The Co-operation in Social Housing Commission: Report One - Learning from Experience

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INTRODUCTION

The Co-operation in Social Housing Commission is built on the principle that when people play a leading and lasting role in their homes and communities, they can begin to address some of the big issues in the social housing sector today. Across the country, residents are calling out for a different kind of relationship with their landlord/housing provider; however, there are few examples demonstrating how this can genuinely work in practice. One of the key roles for social landlords today is putting this into action. This means shifting the relationship dynamic from an "us" and "them" to "we", focusing on shared interests and collaborative power-sharing to achieve better outcomes.

CDS Co-operatives exists "to grow co-op and community led housing to see more people living and working in co-operative ways". To mark its 50th anniversary in 2025, CDS is sponsoring the Commission to demonstrate how approaches to co-operation between tenants and landlords drawing on community capacity can lead to new forms of power sharing and co-operation within the social housing sector.

Aims of the Commission

The Commission aims to demonstrate how power sharing between social housing providers and resident communities can effectively address key issues facing the sector. With rising management and repair costs, the introduction of new Consumer Standards, declining tenant satisfaction, and reputational damage to the social housing sector through problems if neglect and disrepair, the Commission seeks to create the conditions for housing providers and residents to explore new and innovative ways of working together that are transformative, welcoming, supportive and enjoyable. The goal is to showcase how residents can be supported to play a leading role in their housing and community, in ways that are realistic, inspiring and reinforcing for the landlord team.

Definition of Co-operation

> ### *Co-operation:*
> *"an act or instance of working or acting together for a common purpose or benefit; joint action"*[1]

The Co-operation in Social Housing Commission builds on a rich legacy of co-operation and co-operatives that have shaped social movements, the organisation of labour, and economic production for centuries.

In approaching co-operation in social housing, the Commission draws a distinction between **co-operation as a way of relating to and working with one another**, and co-operatives as legal entities. While both have similar origins, the Commission is clear in its objectives not to challenge the current legal models of social housing provision in the UK, but rather, to explore what can be learned from co-operative and community led housing movements that can be applied within the landlord-tenant dynamic of conventional social housing.

In this sense, co-operation is defined in relation to the Commission, and in this research, as a set of principles around how people work together. These principles, summarised below, draw on established

[1] Collins English Dictionary

co-operative principles but allow for other interpretations and definitions to exist in parallel. What the Commission terms co-operation, others might term collaboration or co-production.

Therefore, in this report and as an underpinning of the wider Commission, we understand co-operation as a way of relating and working together that...

1. Works towards commonly agreed goals;

2. Is accountable in its decision-making;

3. Shares resources and responsibilities;

4. Builds people's capability to co-operate;

5. Supports individuals and communities beyond those directly involved.

Objectives of the Commission

To achieve its aims, the Commission has set the following objectives:

1. **Learning from experience**: The Commission will undertake research in the form of a literature review and desktop research to learn from best practice and established knowledge in co-operative and community led housing; establishing principles, practices and measures to underpin the live projects.

2. **Demonstrating through live projects**: The Commission will support housing providers and resident communities to deliver pilot projects that will demonstrate models of power sharing and co-operation in social housing, through a combination of direct project support, and peer learning.

3. **Informing future practice**: Finally, the Commission will capture and share learning from the research and pilot projects throughout the social housing sector and wider public to inform future guidance, standards and policy.

The Research

CDS Co-operatives have commissioned LSE Housing and Communities to carry out research alongside the Commission and help it to deliver its objectives. The research will take place in three parts outlined below. This report summaries the findings from the first stage of the research.

Stage 1: Learning from experience

We will undertake a review of academic and non-academic literature and case studies in UK social housing to identify what are the principles, practices and measures that have underpinned cooperative approaches to social housing. We will carry out interviews with people working across the housing sector to understand the strengths and challenges of tenant involvement, and the different forms it can take.

Stage 2: Demonstrating through live projects

We will document the pilot projects through participant observation and interviews; analyse these projects in terms of impact on communities and on social landlords; and write up our findings.

Stage 3: Informing future practice

We will provide support in synthesising findings from the pilot projects, leading to recommendations and guidance for future practice; we will produce a final report rounding up our findings.

THE WIDER HOUSING CONTEXT

Over the last decade, a number of significant events have highlighted systemic issues within the UK's social housing system and forced landlords and the Government to reflect on how social housing is managed.

On the 14th June 2017, there was a fatal fire at Grenfell Tower, in West London, in which 72 people lost their lives and the 23-storey block of 130 flats was completely destroyed. The subsequent public inquiry (2018-2024) has shown that the residents of Lancaster West had repeatedly raised concerns about the safety of the tower and felt ignored by Kensington and Chelsea TMO, who at the time had responsibility for managing the estate. In reaction to this event The Social Housing White Paper "*The Charter for Social Housing Residents*", was published in 2020, which set out specific requirements for tenants to have their voices heard by landlords through a number of different channels. Off the back of the White Paper tenant satisfaction measures and new consumer standards have been introduced. The Building Safety Act 2022 introduced a number of requirements social landlords must meet to improve the safety of their stock. The Act requires landlords to develop a resident engagement strategy that sets out how they will involve residents in decisions about building safety, residents must also be consulted about key decisions such as changes proposed to fire prevention measures. Landlords must provide residents with up-to-date information on fire safety.

In December 2020 two-year old Awaab Ishak died from a respiratory disease which was caused by mould in the socially rented flat he lived in with his parents. His parents had raised concerns about their living conditions, and the landlord repeatedly failed to act and blamed the family for causing the mould. In response to his death Awaab's Law was passed in 2023, under the new requirements social landlords must investigate hazards within 14 days. From October 2025, landlords will have to begin repair works within 7 days for any hazard that could cause significant risk to the health and safety of tenants. For landlords to successfully meet these requirements they will have to work closely, and have a clear line of communication, with residents.

Alongside these changes, in order to help tackle climate change, all social housing in England must reach EPC C or above by 2030, and net zero by 2050. Meeting these targets will require substantial intrusive work in people's homes which can create a lot of disruption and anxiety for the residents. Working alongside residents and ensuring they are supportive of the works, is key to ensuring they happen smoothly and are successful.

While much work is needed to improve the standard of the existing social housing stock there is also an urgent need to build new social housing. According to Shelter we need to build 90,000 social rent homes a year for 10 years in order to house every homeless person and clear social housing waiting lists[2].

All these changes require substantial work from social landlords, and finding a balance between competing priorities, but what links all the competing pressures is the need to prioritize working alongside residents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a substantial body of literature on both tenant involvement and co-operative housing. Much of it was published well over a decade ago and some elements may be outdated. We have collected evidence from the literature that is most relevant to the aims of the Commission.

Section 1: Tenant Involvement

The majority of social and affordable housing built over the twentieth century in the UK was shaped by politicians and professionals. One expert, Shapely argues that although this approach had merit in providing housing for those in urgent need of a safe place to live, a major mistake was the "*failure to ask tenants themselves about fundamental issues such as the design and location of new homes*". According to Shapely, *"choice was never on the agenda"*[3].

