Tenant involvement in the organisational structures of housing associations in England: exploring the barriers 2000 - 2008

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the barriers to effective tenant involvement at an organisational level in housing associations by tracking, over a long period of time, the experience of tenants who get involved in the forums, panels and boards of housing associations. The focus of the research is the relationship between the tenants and the professional staff, in corporate environments where delivery of a user-focused service is purported to be the shared goal. The aim has been to explore with tenants and staff their experiences of trying to make tenant involvement work at a strategic level within the organisation.

My research seeks (a) to unravel the methods used by the different actors to influence activities and outcomes, and (b) to examine their effects on the power balance in and between the groups of people in question. Clegg's 1989 'Circuits of power' theory is used to plot and analyse the processes involved in the transformation (or not) of power within the culture and practice of tenant involvement and the empowerment (or not) of the tenants who work with staff at the heart of these corporate cultures. In addition I use Somerville's 1998 typology of empowerment to illustrate the potential for organisational change.

I gather a wide range of material, using a detailed questionnaire, 17 case studies plus a further three of national level involvement initiatives, and an analysis of 112 Housing Corporation and Audit Commission inspection reports (from 2003 and 2008). To this I add my own experience as a participant observer in a range of settings over the period. This thesis is intended to shed some light on why the same barriers continue to exist and why so many involved tenants and their housing associations are still struggling to make involvement really make a difference at this level, despite a decade of intensive regulation and inspection of involvement activities

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Abbreviations

Terms and abbreviations

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BV	Best Value
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
CIH	Chartered Institute of Housing
EMB	Estate Management Board
HA	Housing association
HARTOE	Housing Associations Residents and Tenants Organisations of England
LSVT	Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (housing association)
NHF	National Housing Federation
NFHA	National Federation of Housing Associations
PEP	Priority Estates Projects
QUANGO	Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation
RA	Resident Association
RI	Resident involvement
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SMART	Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time
TA	Tenants Association
TAROE	Tenants and Residents Organisations England
TI	Tenant Inspector at the Housing Corporation Inspectorate
TIA	Tenant Inspection Advisor Audit Commission Inspectorate
TMC	Tenant Management Cooperative
TMO	Tenant Management Organisation
TPAS	Tenant Participation Advisory Service
TP	Tenant Participation
TPO	Tenant Participation Officer
TBM	Tenant Board Member

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all my friends, family and colleagues who have supported me over the many years that it has taken me to complete this research. I would also like to thank all the tenants and staff that have been willing to share their experiences with me. In particular I would like to thank Angela McKee for her unwavering belief in me and willingness to explore with me my ideas and crucially her intensive support over the period of writing this thesis. I would also like to thank Tamsin Stirling for helping me maintain my perspective and develop my theoretical insights by providing a supportive critique. I would like to thank Luke Winter for his support and especially Bill Winter for his care and support over this last three years of the journey; and of course my thanks to my supervisor Professor Grace Davie at the University of Exeter for her advice and for believing in this work and in me.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 My starting point

This thesis concerns the role of involved tenants in housing associations from 1999 to 2008. It is important from the outset to appreciate that housing associations are distinct from local councils in the provision of social housing. They are 'independent societies, bodies of trustees or companies established for the purpose of providing low-cost social housing for people in housing need on a non-profit-making basis'[1]. 'Involved tenants', for the purposes of this research, are those tenants who choose to get involved within the organisational structures of their landlord association through membership of a panel or forum (and associated working groups), or through membership of the board; they are therefore involved at a strategic level in the monitoring and development of policy and practice in the areas of governance, management and service delivery. More information on housing associations and the changing face of tenant involvement can be found in chapter 2.

My interest in this research topic stems from my own participation in such involvement within a large national housing association over a fourteen year period (from 1995 to 2009). My experience, and that of my fellow tenants, did not seem to match the rhetoric of my landlord, or that of successive governments, about the potential for service-user involvement both to deliver improved services and greater accountability, and to empower tenants and communities (Housing Corporation 1992, and Housing Corporation 1999b). In 1996, when I first joined the 'customer panel' of my housing association landlord (and thus became an 'involved tenant'), it was not clear to me what it was that I and my fellow tenants were supposed to be doing, or indeed why we were being invited to do it, because from our point of view it was neither empowering nor successful in improving services. Prior to starting my research in 1999 I was aware that

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[1] Source: http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingstatistics/definitiongeneral/
[Accessed 6 January 2007]

much of what went on in housing associations in the name of tenant involvement was never discussed between practitioners and involved tenants, and received little or no attention in the wider public or academic domains. For these reasons, I wanted to open up the debate and find out for myself what was really going on behind the closed doors of housing association forums, panels, boards and committees.

Shortly after starting my research, my level of involvement in the field increased. I became a board member of my own association and then gradually moved into consultancy work, building up a busy practice focusing on tenant involvement and service delivery improvement in social housing (i.e. both housing association and council housing). My privileged position both as an involved tenant, and latterly as a consultant, gave me access to corporate environments previously closed to, and unexplored by, academic enquiry.

My motivation for embarking on this research was therefore twofold. It was partly the result of the curiosity and frustration engendered by my experience as an involved tenant, and partly the desire to improve things for the future. This I sought to do through a contribution to professional practice, and the development of an understanding, or knowledge base, that could serve to empower tenants directly.

