-to-date information as possible as to the condition of their housing stock. The more accurate this is the better they are able to plan what needs to be done.

Landlords and tenants need to be clear about what standard of work should be done, where and when. This then needs to form the basis of a yearly programme of work which is published. This Annual Action Plan should also cover any undertakings on improvement to services and to tenant empowerment.

This plan should be monitored every year and tenants should be involved in this process. There is an argument that this monitoring could be assisted by independent inspection by specialists. This is for the landlord to decide but the key point is that tenants must be involved and informed.

Finally try not to make this too complicated or all will be lost in the small print. Better to have simple but relevant milestones than an encyclopaedia.

Checklist

Does your landlord have up-to-date information about the condition of your homes?

Have you agreed what improvement work will be done each year, where, to what standard and by when?

Has your landlord also agreed a similar forward annual plan to cover any improvements to services or tenant engagement?

Does this Annual Action Plan form part of their WHQS Compliance Policy?

Have tenants been involved in the preparation of such a WHQS Compliance Policy?

Are tenants involved in monitoring this Action Plan each year?

Q - Is it reasonable to expect that your landlord will keep their promises?

Every social landlord in Wales has an overall obligation to the Welsh Government to deliver WHQS to all of their tenants by 2020.

For those landlords formed as a result of a ballot of tenants, then they are committed legally to deliver the specific agreements made at the time of transfer. This is only fair as this was the basis on which tenants agreed to vote for transfer.

In all other cases, it is also reasonable for tenants to expect their landlord to give them similarly firm undertakings about how and when they will deliver WHQS and improve services. A Focus on Delivery Charter - once agreed by the landlord - will be a formal undertaking in which tenants could have confidence.

However, there needs to be, in place a robust and transparent process to monitor whether or not this happens. This is called scrutiny and it is the means whereby the landlord and tenants can regularly check performance.

Increasingly social landlords do this through a Scrutiny or Challenge Panel. This is a group of Councillors, or Board members, who together with tenant representatives monitor progress against agreed action plans (such as those covered earlier). If such a Panel is to "have teeth" then it needs to have equal representation from landlord and tenant, clear reporting lines, adequate support staff and unfettered access to information and evidence.

Checklist

If your landlord is a Stock Transfer Housing Association, are they delivering on the commitments made at the time of transfer?



If your landlord is not a Stock Transfer Body then have they made any formal undertakings to their tenants in relation to WHQS and, if so, have they been fully publicised?



Does your landlord have a Scrutiny Panel (or something similar)



Does such a Scrutiny Panel have equal representation from tenants and landlord and is it valued by the landlord?



Q - What happens if a Focus on Delivery Charter is agreed but not honoured in full?

Then there needs to be in place an agreed dispute process. However, the issue needs to be substantial, be related to the firm undertakings in the Focus on Delivery Charter and have been raised collectively by a number of tenants.

Individual disputes between tenants and landlords can, and should, be dealt with differently in relation to a landlord's obligations (or otherwise) under the relevant housing legislation.

It is important that landlord and tenants accept that - despite best intentions - things can go wrong and there needs to be, in place, a jointly agreed process to "bring things back on track".

This process needs to be fair and transparent one which at every stage tries to resolve matters. For example:-

1. the matter is referred to the Scrutiny Panel (or similar body)
2. if the matter is still not resolved then it could be referred to the Council or, in the case of Housing Associations, the Board
3. if there is still no agreement then the issue could be referred to the Welsh Government or the Public Services Ombudsman.

Checklist

Does your landlord accept that there should be a process to resolve matters if their WHQS undertakings are not met?



Is there a process in place which allows such disputes to be considered fairly and recognises the right of tenants to take the matter further?



What are others doing?

Self Assessment - RCT Homes

V2C's Scrutiny Panel was established in March 2014 as V2C moves into the post-WHQS phase. An open and fair recruitment process was undertaken, with an independent expert to ensure that the panel was focused upon quality rather than quantity.

The Scrutiny Panel is providing a "critical friend" challenge to V2C and will help to deliver true co-regulation by holding V2C to account. To support the Scrutiny Panel an extranet portal has been created so documents can be shared and edited in a secure location, while the Scrutiny Panel will be utilising V2C's Self-Assessment framework to work with V2C to identify priority activities worth scrutinising.

This is because V2C's Self-Assessment framework evidences what activities V2C are delivering, how V2C are performing and what outcomes have resulted.

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Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance given in the preparation of this Manual by tenants from Caerphilly County Borough Council and by staff from their Housing Department.

Also, our grateful thanks to Rachel Morton, i2i in sharing good practice in this field and to those organisations who were prepared to share their experience in the case studies.