By the late 1960s, there was growing dissatisfaction amongst tenants about how their housing was being managed and there was increasing evidence of tenant organisation. For instance, in Sheffield alone, 23 tenant groups emerged to protest over issues such as the lack of recreational facilities and changes to the rent-rebate scheme. Additionally, there were a number of rent strikes in London, Glasgow, Sheffield and Liverpool. Organised groups also formed in slum clearance areas to lobby their local councils and secure funding for improvements. Over this period, some councils began to demonstrate an interest in developing tenant participation teams. In the 1970s, Anne Richardson carried out research which led to the publication of a government sponsored handbook on tenant participation in council-housing management. The report "*Getting Tenants Involved*"[4] aimed to promote tenant participation schemes to improve the quality of landlord service. By 1975, 70.6% of all London boroughs had at least one tenant participation scheme, but only 27.8% of metropolitan councils. During the 1980s, large scale council house building largely stopped and a proportion of the stock was transferred to housing associations. The value of tenant consultation and engagement was highlighted in the 1990s through the Governments "City Challenge" programme which gave £7.5 million to ten local authorities for five years, to regenerate run-down inner-city areas in partnership with residents[5].

Tenant participation became a greater government priority in the late 1990s and early 2000s. New Labour introduced several programmes that promoted tenant participation and local authorities' capital funding

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[2] Galarza V et al (2024) Brick By Brick- A plan to deliver the social homes we need. Shelter. Available at: https://downloads.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndnpn0s/3gKsteftNszu0ttpNdSdkO/4e5e1107d5236a579c164d46bcc496 95/2024-07-11_-_Brick_By_Brick_Report_-_Single_Spread.pdf
[3] Sharpley P (2008) Social housing and tenant participation. Policy Papers. History and Policy
[4] Richardson, A. & A. Wiles (1977) Getting Tenants Involved. London, Department of the Environment.
[5] Sharpley P (2008) Social housing and tenant participation. Policy Papers. History and Policy

allocations were linked to their tenant participation performance via 'Tenant Participation Compacts'. These were co-produced agreements between local authorities and tenants which set out how tenants should be involved in the housing service[6]. The New Labour government also funded a tenant training programme at the National Communities Resource Centre at Trafford Hall, teaching tenants the necessary skills to meaningfully engage with their landlord.

Government funding for tenant participation training and support programmes were reduced and in some cases, cut altogether, during in the austerity period from 2010. In 2017, the Grenfell Tower fire illustrated the danger of not listening to tenants and not involving them in decisions and highlighted the importance of tenant participation. The Social Housing White Paper "*The Charter for Social Housing Residents*", published in 2020, set out specific requirements for tenants to have their voices heard by landlords through a number of different channels[7]. In 2018, the National Housing Federation updated its Code of Governance to include a requirement for boards to be accountable to their tenants. They also introduced their "*Together with Tenants*" Charter, which is "a sector-wide initiative aiming to strengthen the relationship between residents and social landlords", the charter sets out a number of commitments that landlords can make to their tenants, so residents can hold landlords to account[8].

Sharpely highlights that participation can take various forms and varies across organisations. Some forms of participation are landlord-led, such as board membership and scrutiny panels, while others are more resident-led, such as tenants' and residents' associations and community action groups. Sharpely also distinguishes between business-focused engagement, for example through a scrutiny panel and more informal, "fun" engagement, such as social events. In some organisations, tenant participation is considered the responsibility of all staff, while in others, it is seen as the responsibility of dedicated teams[9]. Hickman and Preece's 2019 paper, "*Understanding social housing landlords' approaches to tenant participation*"[10], sets out some of the benefits of tenant participation:

- Improves service delivery, which in turn leads to improved tenant satisfaction.
- Leads to better decision making.
- Helps landlords allocate limited resources more effectively and prevents money being wasted on services that are not wanted or needed (with interviewees in the research stating that involving tenants has saved their organisation £2.5 million a year).
- Uncovers new solutions to problems.

The report also highlights a number of potential challenges. As noted earlier, in some organisations, tenant participation is viewed as the responsibility of a particular team, shifting tenant participation from a central aim of the landlord to a dedicated group of staff. The report also highlights the challenge of engaging new groups of tenants and notes that, while many tenants groups are hardworking and well-meaning, they are often not fully representative of the wider tenant body. The report emphasises the

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[6] Hickman P and Preece J (2019) Understanding social housing landlords' approaches to tenant participation. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

[7] MHCLG (2020) The Charter for Social Housing Residents Social Housing White Paper

[8] https://www.housing.org.uk/our-work/together-with-tenants/

[9] Sharpley P (2008) Social housing and tenant participation. Policy Papers. History and Policy

[10] Hickman P and Preece J (2019) Understanding social housing landlords' approaches to tenant participation. UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

importance of having engagement activities that appeal to a range of tenants. The more established tenants groups can seem intimidating to new tenants wanting to join. The skills and capacity of tenants can also be a challenge in relation to formal governance roles, such as board membership. Training opportunities were highlighted as an effective means to overcome these challenges, although it was acknowledged that the requirement to participate in training might deter some tenants. Trust was also cited as a potential barrier to engagement; older tenants may not want to engage because of historical experiences, whereas new tenants may be more receptive. Interviewees noted that trust takes time to build, and tenants need to see that engaging is worth their time. For example, they may begin by participating in a one-off survey and gradually progress to feeling ready to join a board.

Section 2: Co-operative Housing

Alongside traditional landlord structures, the UK has a history of co-operative housing, where tenants hold more power. Although this model differs from mainstream housing structures, it offers important lessons for the wider sector.

Origins of co-operative housing: The Rochdale Pioneers and Principles

The Rochdale Pioneers are widely credited with originating the modern co-operative movement in the UK. In 1844, the first co-operative business, the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society was formed in the Rochdale, Lancashire, by a group of 28 artisans working in cotton mills. In the face of poor working conditions and low wages, the Pioneers pooled resources and worked together to open a shop with the aim of accessing basic goods at an affordable price. Following the opening of the cooperative store, the Rochdale Pioneers aimed to acquire housing[11]. The Pioneers were inspired by principles of honesty, openness and respect, and shared ownership: and supported the idea that people should be able to share in the profits that their custom contributed to and have a democratic right to have a say in the business. The Rochdale Pioneers set out the following defining principles:

•   Open membership

•   Democratic control (one person, one vote)

•   Distribution of surpluses to members in proportion to trade

•   Payment of limited interest on capital

•   Political and religious neutrality

•   Cash trading (no credit extended)

•   Promotion of education

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[11] Birchall, J. (1992) Housing Co-operatives in Britain Department of Government Working Papers No. 21 London: Brunel University

These principles are fundamental to co-operatives today; however, the Rochdale Pioneers were largely unsuccessful with transferring these principles into housing[12]. As Birchall[13] observes, by the late 19th century, the Rochdale Society had evolved into a "major landlord," managing 300 rental properties in a manner more akin to a private landlord than a housing co-operative. There are important questions surrounding how organisations can stay true to the original ethos they were founded on as they expand and grow.

Existing models of co-operation in housing

Co-operative housing has remained a relatively small sector, largely forgotten about by UK housing policymakers. Despite this, various models of co-operative and mutual housing continue to exist and show a range of benefits [14]. The different models share the central principle of being democratically and legally owned and controlled by a service-user membership. Legal co-operative housing bodies are an established form of 'co-operative housing', but there are also a number of community-led housing models which have co-operation between residents and staff at their heart, often with residents taking on significant responsibility within the organisation, such as Tenant Management Organisations, Co-housing, and Community Land Trusts.

A. Co-operatives and mutuals

Housing Co-ops are not-for-profit democratic housing organisations run by their members. In the UK, there are 685 Housing Co-ops with an estimated 70,000 members. A distinctive feature of co-operative housing is that it is member-based, with residents and potential residents making up the membership. Housing Co-ops can take several forms[15]. For example:

- Residents are the landlord and the tenants, i.e. an ownership co-operative.

- Residents own the properties collectively, as co-owners, and all pay into a mortgage[16].