1.2   The wider context of my research

Around the time that I started my research, successive policy documents and guidance issued by government and the regulator for social housing (the Housing Corporation) were beginning to encourage tenant involvement at an organisational level, where tenants could contribute to strategic decision making. They stated that this type of involvement was both a good thing in itself and a necessary activity for housing associations, and that resources and time should be set aside to make it happen (Housing Corporation, 1998; Housing Corporation, 1999b; Housing Corporation, 2000d; DETR, 1999b). This position was reflected in many housing association corporate documents, such as annual reports and corporate plans – a consensus that remained unchallenged until 2004 (by which time my research was well under way). At this point things began to change. For example, the Audit Commission (2004) published a research report (*Housing: Improving services through resident involvement*), which focused on the costs and benefits of tenant involvement. This report took the view that, in many

associations, involvement at an organisational level in panels, forums and even boards had become something of a 'sacred cow', and that it was not sufficiently scrutinised to ensure value for money or the achievement of agreed outcomes.

Whether or not it had become a sacred cow, there was clearly a lack of guidance at this time regarding what might constitute good practice. At the start of my research I could see that there were tensions both between tenant involvement staff and tenants, and between tenant involvement staff and management. Not everyone had the same view about what they were supposed to be doing, and importantly, why they were doing it. Moreover, both my own experiences as an involved tenant, and those of my colleagues, led me to believe that housing association staff were stereotyping tenants and seeing them as a homogenous group, and this appeared to be reflected in their practice. At that time, within my own housing organisation, responsiveness to the input of tenants was slow, and staff attitudes were experienced by tenants as patronising.

More recently, through a range of legislative and policy instruments, housing associations have been encouraged to develop and broaden the scope of their tenant involvement activity (Housing Corporation 2002a, Housing Corporation, 2004; Housing Corporation, 2007b). Increasingly the policy framework has promoted a view of tenants as customers and citizens, who pay for services from landlords, and whose landlords should therefore be accountable to them. Customer influence has been seen as a key driver for service improvement, and this approach has been set within the broader context of civil renewal, promoting greater choice and accountability to service users as citizens across a range of welfare services.

At the same time, the expectations of the regulators and inspectorates have risen and, in some areas, become more prescriptive, with increasing pressure on landlords to undertake broader and more inclusive tenant involvement activities that produce outcomes in service delivery, and deliver value for money. From 1997 the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code[2] had included a requirement to involve tenants in decisions about management and services (Housing Corporation, 2002a). However, before the introduction of the inspection regime in 2002, the Housing Corporation was not able to identify exactly what it was that associations were doing when they said that

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[2] The Housing Corporation was the regulator for housing associations in England until November 2008.

they were involving tenants. They could not identify outcomes, nor the value or impact of such activity, either to associations or tenants. Their focus was solely on ensuring that opportunities were in place. In the late 1990s there appeared to be little discussion about empowerment, accountability, outcomes, or value for money in relation to involvement activities.

Tenant involvement in this sector is seen as particularly important because of the absence of an effective market to regulate the quality of services. Tenants living in social housing have limited opportunities to move between housing associations, or between housing associations and council housing. They cannot therefore vote with their feet on issues such as rent increases or quality of service; they cannot leave if they judge that the services they receive are poor value for money. Despite moves to equalise rents between housing associations and councils, and to increase rents in social housing overall to approach more closely those in the private rented sector, mobility between sectors does not become any easier: significant physical and financial barriers persist through the continuing differences in rent levels and security of tenure. Moreover, the increasing shortage of social housing overall (1.77 million households - and rising - on waiting lists, as reported in the Local Government Chronicle, January 2009), means that social housing is a strictly rationed resource, and access is limited to those who are considered to be most in need. This mismatch between supply and demand, coupled with the constraints on mobility within the sector, rules out the possibility of choice as a market indicator, which means that housing associations will not be motivated to improve services by the need to keep their customers (Balchin, 2002). Instead, services are planned and delivered by staff, generally with the needs of the organisation in mind, and may or may not meet the needs and preferences of tenants as customers, or be responsive to them. In short, the associations themselves are unlikely to lose any business as a consequence of their behaviour, because tenants and future tenants have little option but to accept what is provided (Cole and Furbey, 1994).

However, research and comment appeared to be scant in this area. Before 1999, very little had been written about what I term 'organisational involvement' in housing associations, as opposed to more local forms of involvement at area, community or street levels. Street level activities in communities and estates have been well documented both prior to 1999 and since, and many good practice guides were available

at this time for both practitioners and activists (Craig & Mayo, 1995; DETR, 1999b; European Union, 1997; Watson, 1994). Local authority involvement activities started to become research fields in the early 1970s (Bevington, 1991; Cairncross et al, 1997; Craddock, 1975; Hague, 1990; Jackson, 1999; Power, 1991), but there was limited information about how housing associations facilitated involvement in housing management and governance until the late 1980s, when Housing Action Trusts, and later, housing association governance, were researched by Platt et al (1987 and 1990), and housing association governance committees were researched by Kearns (1987). Finally in 1991 the NFHA, in partnership with TPAS, published *It's a better way of working: tenant participation in housing associations*, which presented the findings from five case studies of tenant participation practice. This work was commissioned to meet a perceived need for guidance within the sector, and was important because although some of the issues are similar between local authorities and housing associations the constituencies themselves are very different. As Clapham and Kintrea (2000) point out, staff culture was more powerful in housing associations than in local authorities or voluntary associations, in part because housing associations were essentially private businesses, many of which were charitable organisations with distinct historically-based cultures.

A second point is equally important: despite the diversity of cultures within the housing association sector, associations, whether traditional or large scale voluntary transfer, had much in common. They were all in receipt of some public monies, were semi-autonomous, and were run by voluntary boards made up largely of white middle class professionals, with limited accountability to the wider community (Kearns, 1994). Furthermore, by the time this research started, housing associations had become the main provider of new social housing, which was funded by a mix of public and private money. Individual associations were in competition with each other for reducing government grants, and this did not encourage collaboration and information sharing between them. Involved tenants were therefore isolated from their counterparts in other associations, and researchers did not have easy access to such environments. My privileged position as an insider thus gave me an opportunity to explore new ground.

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1.3   Refining my research questions

My experience as an involved tenant had left me with a huge number of questions. I wanted to know why tenant involvement was not working for me and for my fellow tenant colleagues, and whether tenant involvement in the organisational structure of housing associations really could make a difference in terms of process, empowerment, outcomes and culture. Could tenants really become empowered through the involvement process and could they then change the focus of housing management and governance? What, then, were the barriers to involvement and how were these barriers created and maintained? Importantly, what does *successful* involvement look like, who judges this and how? Are judgements to be based on process and/or outcome? Are the views of tenants different from those of the service providers, and who ultimately decides how services are delivered? If involvement appears to be working in one housing organisation, from the perspective of both the organisation and tenants, then why does it not work in another? Why was it that, in some organisations, staff talked to only two or three tenants about the quality and effectiveness of services, and why were these people almost always older white males?

My research is undertaken principally from the point of view of the tenant. However, in order to understand fully the barriers to involvement, I felt that it was necessary to explore and understand the structures and processes whereby the service is delivered; the experience and skills of the staff that facilitate and manage the activities; the wider organisational context within associations; and the regulatory framework.

My initial data collection was broad-based and exploratory. I wanted to find out more about what was going on in the field. Using a questionnaire I aimed to establish who was involved in the process, what they were doing, how they were supported, and what their experiences were in terms of outcomes. From more detailed case studies I wanted to acquire an in-depth view of what was going on over a longer period, as well as look at key moments in time. These case studies would give me rich data, more information on the dynamics between tenants and their organisation in practice, and show how the organisation supported its panels and forums. These data were not only valuable in themselves, but would also enable me to 'test' the findings from the questionnaire. In

addition, from an analysis of inspection reports (completed at two points approximately five years apart) I hoped to gain further information about how things were changing (or not) over time, and how the inspectorates identified and addressed barriers to involvement from their perspective. This would also give me more information on the policy framework, to enable me to triangulate my findings. Finally, I wanted to see if the approach of professionals to involving tenants was the same in other settings. I therefore carried out a case study of the Housing Corporation's Tenant Consumer Panel, and explored the approach of the inspectorates to involving tenants in their work, specifically in the areas of training and support.   Chapter 5 describes and discusses my methodology in more detail.

As the project developed (in 2001) so I began to refine my research questions. When I started I found that, insofar as research had been undertaken in the field of tenant involvement at an organisational level (within housing associations), it tended to focus on individual case studies, or descriptions based on aggregated information from self-assessments and surveys that had been completed by the housing association. There was a strong emphasis on describing positive practice and processes, to inform and support the development of involvement. In essence the focus was determined by the agenda of the funding source. Whilst the case studies had valuable insights to share, they were often of flagship projects with exceptional, though short term, resourcing (Bevington, 1991; Barran, 1992; Blewett and Garratt, 1995; TPAS, 1991/1993; PEP, 1994; Housing Corporation 2000a). As an independently funded researcher I wanted to focus on the more common experience of tenants, which was of things *not* working, especially when it came to involvement in panels, forums and boards. Hence my decision to focus on the barriers to involvement, and the framing of my primary research question as follows:

What are the barriers to successful tenant involvement in the organisational structures of housing associations, how do these barriers come about and why do they persist?

In exploring the barriers to successful tenant involvement it is necessary first to look at the meaning of 'tenant involvement' itself, and then determine what the essential elements are if it is to be considered successful.

From the outset commentators and practitioners struggled to develop a definition, or even an agreed name, for tenant involvement. This was partly because words like 'participation' and 'involvement' have attracted a constellation of meanings over time, and because the concept reflects both a process and an outcome. The most commonly accepted definition of tenant involvement is that developed by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service in 1991 as being: 'A two way process involving sharing of information and ideas, where tenants are able to influence decisions and take part in what is happening'(TPAS/NAFA: viii). This definition includes both process and outcome.