- A housing association or council owns the property and has a management agreement with a cooperative of tenants who run the homes they live in. These co-operatives can also be called Tenant Management Organizations (TMOs).

- In some cases, Housing Co-ops can also be registered housing associations.

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[12] Rowlands, R. (2009). Forging Mutual Futures - Co-operative, Mutual and Community Based Housing in Practice: History & Potential. Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham, Birmingham

[13] Birchall, J. (1992) Housing Co-operatives in Britain Department of Government Working Papers No. 21 London: Brunel University

[14] Bliss N (ed). (2009). Bringing Democracy Home. The Commission on Cooperative and Mutual Housing. https://www.cch.coop/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/bdh-commission-report.pdf

[15] Benton, E, Russell, R, and Power, A (2022) Keeping Communities Together: How smaller social landlords and community-led housing can provide affordable, secure, low cost accommodation for communities in need. CASEreport 141. London. LSE.

[16] Community-led Homes (2022) What are housing co-ops? Available at: https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/what-housing-co-operative

B. <u>Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs)</u>

A TMO is where housing association or council tenants and leaseholders take responsibility for managing their homes in a specific area. The residents form an independent legal body, with an elected, tenant-led committee. The ownership of the homes remains with the council or housing association, but the TMO is responsible for agreed day-to-day management, including tasks such as rent collection, allocations, tenancy management, repairs and caretaking. The tasks tenants take responsibility for can vary based on the negotiated agreement with the landlord. Some small TMOs are completely volunteer-led, but most employ staff as housing managers and caretakers. TMO's emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a type of housing co-operative.

C. <u>Community Land Trusts (CLTs)</u>

Community Land Trusts are community-led, not for profit, democratically organised organisations that own and develop land for the benefit of the community, often in the form of affordable housing but they can also include community gardens, civic buildings, pubs, shops, shared workspace, and energy schemes[17].

D. <u>Co-housing organisations</u>

A co-housing group is formed by a community of people, typically with similar needs and interests. Co-housing is owned by the group and usually contains private rooms or houses with shared communal areas such as living rooms and kitchens, where people come together to share meals and spend time together. The residents are responsible for the management and maintenance of the site. They are run in a non-hierarchical way, giving all residents an equal say in how they are organised[18].

Assets and strengths of co-operative housing

There is a wide body of literature that highlights the strengths and the challenges of co-operative housing. We have highlighted the strengths most relevant to the Commission as well as some of the challenges.

The 2009 report *"Bringing Democracy Home- the Commission on Co-operative and Mutual Housing"*[19] found evidence that generally points to higher satisfaction ratings in co-operative and mutual housing across a range of different organisations. The report also highlights that, at the time of publishing, the NFTMO (National Federation for TMOs) was not aware of any TMO that had voted to be returned to council management in the five yearly continuation ballots. The report also found that the Tenant Services Authority's National Conversation Survey showed an 88% satisfaction rating amongst housing co-op tenants, as opposed to a 77% rating for housing association and council tenants. It is important to highlight that these findings are 15 years old and more up to date evidence would be useful.

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[17] Community Land Trust Network (2022) About CLTs. Available at: https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/
[18] UK Co housing (2022) About Co-housing. Available at: https://cohousing.org.uk/about-cohousing/
[19] CCMH (2009) Bringing Democracy Home- the Commission on Co-operative and Mutual Housing. Available at: https://www.cch.coop/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/bdh-commission-report.pdf

An important strength of co-operative housing is community building. Cairncross et al[20] highlight that *"the development of community spirit was widely identified by TMOs as one of their main achievements"*. Furthermore, Davids[21] states that, housing co-ops *"live out the ethics of real community living"* and stand for *"community warmth and community wellbeing"*. These findings are supported by the co-ops surveyed in *"Bringing Democracy Home"*. For example, a co-operative tenant who was interviewed described how *"[in co-ops] you look out for your neighbour, knowing that your neighbour will look out for you. And the children all know that they can knock on any door, and people will look after each other's kids as if they were their own"*.

Involvement in co-operative housing can also bring significant benefits to individuals. The report *"Bringing Democracy Home"* highlighted several examples of people gaining employment as a direct result of the skills they developed from being involved. They also documented examples of individuals who, after experiencing challenging life events, were housed in a co-op and, as a result, acquired new skills and grew in confidence[22]. Similarly, Cairncross et al. noted that TMO board members reported increased confidence and new skills.

Challenges and barriers of co-operative housing

Rogers[23] sets out the "seven deadly sins" that must be guarded against in co-operative housing, these can be applied to participation more widely:

- The problem of representatives, once elected, usurping power and ruling others
- The "us and them" oligarchy
- Corruption
- Favouritism
- Lack of accountability and secretiveness
- Failure to declare conflicts of interest
- Apathy

Co-operative housing often relies heavily on individuals' voluntary goodwill and time, as highlighted by Price Waterhouse[24]. Rowlands[25] argues that voluntary efforts have a cost that should be recognised so that cooperatives are not seen as a cheap alternative to housing management teams. Rowlands also stresses the importance of developing a framework to evaluate the true cost-benefit of co-operatives, noting that their success depends on investing in community empowerment through appropriate support mechanisms and structures. This critique also reflects a broader concern about the overreliance on the third sector, which, while beneficial, requires a robust support infrastructure to be

[20] Cairncross, L, Morrell, C, Darke, J, Brownhill, S (2002) Tenants Managing: An Evaluation of Tenant Management Organisations in England Oxford Brookes University ODPM

[21] Davids, T (2008) writing in the CCH Bulletin

[22] CCMH (2009) Bringing Democracy Home- the Commission on Co-operative and Mutual Housing. Available at: https://www.cch.coop/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/bdh-commission-report.pdf

[23] Rogers D (1999) New Mutualism-The Third Estate. The Co-operative Party

[24] Price Waterhouse (1995) Tenants in control: an evaluation of tenant-led housing management organisations. London: Department for Environment.

[25] Rowlands, R. (2009) Forging Mutual Futures - Co-operative, Mutual and Community Based Housing in Practice: History & Potential. Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham, Birmingham

sustainable. Bliss et al emphasises that it is not possible to empower people in a day, it requires an ongoing approach that allows people time to build up the skills and knowledge needed.

Co-operative housing has often been seen as vulnerable to shifting into dominant housing tenures such as owner-occupation driven by broader societal forces. It can also lead to cooperatives being taken over by or absorbed by bigger landlords. Birchall[26] argues that co-operatives are particularly susceptible to these pressures, describing how they tend to "*succumb to the wider social forces which sustain these dominant tenures*". Similarly, Rowlands [27] notes that co-operative housing models have been susceptible to take-over by dominant modes of housing delivery. This tendency applies less to later developments like common ownership and tenant management, which have been more effective in maintaining their independence. Clapham and Kintrea[28] build on this, suggesting that co-operatives must continually adapt to meet changing needs while navigating the space between renting and owning.

A core principle of co-operative housing is that one member equals one vote and all members have the democratic right to vote on all issues. However, they note that, for some organisations, it works best to delegate day-to-day operations or strategic matters to a specific group of tenants or staff. All co-ops must work to find the right balance. Formal activities such as being on the board must be balanced with more informal interactions such as "fun days"[29].

Concluding thoughts:

For the purposes of the Commission, we are particularly interested in how the process of co-operation and power sharing between residents and organisations can improve conditions. It acknowledges the significant value that co-operative housing organisations bring to the wider sector and to communities, but the key focus here is to understand how processes of co-operation can be embedded in traditional resident/landlord housing structures.