However, not all commentators have been in favour of including matters of outcome within the definition. For example, Richardson (in 1983, when tenant involvement at an organisational level was at an early stage), considered that it was the existence of access between the groups that was important, and that it was not helpful to include issues of power or empowerment in the definition. In her view, it was not possible to conceive of outcomes, or the potential for influence, at the definition stage. She even went so far as to say that 'the key dimension for a definition of participation should not concern power at all' (1983: 27). She pointed out that power was evident in all aspects of daily life and that the relative power differentials could create a myriad of potential outcomes simply through the process of interaction. The HART report (Platt et al, 1987) also puts rights of access centre stage rather than focusing on outcome, and defines tenant participation as 'the right of tenants to have a say in decisions which affect their housing and the opportunity to review the consequences that flow from them' (Platt et al, 1987: 2).

Whilst it might be considered that this definition contains an implied outcome, all too often such processes have been criticised by tenants for failing to produce any tangible effects. If there is no outcome then the notion of involvement is meaningless, and where there is a significant differential positioning and access to resources and support then power, and thus empowerment, become major issues to explore and understand. Since the early days of involvement, when these definitions were first established, the concept of power in terms of what it does (Clegg, 1989), and empowerment in terms of the impact on the people involved (Somerville, 1998), have come more to the fore, suggesting that the former has the potential to create a barrier to the latter. In short power needs to be central to the research process.

The question, therefore, of what is meant by *successful* tenant involvement is necessarily going to be a challenging one.   In my view, if tenant involvement is to be considered successful it has to be seen to be making a difference to services and/or the organisation's accountability to tenants, to be empowering, and to be inclusive in its mode of operation. Breaking this down further, involvement should result in the organisation being seen to take account of the views of tenants, meaning that there should be evidence of where the nature and/or delivery of services has changed as a result. Of course it may not always be appropriate to act on the recommendations of tenants, but there should always be transparency regarding the consideration of the tenants' views, and the reasons for rejection where they are not adopted. Thus accountability requires the association to give feedback to tenants that states clearly what they believe the views of the tenants to be, what action they have taken in consequence and the reasons for any decision not to act in accordance with those views.

The second strand of my definition is that successful involvement should be empowering. Sadan states that in her view:

> The process of empowerment means a transition from a state of powerlessness to a state of more control over one's life, fate, and environment. The process is aimed at changing three dimensions of a social condition, i.e. to bring about a change in: people's feelings and capacities; the life of the collective that they belong to; and the professional practice that gets involved in the situation. (Sadan 1997:13)

On the whole, there is little talk of 'empowerment' in the tenant involvement world. It is not a word that tenants themselves use, not least because the word can easily be seen to have patronising overtones. Yet I believe that the concept of *empowerment is* relevant in a number of ways. In terms of the feelings and capacity of the tenants it is easier to examine these in the negative than the affirmative. My research was not designed to measure changes in people's feelings and capacities, but the stories people told very often indicated feelings of powerlessness in the face of an unyielding or unresponsive organisation. There is no doubt in my mind that the subjective experience of tenants is relevant to the concept of 'success' in tenant involvement. It cannot, of course, be judged on the subjective experience of tenants alone, but if the experience appears to be uniformly bad and frustrating then it cannot be considered a success, even

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if changes are made to services in consequence, as the participation will be neither sustainable nor empowering at a personal level. At a more political level, and following Somerville's conception of empowerment as 'any process by which people's control over their lives is increased' (Somerville, 1998:233), I use the term to mean that the group or individual gains more control or influence over activities, resources and/or outcomes, and is strengthened in consequence. I also, following Clegg (1989), refer to empowerment in terms of the processes involved in transforming power within organisations in a way that shifts the balance towards those who are currently subordinated, whether this takes place through the actions or strategies of the 'subordinated' themselves, or through the strategies and actions of the organisation. This is allied to Sadan's third dimension of bringing about change in professional practice.

The third strand of my definition of successful involvement is that it should be inclusive in its mode of operation. By this I mean that nobody is excluded (directly or indirectly) from tenant involvement activities by virtue of the structure and/or mode of operation of the activities in question; in terms, that is, of their initial access, their ability or willingness to stay involved, and their ability to contribute effectively.

Within the framework of the main research question set out above I have therefore identified a number of additional questions:

- What are the characteristics of the involved tenants in terms of age, gender, skills and abilities, disability and ethnicity, and to what extent do these create or maintain barriers?

- What is the 'shape' of tenant involvement at this level in organisations? How does the structure and format of involvement, including the support available for participants, create and maintain barriers for involved tenants?

- What happens in practice, both in terms of outcomes and in terms of the way that interpersonal dynamics affect the possibility of success?

- Are there differences between the relatively new Large Scale Voluntary Transfer associations (LSVTs) (which were created for the purpose of enabling the transfer of council housing stock into the housing association sector) and traditional

housing associations, given that tenant involvement is built into the fabric of the governance structure in the LSVTs?

- How can the application of different bodies of theory assist in the understanding of why barriers to involvement arise and persist? Can a theory help to define a way forward that will enable tenant involvement at this level in organisations to be more 'successful' as defined within the research question?

Thus my intention is twofold. It is first to identify the barriers to successful tenant involvement in the organisational structures of housing associations, and secondly to examine the relationships within the involvement process. I seek therefore to unravel the methods used by the different actors to influence activities and outcomes, and also to examine the effects of those methods on the power balance in and between the groups of people in question.

This research sets out to make a distinctive contribution in a number of ways. It seeks to explore an important area of activity within housing association practice that has not previously been explored in any depth, and does so in the context of a longitudinal study, thus providing a picture of ongoing issues and developments, rather than simply a snapshot. The focus on barriers to success rather than on what is working well is relatively unusual, not to say unfashionable, but I believe it is critical to a full understanding of the practice of tenant involvement, and necessary if we are to identify the positive changes that are required in professional practice if tenant involvement at this level is to be a success. It does not preclude the opportunity to pick up on good practice where it exists. Most importantly, however, this research uses concepts of power in order to understand and interpret the dynamic of tenant involvement as it occurs in practice, and to show how and why these barriers are constantly reproduced. It seeks to contribute not only to an understanding of the processes involved, but to provide pointers for future improvements in practice, both within the field of tenant involvement, and in the wider field of service-user involvement across a range of services.

1.4   The structure of the thesis

The remainder of this introduction provides a guide to the structure and content of this thesis. Chapter 2 sets the scene for the research by tracking the development of housing associations, housing management and tenant involvement within the context of a developing, and latterly reformed, welfare state. This chapter explores the governments' changing approaches to consumerism, citizenship, customer primacy and accountability, which forms the cultural context in which housing associations are located, and which influences the work they do. What emerges is a narrowing of the traditional divides between the public, private and third sectors. Within this context it is possible to explore tenant involvement from the immediate post-war period to date, looking closely at the history of the legislative framework and how this has influenced involvement activities over the years. From this history, it can be seen that there was a distinct change in the 1970s from 'activism' to 'participation' (Grayson, 1997), and then by 2000 to 'involvement', thus reflecting the shift in the rhetoric of user-involvement in the development and delivery of public services generally, as legitimised through statute and government regulation. This chapter is divided into four parts that cover: the period from the 1850s to the 1930s; the introduction and development of the welfare state from the 1940s to the 1970s; the advent of neo-liberal approaches from 1979, including the introduction of the regulatory and legislative framework for housing associations and in particular tenant involvement; and a final section that draws together a number of key themes.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature relating to the types of tenant involvement undertaken in the sector and the main barriers to its effectiveness. From this review, it was possible to identify significant gaps in the literature in relation to tenant involvement in the organisational structures of housing associations, particularly at the outset of my research. In recent years funders, researchers and policy makers have started to take an interest in housing association governance and involvement systems, and involved tenants and board members have been increasingly scrutinised and subject to assessment and criticism (Audit Commission, 2004). However, in 1999 this was uncharted territory, and even the work that has been done since has focused on *what* is happening rather than *why* it happens in the way that it does. In addition, this chapter brings together a wide range of barriers, identified from community level partnerships

and wider tenant involvement; these are arranged in themes that illustrate the unchanging nature of the barriers across the last 20 years.

Chapter 4 examines the theoretical underpinning of the research. Finding a theory to help me understand the dynamics of successful or meaningful tenant involvement was a challenge, in that I wanted specifically to explore the dynamics of the interaction between the parties involved. There were theories in other academic fields that might have been helpful - for example, social psychological and social movement theories - together with tools such as critical discourse analysis, which had previously been applied to collaborative activities within social housing research. However, critical discourse analysis is more suited to tracking single events or a series of events within one locality, and the other bodies of theory tended to centre on why people got involved, and not on the mechanics of the involvement process itself or why certain outcomes were, or were not, achieved. I needed a model that could operate more flexibly in a wider arena of research, and which was more appropriate to the study of organisations.

After considerable reflection, I decided to draw on the work of Clegg's (1989) circuits of power framework, which had first been referred to in a tenant involvement context in Cairncross et al's (1997) study of tenant involvement in local authorities. More recently, Hawtin and Cooper (1998) have reviewed the available theory in the sector, and have pointed out that Clegg's approach could not account for the dynamics involved in community engagement. However, given that my interest was specifically in tenant involvement in organisational structures, which is markedly different from community engagement, I felt that this theoretical model had the potential to offer real insight into the issues that were arising. I wanted to apply Clegg's circuits of power model to specific instances and activities, in order to show how tenant involvement was constructed and reconstructed over a period of time within the corporate landscape, as opposed to the arguably more 'messy' involvement context in the community, which had already been well documented. I felt that this theoretical framework was particularly useful for looking at the power relationship between staff and tenants, and that it would show how changes in outcomes and process were constructed, and at which point in the process such changes might happen and why. I felt that not enough had been made of the inequalities between the two, or sometimes three, parties involved

in tenant involvement activities: staff, tenants and managers, or staff, tenants and regulators.