With that in mind, there are useful lessons for the Commission from the literature on tenant involvement and co-operative housing, including both the strengths and the potential challenges of these forms of tenant involvement. There is evidence to suggest that both co-operative housing and higher levels of engagement lead to better service delivery and higher satisfaction levels for residents. For participation to be meaningful, it must be embedded into the culture of the organisation. Care needs to be taken to ensure that there are different forms of engagement to suit the varying needs of tenants. Organisations must consider the governance and legal responsibilities that housing organisations must adhere to, and ensure that adequate training and capacity building is provided for residents involved in taking on any of these responsibilities. Organisations must keep their core social purpose at the forefront and renew their focus on this core purpose as they grow. Finally, as much of the literature on this topic is more than a

[26] Birchall, J. (1992) Housing Co-operatives in Britain Department of Government Working Papers No. 21 London: Brunel University

[27] Rowlands, R. (2009). Forging Mutual Futures - Co-operative, Mutual and Community Based Housing in Practice: History & Potential. Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham, Birmingham

[28] Clapham D, Kintrea K. (1994). Community Ownership and the Break-up of Council Housing in Britain. Journal of Social Policy. 1994;23(2):219-245.

[29] CCMH (2009) Bringing Democracy Home- the Commission on Co-operative and Mutual Housing. Available at: https://www.cch.coop/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/bdh-commission-report.pdf

decade old, the work of the Commission should support the building of a new body of evidence for future projects.

To help us build on our understanding of the history of co-operation in social housing we have highlighted key case studies showcasing different examples of social housing provision. These case studies were gathered by a combination of desk-based research, our own past research and by talking to representatives from different organisations. They provide useful lessons for future power-sharing arrangements between tenants and landlords. We have selected seven case studies from across the UK, representing different sizes and types of organisations

Phoenix Community Homes

Date formed: Formally set up in 2007

Location: London Borough of Lewisham

Number of homes: 7600

Phoenix Community Homes was London's first community gateway housing association. The "Community Gateway" model allows residents to take a central role in decision making about how their homes are managed. Over half the board is made up of residents, the chair must always be a resident, and resident groups scrutinise every level of the organisation. Residents are also encouraged to become shareholders for the cost £1 which allows them to vote on how the organisation is run, with each resident being allocated one share, this helps ensure they are at the centre of all policy and decision making. Phoenix is keen to avoid tick-box resident engagement strategies. They reward residents for providing feedback[30][31].

Phoenix started life in 2005 when residents were introduced to the "Community Gateway" model by a group of local tenant activists including Pat Fordham who later became Phoenix's first Chair. Residents were dissatisfied with the service being provided by the council who were unable to bring their homes up to the decent homes standard. In 2007 following a residents ballot Phoenix Community Homes was formed, via a stock transfer from Lewisham Council. It included housing in three wards Bellingham, Whitefoot and Downham, all of which were considered disadvantaged[32].

To bring residents on board and allow them to make informed decisions about policies , Phoenix gained accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Housing to provide housing training to staff and residents together. The Phoenix Academy, now offers professional training up CIH Level 4. [33].

Phoenix management has evolved since the group was first formed. When they were first established the properties were divided into 12 sections each with approximately 500 properties. Each section had its own committee and budget. The committee would hold formal meetings to make decisions about how the budget was spent. Attendance was low as some people were put off attending formal meetings and there were disagreements about how money should be spent. Following a ballot, a "Community Chest" was created which held all the money and groups could apply for pots of money for projects.

In March 2023 the board reviewed their resident involvement strategy to ensure the continuation of the "Community Gateway" model. This has embedded the role of the residents' forum the Phoenix Gateway into the rules of the association. The Board have also established a Resident Experience Committee which has a majority of resident members and has delegated authority from the Board to agree policies relating to housing and property management e.g. repairs, allocations, ASB etc. A Resident Scrutiny Panel conducts independent deep dives into specific areas of service and reports directly to Board. Phoenix has also broadened its approach using a wider range of involvement activities to ensure barriers to participation are broken down with a focus on equality, inclusion and diversity. For example "Chat and Chips" sessions are held with different housing services which visit

[30] https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/comment/more-housing-associations-should-adopt-the-gateway-model-to-empower-tenants-74599

[31] https://www.agendani.com/better-tenant-engagement-the-community-gateway-model/

[32] https://www.phoenixch.org.uk/sites/default/files/9831%20-%20PCH%20-%20AR%202022-23_web.pdf

[33] https://report.phoenixch.org.uk/phoenix-annual-report-2021-22/resident-leadership-and-effective-governance

different areas along with a chip van handing out free chips to encourage residents to engage. Events focussing on specific groups celebrate diversity and include discussions relevant to particular communities e.g. International Women's Day, Pride, Black History Month, Disability Awareness day.

By 2013 Phoenix was the largest employer in the local area, and so they needed a bigger office space. They took over the site of a former pub "The Green Man" which had been abandoned for 12 years and was an anti-social behaviour hot spot. As well as being used as offices for housing staff and services, it also acts as a community hub, hosting the local Credit Union, and a space for local groups to use, for example a "Knit and Natter" group and a youth programme. These activities are open to everyone not just Phoenix residents.

Phoenix has continued to expand since it was first set up in 2007. In 2018 they received £60 million investment from the Pension Insurance Corporation to build new homes. So far, they have completed or are in the process of completing eight new developments. These range from converting a family house into three flats at affordable rent, to a new build development of 60 flats[34]. In 2021 L&Q sold 1500 homes in Grove Park, Lewisham to Phoenix, following a resident ballot. This allowed Phoenix to expand the "Community Gateway" model, and the money allowed L&Q to build new homes[35]. Where possible Phoenix encourage "chain lettings", under-occupying older residents move into new one-bedroom flats to free up bigger properties for families.

Lessons for the Commission:
- For residents to meaningfully engage they need to be given the skills and knowledge; the Phoenix Academy is an example of how to do this.
- The needs of residents and communities change over time, it is important to adapt structures when things aren't working, and be open to new ideas.
- Not all residents have the same interests, people want to be engaged in different ways
- There is a wider role for housing providers in the community, they act as anchor organisations within neighbourhoods
- Working in partnership with other housing organisations can increase your capacity
- It is important for organisations to know their strengths

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[34] https://www.phoenixch.org.uk/community/development
[35] https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/lq-completes-1500-home-stock-transfer-in-south-london

EastendHomes
Date formed: 2005
Location: London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Number of homes: 3,796

EastendHomes was set up as part of the Tower Hamlets Housing Choice programme in 2005. Tower Hamlets was unable to bring their housing stock up to Decent Homes Standard, and so the 18 estates in the borough were transferred to eight housing associations as part of the transfer deal. The newly formed housing associations were able to bring in private finance to help fund the works. During the transfer process EastendHomes made a commitment to a localised and responsive housing management service with a resident-led management committee that would have a say in what services are provided and to what standard.

EastendHomes is broken down into four areas, each with its own neighbourhood office. Each office has a Neighbourhood Manager and Housing Officers, Housing Support staff, caretaking, and estate services staff. The areas vary in size from 427 properties to 1,604. Rent collection, lettings and home ownership are based in a central housing office, as well as technical staff, major works and regeneration; strategy and policy performance; and finance.