At the same time, I drew on Somerville's (1998) typology of empowerment as another way in which to identify sticking points in the process. Somerville's language of increasing/decreasing dependency and top down/bottom up approaches, and its connection to empowerment, are readily understood concepts within the housing sector, in contrast to Clegg's more esoteric use of language, and thus it would enable easier communication with research participants. Somerville's typology also provides a framework in which it is possible to assess whether lasting changes have been made to the power relations and whether tenants have been truly empowered.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodology adopted. This included a detailed questionnaire with 120 panel and forum members, some of whom were also board members; case studies of 17 housing associations; an analysis of the themes from Housing Corporation and Audit Commission inspection reports in 2003 and 2008; and interviews with a range of stakeholders. At the beginning of the journey, I gave considerable thought to the complexities of applying an academic approach to something with which I was deeply involved on a day-to-day basis. And as the research continued I needed to track the changes in my own position as the research increased my understanding of what was really going on. In addition, during this period the context and delivery of tenant involvement changed considerably, as a result of the direct involvement of government in the regulation and inspection of associations. This opened up the field to the scrutiny of both inspectors and academics, as the Housing Corporation, and latterly, the Audit Commission inspection reports became available in the public domain. I was amassing a huge amount of material and data, which was also reflecting significant changes over period, and I had to consider how best to order and present it. At the same time, plotting the change over the research period offered me the opportunity to see whether these new initiatives and regulatory requirements were making any difference in overcoming barriers to successful involvement.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 contain the principal findings from the three primary data sources. Chapter 6 covers the characteristics of involved tenants, their capacity, and the barriers to getting and staying involved. In relation to the characteristics of the tenants it has been possible to draw some comparisons with national data from the Hills report (2007)

(social housing in general) and the Housing Corporation's (2006) report on housing association tenants. Chapter 7 looks at the structure and policy framework of involvement, and explores the capacity and experience of the staff responsible for its development and maintenance. It also looks at issues around training and support for tenants in developing their capacity for involvement activities, including its take-up, scope and impact. Chapter 8 looks at tenant involvement in practice, the difference it makes from the tenants' point of view, and explores the barriers that are created through the dynamics between members in the key forums and panels, and between these groups and the organisations that they work with. It also looks at where group members, and those who are tasked with supporting them, focus their energies and actions. Finally it explores some of the strategies employed by those seeking specific outcomes, and the intended and unintended barriers that are created in consequence.

Chapter 9 contains the analysis of my findings from the field work and the literature in the light of theoretical frameworks: Clegg's circuits of power (1989) and Somerville's empowerment typology (1998). The sections are structured to reflect the different elements of Clegg's model, and to address the key research questions. I start with an explanation of the characteristics of the involved tenants, in relation to the standing conditions, and relations of meaning and membership. It is at this point that the history of tenants' experiences, and professional staff cultures in housing associations, needs to be borne in mind, as part of the construction of meaning and of the relationship between the two parties.

In section two I explore the shape of involvement practice. First I look at national and local policy in relation to its impact on involvement activities, and using Clegg's framework, assess the potential exogenous effect against the 'real' effect of regulation and inspection on practices as found in my research. I suggest a range of reasons for the impact of regulation on involvement using the framework. I then assess the findings regarding training and support, and identify a range of barriers to involvement and their impact on success as defined here. I outline some areas of interest in relation to the capacity of staff and the support available to facilitate effective involvement. The third section explores the dynamics to be found in panels and forums, using an example from the case studies to illustrate how power is used to fix and transform rules of practice, and how this plays out in organisations. It also looks at how staff and tenants operate as

key nodal points or 'obligatory passage points' for channelling power, and demonstrates the typical accommodation that is reached in most organisations. In the fourth section I return to my central question of whether tenants involved in the corporate undertakings of housing associations have an impact on services in a positive way, and whether they become empowered in the process. By drawing on examples from the case studies I explore 'bottom up' pressures, such as individual and collective challenge, and also how effective tenants can be in protecting their rights. Additionally I consider the extent to which 'top down' approaches to developing and supporting involvement and empowerment are effective.

Continuing with the examination of outcomes, power inequalities and the potential for empowerment (in Clegg's terms, looking at changes in the rules, the standing conditions and the relations of meaning and membership which benefit the subordinated), I use Somerville's 1998 typology to determine whether changes in power relationships are positive for individuals, communities. I do this by considering the ongoing direction of action in association involvement activities (i.e. top down or bottom up), and the extent to which the data over the whole research period suggest that associations are now responding to tenants' priorities and preferred ways of working. I discuss the effect that 'bottom up' pressure from tenants has had on housing associations and whether it has the potential to transform power. I then consider the effect of shifts in dependency relationships between the groups involved, and whether this represents enough change or empowerment to make a real difference.

In short, with the dynamic nature of power in mind, and the wider structural inequalities already present, I attempt to assess the extent to which tenant involvement in organisational settings is likely to make a difference to the quality and focus of housing services to tenants, or serves to empower involved tenants.

 In Chapter 10 I draw conclusions regarding the scope and focus of my work, and consider the contribution made to knowledge. I conclude by drawing out the key findings, and offering suggestions for an alternative approach both to the study of tenant involvement and to its practice.