EastendHomes has different levels of resident involvement. At the highest level are the Board members; there are five spaces on the board for residents, out of twelve members. At the next level down, each area has a dedicated Estate Management Board (EMB). The local boards are made up of elected residents and meetings are attended by the local housing staff. These groups receive specific information about the performance of their estates which helps ensure local issues are identified. Each EMB must adopt a constitution which sets out rules and practices. EastendHomes serves a very culturally diverse community and the boards aim to be broadly representative of the communities they serve. In 2010 one of the EMBs opted to transfer to a Tenants and Residents Association (TRA). A TRA is not subject to the governance rules of EastendHomes, but they continue to support this group. This decision was made following a 6-month trial period and a consultation of residents who agreed to make this arrangement permanent. As well as the EMBs EastendHomes has a resident scrutiny panel which works outside the formal governance framework to scrutinise the performance of the landlord.

Estate inspections are carried out by the area housing officer, and residents are invited to take part in these inspections. Areas are assessed and graded using the "The National Indicator 195 system", a survey that a survey that measures the cleanliness of streets and neighbourhoods in the UK. Training is provided for residents to teach them about the grading system. Residents who attend training and estate inspections are rewarded with shopping vouchers. The same inspection system is in place for void properties, with the inspection carried out by a technical officer.

EastendHomes conducts annual surveys using questionnaires and measures overall satisfaction getting feedback after someone has had a repair, been let a new property, or reported a case of ASB. They also hold ad-hoc focus groups to provide qualitative feedback on a particular area undergoing review. These opportunities are also used to review the resident engagement strategy[36].

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[36] https://www.eastendhomes.net/download.cfm?doc=docm93jijm4n1819.pdf&ver=1709

EastendHomes also runs a range of activity groups such as a Bangladeshi women's group, a food pantry, and gardening group, as well as running fun days and open days. These provide an opportunity to collect informal feedback from people who may not engage with more formal methods. They also are used as a way to recruit residents to more formal roles[37]. They are very helpful to a low income community.

Lessons for the Commission:
- While EastendHomes is locally based, relative to many housing associations, they still think it is important to break this down further, and recognise there may be different issues even across a limited geographic area
- EastendHomes recognises it is important to adapt to the needs of local tenants, for example switching from an EMB to a TRA. Resident engagement and power-sharing should not be static, but a process that is regularly reviewed to ensure it meets changing needs.
- Residents have differing capacity to engage; offering different forms and levels of engagement is important to involve as many people as possible
- Knowledge should not be assumed. Training is important to ensure that those that do want to be more formally engaged have a clear, up to date, and relevant knowledge base
- EastendHomes acknowledges that engaging takes up peoples time and offers rewards to demonstrate their time is valued.

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[37] https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/casereport152.pdf

Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team

Date formed: 2017

Location: London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Number of homes: 826

The early blocks of the Lancaster West Estate were built in the 1930s, with the bulk of the estate being built in the late 60s to mid-70s. The estate was originally managed by Kensington and Chelsea council. In 1996, the Kensington and Cheslea TMO (KCTMO) was formed, under the inspiration of the director of housing in order to encourage maximum tenant participation. Unlike most TMOs that manage a single estate or block, the TMO was responsible for all the council's housing stock, making it the largest TMO in the country. By the 2000s, KCTMO had become in practice an Arm's Length Management Organisation for the Council, with tenants having little real power or influence over how their homes were managed.

On the 14th June 2017 there was fatal fire at Grenfell Tower, located at the centre of the Lancaster West Estate, in which 72 people lost their lives and the 23-storey block of 130 flats was completely destroyed. The subsequent public inquiry (2018-2024) has shown that the residents of Lancaster West had repeatedly raised concerns around the safety of the tower and felt ignored by KCTMO. A lot of the concerns were raised around the quality of the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower that took place in 2016 which KCTMO oversaw.

Following the fire, the management of the estate was taken over by the "Gold Command" of all councils, and the Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team was set up. This involved a dedicated neighbourhood management team based on the estate. All housing services, including tenancy management, repairs and maintenance, are now based in the local office, allowing staff to respond quickly to any problems. Residents are able to drop into the office and report any issues face-to-face. The LancWest Works programme was also set up providing three-month placements within the team to local residents, many of whom are now full-time members of staff.

As well as a new management approach, the team is also responsible for overseeing an extensive refurbishment of the whole estate, with the aim of making it a "carbon neutral estate for the 21st century". Unlike the previous refurbishment there was a commitment that the works should be resident-led, and all works should be done sensitively and in co-operation with residents. Residents have been consulted at every stage of the process. This has included ideas days, door-knocking, residents' association meetings, online surveys, open days of refurbished flats and consultation events to collect views on different aspects of the refurbishment works such as the windows.

In 2022, LSE Housing and Communities was asked to carry out the first stage of a three-part evaluation of the works reviewing residents experiences of the refurbishment and the new neighbourhood management structure. As part of this process both residents and stakeholders were interviewed. Most residents recognised that the management of the estate has improved, and they feel the new team is working to make things better. Some key themes emerged from speaking to residents about their involvement. Firstly, different residents want different levels of engagement. There is a balance to be found between involving residents and not overwhelming them with information and demands on their time. Residents and stakeholders described some residents as suffering from "engagement fatigue". The Lancaster West Team have worked hard to communicate with residents in different ways; utilising Whatsapp groups, online and in-person meetings, leafleting, and events. Despite this some people still don't have all the information about the works, and engagement needs to be

on-going to ensure all residents feel informed, particularly given the anticipated length of the refurbishment project. Finally, building trust is key, especially given the context of Lancaster West. The team have worked hard to build trust and ensure there is transparency and clarity about what is happening in the estate[38].

Lessons for the Commission:

- The Lancaster West example shows that even in very difficult circumstances it is possible to rebuild trust with residents.
- It is hard to strike a balance between involving residents in decision making in a meaningful way and not creating "consultation fatigue". We know residents will always want different things so careful consideration is needed to see how best to manage this, ensuring the different needs and wants of all residents are being met, and making sure that the reasons behind specific decisions being made are transparent and well-communicated.
- Lancaster West not only involves residents in decision making, they have employed residents to directly deliver services. This increases residents' stake in the community and helps staff deliver a service that meets the needs of residents.
- Due to the circumstances surrounding the Lancaster West Estate it has been allocated a larger budget than most other similar housing estates, with additional resources. It is important to consider how far this limits the ability of other areas to replicate the model.

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[38] https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/casereport150.pdf

Soha

Date project started: 1997

Location: South Oxfordshire

Number of homes: 7,923

Soha was formed in 1997 when council housing tenants in South Oxfordshire voted for a stock transfer to what was then called South Oxfordshire Housing Association. 5000 homes were transferred in the process. Since it was first formed Soha has built around 2000 homes, including shared ownership, private renting, independent living and key worker housing. In 2023 they were rated the third largest housing developer in proportion to their total stock. Despite their ambitions to continue to grow, they want to retain their local base, and they have a policy not to build further than an hour's drive from their base in Didcot.

In 2017 they became a mutual organisation, meaning all residents can now become shareholding members, which allows them to:
- Hold the board to account
- Have a say on Soha's communities' priorities
- Have a vote in major organisational change
- Have a say on how Soha spends money and delivers services

Soha have a system of co-regulation, meaning they actively encourage and support residents to engage in setting policy and holding managers to account on delivery. Board members are nominated by a panel that includes residents. A vote is then held at the annual AGM, open to all shareholding members. Residents also sit on the board, with five of the 12 board members currently residents. Soha also runs a resident scrutiny and audit panel, looking at specific issues, such as the lettings process. All findings and recommendations are feedback to senior management and the board. All members are offered training and the opportunity to attend events and conferences. There are clear examples of shareholders exercising their powers. At the most recent AGM a vote was taken on whether to increase Soha's debt ceiling in order to allow them to borrow more money to build new homes. In order to involve members in this decision, the leadership of Soha presented to members on risks of taking on more debt versus the value of being able to continue building new homes. The members approved the rule change after a full debate at the AGM.

In 2022, SOHA extended shareholding membership to staff. Staff membership is capped at 15%, and there is 15% cap on staff votes in any decision, to ensure resident members remain the majority in decision making.

As well as the more formal structures there are a number of residents groups working across different Soha areas. These groups offer an opportunity for local residents to come together and talk about the issues impacting their areas. If the groups would like to apply for funding Soha can support them to become constituted and form a resident's association[39].

Lessons for the Commission:
- Soha adopted the mutual approach 10 years after it was first formed, showing it is possible to transform how an organisation is managed and governed, changing its approach to resident involvement.

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[39] https://www.soha.co.uk/

- Soha shows it's possible to expand considerably while still retaining a tenant-focused approach. Doing this within a defined geographical area strengthens the link to a local base.
- As with some of the other case studies, Soha recognises the importance of providing training to tenants to give them the skills and knowledge needed for meaningful engagement.

Cassiltoun Housing Association (originally Castlemilk East Housing Co-op)

Date project started: 1984

Location: Glasgow

Number of homes: 1077

The Castlemilk Estate was built on the outskirts of Glasgow in the 50s and 60s. From the start the estate faced challenges: residents were moved there from slum clearance areas in Glasgow; many people were out of work due to the decline of the manufacturing industry in the West of Scotland and distance from labour markets; the estate lacked locally based facilities, and there was poor transport into Glasgow. Between 1971 and 1991 the population fell by almost half. To try and tackle these problems, nine tenants decided to set up the Castlemilk East Housing Co-operative with the support of Glasgow City Council. The ownership of 90 of the council homes were transferred to the Co-op. It was the first stock transfer of this type to happen in Glasgow[40].Under the Co-operative structure any resident of the 90 homes can become a member by purchasing a share in the organisation for £1. All members elect the management board at the AGM.

In 2004 the housing co-op was converted to charitable status and was renamed Cassiltoun Housing Association. The Co-op structure remained in place.

Cassiltoun has played a key part in the regeneration of Castlemilk, not only through the regeneration of housing but through wider community activity, such as creating business and employment opportunities for local people. Recently representatives from the housing association attended a careers day at the local secondary school to talk about the different job opportunities they can offer.

In 2000 the residents established the Cassiltoun Trust to oversee the redevelopment of the Castlemilk Stables, a 17th century stable block which had fallen into disrepair. The stable now acts as a community hub, offering community lunches and activity groups. It is also home to a nursery.

Cassiltoun Housing Association is keen to respond to tenant feedback. In their newsletters they publish complaints and what they have learnt and what action they have taken. In 2024 following feedback from their tenant's survey, they transferred their newsletter online, but tenants who do not have access to the internet can request a printed copy[41]. This was an important response to local priorities and needs.

Lessons for the Commission:
- In every housing structure there will be tenants who are unhappy with the situation and complain. It is important that organisations are honest about this and ensure they are learning from each incident.
- Housing providers can play a role in providing wider community support, such as the restoration of the Castlemilk Stables.
- It is important to meet the needs of tenants, and to be flexible in your response, to allow those in the minority to feel heard. For example, while the majority of tenants wanted the newsletter online, Cassiltoun has still made provision for the tenants who don't have access to the internet.

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[40] https://scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk/org/cassiltoun-housing-association/
[41] https://www.cassiltoun.org.uk/

Walsall Alliance of Tenant Management Organisations (WATMOS)

Date project started: 1999

Location: Walsall area of the West Midlands and Lambeth in London.

Number of homes: 2700

WATMOS's origins date from the early 90s with the formation of eight TMOs across the Walsall area, when tenants took on the right to manage by forming TMOs in response to the poor management of their council properties. 70% of this stock was unpopular, high rise tower blocks. All the TMOs were formed by different groups of tenants but the leaders of these projects formed relationships which led to the development of the Walsall Tenants and Residents Federation. While there were some initial teething problems working out management agreements with the council, the TMOs brought about noticeable improvements: they cleared repairs backlogs; reduced rent arrears; and employed local estate-based management so problems were dealt with promptly. Crime and nuisance also reduced; committee members would meet with potential residents before they were allocated properties to let them know "nuisance would not be tolerated".

WATMOS was formed in 1999, following the Labour Governments move towards the transfer of council stock to housing associations. Wallsall Housing Group (WHG) was set up as a stock transfer organisation with the aim of offering tenants across the borough similar empowerment opportunities to the TMOs. The TMOs had the option of being transferred to WHG with the rest of the council stock, transferred to another existing local housing association, or forming their own independent housing association set up specifically for the TMOs. The group decided to take the latter option. The official transfer took place on the 27th March 2003, the group was called Walsall Alliance of Tenant Management Organisations (WATMOS).

In the first five years, WATMOS maintained local services across each of the eight TMOs. The board remained resident controlled with a board of eight tenants, one from each TMO, and four independents. Forming the housing association created some challenges in how the organisations were managed, as they had to ensure they followed lenders' requirements and the regulatory code in the same way as any other housing association. This meant the TMOs had to be part of a legal group structure under WATMOS and new systems had to be put in place for delivering repairs, which had previously been carried out by a combination of the TMO staff and the council.

In 2000, inspired by the WATMOS model, a group of five Lambeth TMOs set up LATMOS, but by the time an options appraisal for the future of Lambeth homes were carried out in 2006, one of the TMOs had become insolvent and another had dropped out. Due to the time pressures, it was felt the TMOs should be transferred to an existing housing association. After discussions amongst the LATMOS members it was felt that WATMOS was the best choice due to its commitment to TMOs. The transfer took place in 2012.

More recently changes have been made to how WATMOS is managed. Over the years tenants have been less keen to be involved in formal TMO management structures, partly due to the pressures and commitments of everyday life, but also the increased scrutiny housing associations are under following the Grenfell fire, the introduction of the Building Safety Act, and other regulations. An agreement was made to centralise decision making to take the pressure off tenant representatives. While the board is still majority tenant-led, a greater focus is placed on skills-based recruitment to ensure the Board has the expertise to steer the organisation through these challenges.

Despite these changes tenants are still central to WATMOS. Every TMO area has a local estate group that is allocated a budget to carry out local community activity. It is felt these groups understand the needs of the community better than the central office. The Chief Executive regularly holds open meetings with tenants and offers opportunities for feedback even if it's sometimes contentious and not what they want to hear. Increasingly WATMOS is finding people want to engage online or over WhatsApp groups, and footfall to local offices has reduced. However, WATMOS recognise for some tenants this is still an important service, so the offices remain open.

The local TMO groups scrutinise WATMOS's performance to ensure it is meeting tenants' needs. In 2023 WATMOS launched their Resident Voice Network which aims at creating more ways for residents to be involved. These include being an ambassador for your estate or building; running community projects; sitting on the scrutiny and review groups or Resident Committee; being part of a procurement panel to select contractors; helping with newsletters and annual reports; answering surveys and participating in estate walks. Alongside this a "Board Readiness Programme" offers support and extra skills training to residents who want to be part of the board.

Lessons for the Commission:
- Whatever the tenant power sharing structure in place, organisations must still meet regulatory requirements, it is important structures are put in place to ensure this happens.
- Residents want to be responsible for different aspects of the management and may not feel they have the time to respond to more complicated regulatory challenges. It I important this is acknowledged and there is room for more complex aspects to be controlled by another structure if necessary.
- How people want to engage is changing; people may have less time now than when the TMOs were first set up. This needs to be recognised, and involvement structures need to fit with people's everyday lives.
- WATMOs took on the management of new TMOs, in a new geographical area, showing the ability of organisations to expand and still retain their ethos, if done in the right way.