CHAPTER TWO: TENANT INVOLVEMENT - HISTORY AND CONTEXT

2.1   Introduction

The development of social housing policy, and in particular that relating to housing associations, has very closely reflected changes in both society and politics in the UK. By locating this development in the context of the wider social, political and economic conditions since the early days of the housing association movement, it is possible to identify the drivers for greater tenant involvement, choice and landlord accountability. What follows, therefore, is the contextual information underlying the development of tenant involvement in the UK. Specifically, this chapter explores the broad changes in government policy, and the developments in housing policy and the housing association arena, since the 1850s. It plots how social housing provision and its management culture have developed within the broader context of welfare provision. It also charts the development of tenant involvement through the changing legislative and regulatory framework.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first covers the early years of rented and social housing, the rent strikes, direct action and the emergence of early tenant activism, from the 1850s to the 1930s. The second covers the period from 1930 to 1960, and explores the state's response to housing need, the developing labour movement following the Second World War, the introduction and development of the welfare state from 1940 to 1960, and the issues that emerged for housing, tenants and tenant groups as a result of housing policy in that period. The third section explores the 1960s and 1970s as a turning point in housing and welfare policy where the voices of those excluded come to the fore and the impact of large scale municipal housing is finally realised and a new role for the growing housing association sector begins to emerge. The fourth and longest section tracks the advent of more concrete neoliberal approaches to involving tenants and to social housing generally, through the Conservative and subsequent Labour reforms from 1979 onwards. This section charts the development of tenant involvement through the lens of legislation and regulation to show the shift into

more participatory forms of involvement, and considers how effective these instruments have been in achieving their aims.

2.2   1850-1930 Protest and strikes

2.2.1   Early history and the roots of protest

Private and employer landlords dominated working class housing in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Rent hikes were frequent and rent arrears common, as were altercations with landlords and summary evictions. Evictions were easily gained as there was no requirement to prove grounds under the legislation at that time (Englander, 1983). During this period there were also a number of small charitable organisations that provided alms-houses at a peppercorn rent, for example, for retired servants, or those in poor health. The idea of alms housing was introduced in the 12th century and provision continued through the following centuries, funded by endowments and trust funds (Malpas, 2000). Large employers such as Owen, Cadbury and Lever, as philanthropists, provided tied accommodation for their workers, and this also enabled them to support the health and effectiveness of the workforce through the availability and provision of quality food.   For many, the experience of regular work and reasonable living conditions was positive, but the loss of one's job meant losing both home and work, which prevented workers from organising or demonstrating over work and housing issues (Grayson and Walker, 1996).

During the mid-1800s, social movements of workers emerged, which campaigned for better quality housing as part of a wider political disaffection. These included the Luddites and Chartists, who experimented with Land Schemes to provide decent housing and smallholdings (Grayson and Walker, 1996). However, for tenants living in cramped, inadequate rented housing, the only form of action available was to withhold rent, hold rallies, or barricade the streets, so that rent collectors could not visit or evict. Protests about rents and housing conditions were common occurrences within a context of general social unrest in the early 19th century, and many tenants' associations and community groups were formed at that time. Although these actions were not always successful, there were occasions when they achieved results. For instance, the Glasgow

rent strike of 1915, which involved 20,000 tenants, ultimately led to the first ever rent freeze in the private sector (Damer, 1992).

It was against this background that housing associations and trusts emerged in the 1890s. Housing management generally, and the housing association sector as we know it today, has its roots in the philanthropic activities of a number of middle class women, notably Octavia Hill, who in 1864 developed a 5 per cent investment opportunity for investors to fund housing for the working class. This resulted in the Model Dwellings Movement, which aimed to build good housing for rent that would make a profit, in contrast to the charitable institutions and alms-housing that relied on funding from endowments and trusts (Malpas 2000). At the same time, notable charitable trusts were being formed by Peabody and Guinness (Malpas and Murie, 1999).

Octavia Hill's aim was to manage intensively the families and individuals who lived in the accommodation through her concept of unified housing management: to educate them to live well, eat well, stop drinking and to work regularly, in order to become sober, productive members of the community. Her concern, as with her peers, was the moral uplift of the poor, and the price of non-compliance was eviction. For the model to work, and for investors to realise their profit, tenants had to be in employment and the rent collected. At the height of her activities, in 1912, Octavia Hill was managing over ten thousand units, and her work influenced social housing practice over many decades (Whelan, 1998).

This 'educational/social work' approach to housing management was delivered by volunteer middle class women who went on to form the first professional body for housing management, the Association of Women Housing Workers. This organisation aimed both to train staff and to establish standards for housing practice. It was not until 1931 that they finally joined the more male dominated, local authority based Institute of Housing (Malpas, 2000).

In addition, Octavia Hill saw a good relationship between tenant and landlord as the foundation of good housing management – an approach influenced by the Christian Socialist Movement and her own family ties. She was determined to use whatever means possible to improve the lot of the poor. Whelan (1998) comments that, 'Octavia had a conception of the landlord and tenant relationship that verged on the sacred and

imposed the most serious duties on both parties' (Whelan, 1998:11). Hill's approach was to train ladies to undertake housing management in line with her own beliefs and practices. She was, apparently, of the opinion that a group of tenants could be useful for consultation purposes when needed (Whelan, 1998), but there is very little information available on exactly how she involved her tenants, and what impact they had on the way that she delivered services. Spink (1998), however, pointed out that the representatives likely to get involved and to be acceptable to the landlord, would be those that were 'safe' and who would ensure that the items discussed were those selected by the landlord.

Spink (1998) also drew a comparison between Octavia Hill's approach to housing management and that of the alms-house organisations, referring to the latter as 'benevolent uncles as opposed to the approach Octavia Hill and her philanthropist peers took as seeking to protect and shape a subservient child' (Spink, 1998:45).