Bushbury Estate Management Board (EMB)
Date project started: 1998
Location: Wolverhampton
Number of homes: 966

Bushbury EMB is the organisation that manages a large share of the social housing in the Low Hill Estate, Wolverhampton, one of the area's largest estates. Built in the interwar period, by the 1970s the estate started to fall into disrepair as the council were falling behind on repairs. As the estate became more unpopular, it was increasingly used to house ethnic minority households, which created tensions with the existing, mainly white, population. Many of the houses were left empty which encouraged anti-social behaviour and gave the estate a bad name.

In reaction to the problems on the estate the council proposed to demolish it. A group of residents in the Bushbury Hill area of Low Hill joined together and lobbied government to save the housing. It was allocated City Challenge Funding to carry out structural repairs and save the houses from demolition. Following this, the residents voted to exercise their right to manage and a Tenant Management Organisation, Bushbury Estate Management Board, was formed. At this point Bushbury was still seen as an unpopular place to live and had 100 void properties. The TMO worked to improve the standard of void properties and introduced one of the country's first choice-based lettings schemes[42].

The TMO board members are responsible for the running of Estate Management Board. All the board members are democratically elected; all are EMB residents; and the board positions are all voluntary. All board members receive induction training and on-going training in Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding, Housing Law, Health and Safety, amongst other key issues.

All residents are invited to become a shareholder for 10p. All members can vote for the board, and on other important decisions about the future direction of the EMB. There are currently 886 shareholders which represents 71.75% of households.

In 2023 a new resident engagement plan was introduced that invited tenants to join the board and staff to review in detail a specific service. Service reviews so far have included the anti-social behaviour service and looking at how to make tenants feel safe in their homes[43].

As well as the day-to-day management of the houses, the EMB take an active role in the wider community. To help tackle ASB on the estate they have installed CCTV and worked closely with young people. The EMB supports a number of initiatives to bring the community together such as school holiday activities, summer trips, and over 60s lunches. Alongside this they support the local community centre, ensuring it has the funding it needs to stay open.

To help fund their community work, the EMB set up a local charity Bushbury Hill Community Action Group (BHCAG) which raises money at events and applies for grant funding. The Community Action Group is also a less formal way for residents to be involved than being a board member. Anyone can join and have say in what they think matters in their local community. For example, one board member who noticed a problem of loneliness and isolation in the local area decided to set up a befriending service, Bushbury Buddies. She originally received funding from various charities, including the Lottery, and is now supported

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42 https://municipaldreams.wordpress.com/2014/12/09/the-low-hill-estate-wolverhampton/
43 https://www.bushburyhill.co.uk/

by Bushbury Hill Community Action Group. Without the confidence and skills that came from, being on the board, she feels she never would have been able to set up the group[44].

Bushbury EMB is part of the WV10 Consortium, a partnership of local groups in Wolverhampton that empower grassroots community groups to work together to secure funds and deliver services to support local people. All the work is co-produced with local people and enables local people to influence decision making and investment[45].

Lessons for the Commission:
- Despite problems, even when estates are considered unpopular, many residents still want to live there. It is possible to turn around the conditions of an estate, even in the most extreme cases, but the local community has to be involved.
- Like a number of the other case studies, the value and necessity of training for potential board members and other involved residents must be stressed.
- Housing management has a role to play beyond just managing the housing. Housing managers can help tackle wider community problems and improve community cohesion. They bring a lot of added value through schemes such as holiday activities. Organisations can have a role in supporting residents to set up groups to tackle issues that they see as important.
- Local residents know the problems in their local area, and when supported in the right way, can help to tackle them, Bushbury Buddies is a good example of this.
- The involvement and power sharing with residents can go beyond tenants, into the wider local community. The WV10 Consortium is an example of how this can be done.
- Some tenants may just want to be involved and have influence over a specific issue that is important to them, Bushbury EMB's service review model allows for this.

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[44] https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/textonly/LSEhousing/Research/Tenants_in_Action/Tenants-in-Action.pdf
[45] https://wv10consortium.co.uk/

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE CASE STUDIES

While every case study is unique. there are some overarching useful lessons for the Commission and future projects that want to increase co-operation between residents and landlords.

1. All residents have different needs, and the way they want to engage will vary. It is important that a range of approaches are offered, from very high-level involvement, such as being a board member, to attending a quick drop in session or community day and sharing how they feel about their landlord. Some organisations have brought residents on board as staff, to deliver services in the local area, which can help to build a sense of co-operation, and remove a 'them and us' mentality.

2. Communities and organisations are constantly changing and adapting. Systems and processes that worked when organisations were first set up may not be suitable in the current climate. It is important for organisations to be receptive to this and open to change.

3. It is possible for organisations with tenants at the centre to grow and expand, as SOHA and WATMOS show. However, a commitment needs to be made to the core principles of the organisation to ensure these are not lost.

4. For tenants to engage meaningfully, especially at board level, they need to equipped with the right skills and knowledge. Providing courses and training programmes is necessary to ensure this happens.

5. Even in the most challenging circumstances, it is possible to engage with residents and re-address the power imbalance between landlord and tenant. Co-operation and power sharing can help to rebuild trust with residents, even in the most difficult circumstances. But this is not an easy process, and there needs to be a long-term commitment from the organisation to allow relationships and trust to develop, with a constant re-appraisal of how things are working on the ground.

6. Housing providers have an important role beyond just bricks and mortar. They are also key players in the wider community. It is important tenants have some influence over issues that are important to them, which go beyond simply the management of housing. Power sharing can go beyond the direct estate or neighbourhood, and influence wider community structures, as shown in the W10 Consortium.

7. When setting up resident involvement structures the geographical areas covered need to be carefully considered. Challenges and needs can vary significantly, even over a limited geographic area.

8. Increasing regulatory pressures on housing associations have an impact on the level of involvement residents feel comfortable with. Some issues, for example building regulation, may be better dealt with centrally, by a dedicated experienced and qualified team, while others issues would benefit from a more local approach, drawing on residents' expert knowledge of their communities.

INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

Alongside the desk-based research, we carried out interviews with experts working in the social housing sector, to understand more deeply how co-operative principles have been used over their career, what they see as the strengths and potential challenges of a more cooperative approach to tenant-landlord relations, and how these ideas can be applied to the sector more widely. We spoke to people working

directly for social landlords that prioritise co-operative principles, and representatives from umbrella organisations. We highlight the key themes below.

a) Strengths of cooperative approaches

The interviewees highlighted a number of the strengths of co-operative ways of working and their application within social housing. Firstly, more co-operative approaches allow management to have greater insight into the problems and challenges their tenants are facing, and allow problems to be dealt with more quickly. If tenants are involved from the outset, organisations have a much clearer picture of their priorities and it ensures everyone is working towards the same goal. One participant said that while initially you may hear things that as a landlord you may not want to, in the long run it will ensure you are working in the right way. Interviewees also highlighted that tenants can offer new perspectives and solutions. It was argued that involving tenants can help save money as it reduces the need to use expensive consultants to come up with solutions to challenges being faced. It was also felt that a co-operative approach can help reduce the short-term nature of many resident engagement projects that are led by an individual, or are reliant on a specific pot of funding. It embeds the principles of co-operation and power-sharing as part of the organisation's culture. One participant argued that involving tenants produces better outcomes for landlords. An example of this is the introduction of mandatory regeneration ballots on London estates, which has led to higher-quality proposals, and greater tenant buy-in. Participants also highlighted that giving people a sense of ownership of where they live helps improve their well-being. One participant felt that involving residents can help challenge negative stereotypes, as landlords will have a better understanding of the backgrounds and skills of their tenants.

> *"It's about empowering people in their own housing situation...it's about people's sense of ownership of their own homes and their communities and the empowerment that this gives to people, and the sense of independence and well-being that comes from that"*

b) Challenges of cooperative approaches in social housing

The interviewees highlighted some challenges with implementing more co-operative approaches that might limit an organisation's inclination to adopt more power-sharing agreements. Firstly, the culture of social housing in the UK is often paternalistic. For co-operative principles to be adopted more widely, we need to address this culture. Furthermore, for more co-operative ways of working to function, tenants need to acquire the right skills and knowledge, which can be time consuming. One participant felt that tenants are increasingly time poor and feel landlords should just provide a high level of service, without them having to be involved. Following on from this, it was highlighted that all tenants are different and have different needs. One participant highlighted that a strategy is only going to be successful if you recognise these needs and offer different ways to engage. Interviewees were increasingly finding people didn't want to attend meetings but are happy to share thoughts and concerns over WhatsApp.

Over recent years the housing sector has seen increased regulation, which can make organisations wary of adopting co-operative principles as the focus has been on meeting these new official requirements. One participant felt strict regulation can put tenants off from wanting to be involved. This raises an important discussion about which elements of housing management tenants should have control over.

One interviewee highlighted that projects that encourage more power sharing are often led by an individual within an organisation, and there needs to be a plan for who will take over this responsibility when/if that person leaves, to ensure it is embedded as a key element of the organisation's operations. Looking more specifically at new housing organisations, such as community-led or co-operative housing, participants highlighted that the UK currently doesn't have the legal and financial structures to support the development of new groups. Lenders and planners are often nervous about supporting housing groups of this type, as they see them as risky. Furthermore, we have a culture that sees homeownership as the ultimate goal, and until this is challenged people will struggle to see co-operatives and community-led housing as a viable option with tenants in the lead.

c) Encouraging cooperative ways of working with residents

We asked interviewees what they think would encourage organisations to introduce more co-operative principles. It was felt housing association leadership is often nervous about trying new ways of working. More good examples of what works would help reassure organisations. Participants felt leaders needed to back new ways of working and ensure they become embedded in their organisations culture. Participants also highlighted that tenants can help come up with creative solutions to problems, leading to them being dealt with more effectively and potentially save organisations money in the long term. One participant felt that regulation could go further in ensuring that more power sharing happens across organisations providing a minimum standard. However, organisations would still need a more fundamental culture change to ensure it works effectively.

One interviewee felt the "Right to Manage" should be introduced for housing associations, but to make a fundamental difference, it would need to be coupled with a campaign to ensure tenants are aware of the rights available to them. While much of the conversation focused on why landlords should adopt more power-sharing principles, one interviewee highlighted the need to encourage tenants to be involved, showing that ultimately it will create a better neighbourhood for them to live in, with a landlord who can meet their needs. They also said being involved gives tenants greater insight into how their rent and service charges are used.

d) How increased co-operation between tenants and landlords can help the sector respond to current problems

The housing sector is currently facing a number of significant challenges: problems with the fire safety and the condition of existing homes; the need to build new social housing; and recruiting and retaining staff to list just a few issues. Interviewees highlighted several ways more power sharing between tenants and landlords could help to address these problems. Firstly, as mentioned previously, tenants can bring new perspectives and ideas to a range of challenges landlords are facing. Many landlords are currently trying to find the balance between maintaining and managing their existing stock, and building new, much needed homes. One interviewee felt giving more powers to tenants in how their homes are run would allow more time for landlords to focus on building new stock. Partly due to this focus on building new homes, decreased funding, and increased costs, many social homes have fallen into a bad state of repair. Alongside this is the push to decarbonise homes. Repairs and environmental retrofit will require intrusive work in people's homes. If tenants feel they are a part of the decision making, and have a say in how works are carried out, they are much more likely to co-operate with plans and allow works to take

place. An open dialogue with tenants will also ensure any issues relating to the works are picked up on and dealt with faster. Furthermore, many organisations are currently struggling to attract and retain staff. One interviewee felt that the younger generation favoured more co-operative ways of working and this approach could help attract young people to housing jobs.

Finally, it was felt amongst all the interviewees that although more cooperative ways of working are not without their challenges, giving tenants more say over how their homes are run is fundamentally the right thing to do to, and will ultimately lead to better outcomes for both tenants and landlords.

> *"I think ultimately it leads to the outcomes that the community wants, so you're getting the right outcomes because it's the outcomes they're looking for, you're building in success from the start if you start off with co-operative principles"*

Our first stage report shows clear strengths in housing organisations already following co-operative principles, with residents and staff both playing a part in how their housing is managed. It is clear from the case studies that co-operation and power-sharing can take a variety of forms. There are some key lessons and messages that have emerged that will be useful for the Commission's work:

1. **Diverse models:** Power sharing structures can take many different forms, and there is no one size fits all. Organisations should be open to new approaches, and to changing how they work as an organisation develops over time.

2. **Mutual benefit:** Co-operating and sharing power with tenants brings benefits to landlords, through more effective decision making, and greater insight into the problems their communities are facing. It also brings benefits to tenants beyond a better landlord service. Giving people a sense of ownership of where they live can help improve well-being, and build skills and confidence.

3. **Diversity of tactics:** Tenants have different needs. While some tenants may want to go to regular meetings, others may want to engage in a more ad-hoc fashion. Landlords should offer different forms of engagement and strive to engage beyond just a small group of "usual suspects". There is a general feeling that tenants are increasingly time poor and have less capacity to attend regular meetings, which needs to be taken into account.

4. **Training and support:** In order for tenants to engage meaningfully with formal structures, such as boards, they need to acquire the necessary the skills and knowledge. Training is crucial, but it does require time and dedication from involved tenants in order to work with landlords. There are questions around renumeration, childcare, and other issues that affect residents' ability to become formally involved. There need to be strategies to address these issues.

5. **Responsibilities and regulation:** It is important to agree clear boundaries around which aspects of housing management that tenants and landlords are best placed to be responsible for. Over recent years there has been increasing regulation, which can make both staff and tenants nervous about higher levels of power sharing. In some cases tenants have a big say in housing management, but for some organisations the tenants and staff may both feel this should be the responsibility of paid housing managers. All those involved in any regulatory or governance-related project must aware of their responsibilities and the complexity of regulation.

6. **Broader support:** While day-to-day housing management is a large part of social landlords' responsibility, social landlords also have a role in the community, for example providing community spaces and providing support. Doing this in partnership is crucial to success. Tenants are often the ones best placed to say what the community needs and where community efforts should be focused.

7. **Organisational buy-in:** For power sharing to be meaningful, it needs to be embedded in the landlord's structure, not just the responsibility of one team or individual, or limited to a specific pot of funding.

8. **This is essential:** As we set out in the first section social landlords are facing a number of competing pressures; the new tenant satisfaction measures; the new consumer standards; building safety standards; Awaabs Law; net-zero targets and the urgent need to build new social homes. These new requirements place new pressures on landlords to work with their tenants.

Conversations with stakeholders highlighted the ways in which working in more co-operative ways with tenants could help landlords meet these new targets. Both the Grenfell tragedy and the death of two-year old Awaab Ishak highlighted the danger of not listening to tenants, co-operative ways of working ensure tenant's voices are always central to the decisions being made. Resident needs should be central to everything social landlords do.