2.2.2   The emergence of a politicised working class and the development of municipal housing

Although the Housing Act 1890 empowered local authorities to purchase and demolish slum dwellings and re-house their inhabitants, very little had been achieved by 1918, mainly due to limited resources. The developing Working Men's labour movements supported tenants' campaigns, as rents were increasing rapidly in the areas where slums were cleared and accommodation was scarce. Unscrupulous landlords sought to maximise income (Grayson and Walker, 1996) and there were numerous rent strikes, and mass evictions. As a result, housing issues became politicised and were linked to the emergence of the trades unions and the Independent Labour Party (Bradley, 1999). Politicians were keenly aware of the voting potential of these groups: the Labour Party had campaigned hard for the introduction of council housing and that campaign had won votes. This meant that tenants' associations gained access to Labour Party networks, contacts, experienced campaigners and lobbyists and became part of a wider movement of working class struggle. For those tenants who were more radical, and in partnership with some key middleclass supporters, including women campaigners for wider equality, the rent strike was seen as a key step towards wider strikes, thus increasing pressure on government.

It was in this climate of civil unrest that the Addison Act 1919 was introduced. Lloyd George felt that he could win over the activists' leaders by providing state housing and other social benefits (Cole and Furbey, 1994). Large subsidies were made available for the construction of council housing, which was a major concession to the working class movement of the day (Yelling, 1992). Local authorities were expected to undertake surveys of local housing need and make plans to address it. The Department of Health had the responsibility, through local authorities, for delivering 'homes fit for heroes' (Whelan, 1998; Hanley, 2007; Malpas, 2003). What followed was a robust programme of cheaply constructed council housing built to accommodate the better off working classes and the lower middle classes, in an effort to ameliorate tension and create social stability.

Management practices in the public rented sector in the early part of the 20th century were focused primarily on rent collection and property maintenance. However, they were also influenced by the perception of local authority housing. In the early 1920s it was the better off working classes who could afford the higher rents of council homes and who were viewed as 'deserving' or 'respectable' - housing management practices of the day reflected this attitude. Many of the early councils employed private sector agents to collect rent and manage the housing (Cole and Furbey 1994; Franklin and Clapham, 1997).

2.3   1930-1960 Activism and the emergence of the welfare state

2.3.1   Activism and the new estates in the 1930s

By 1930, 10 per cent of the population lived in council housing (Hawtin and Lowe, 1998). The early estates had limited community facilities and the tenants were, in the main, skilled or semi-skilled working class, who had what Bradley (1999) termed 'aspirations' in both political and economic spheres. The focus of tenant activism moved away from rents towards campaigns for basic facilities such as schools, shops and play areas. These campaigns were to some extent successful and some local authority managers encouraged and supported the setting up of tenants' associations. These early groups negotiated for environmental improvements and community spaces and where such activities did bear fruit it often took many years. Meanwhile, tenants

were left living on large estates on the outskirts of towns and metropolitan areas, often without access to pubs, community centres, cinemas or churches (Dresser, 1984).

Tenants continued to campaign for facilities throughout the 1930s, as they believed that local authorities would eventually bow to sustained pressure. Political parties of all hues would support these demands when it suited them, for instance if an election were imminent, or where the aims of tenants and local authorities converged over issues, such as with antisocial behaviour. However, it was the tenants on the better quality estates that were more likely to be supported by the local authority. Tenants' associations also raised funds themselves to enable the creation of a range of facilities such as community centres, though they lost other key facilities as many local authorities actively discouraged the provision of infrastructure that they deemed unsuitable, such as pubs and pawnbrokers and (Young and Willmott, 1962). At this time there was an ethos of social engineering in communities 'for their own good' (Kemp and Williams, 1991).

Council tenants continued to organise themselves through networks of tenants' associations, and subsequently federations of associations, which had a combination of campaigning, social and self-help elements. Tenants had learned from the labour movement how to organise and campaign effectively towards the common good. The campaigning aspect was often organised along trade union lines and was male dominated, with a view to making strong representation of the community's views to both local and national government. This was in contrast to street level involvement, which was largely undertaken by women using informal networks, and was more focused on provision of activities or resources such as Christmas clubs. In some areas the campaigning groups were viewed with mistrust by local authorities, and were sometimes termed 'action groups' because of their propensity for a direct, militant style approach to making themselves heard, or their refusal to pay rates or rent (Hawtin and Lowe, 1998).

In 1934 means testing was introduced to ensure that only the poorer tenants could access subsidised rents. This meant a significant rent rise (nearly double) for the rest, and this proved to be a tipping point. Tensions grew as the make-up of estates changed, while tenants' associations were often refused permission to make their views heard (Bradley, 1999). In Leeds tenants quickly mobilised and returned to the rent strikes and civil disobedience of the turn of the century. This was difficult to organise, however, as

only those paying full rent had reason for concern about rent levels, and the local community did not know who the payers and non-payers were. The solidarity of the previous era was shattered, as what constituted 'the common good of the community' was no longer clear. The outcome of this strike was largely negative, as large numbers did not get involved and the ring leaders were evicted. This happened again and again in different parts of the country, even in Labour controlled local authority areas. In consequence many tenants' groups broke their allegiance with the Labour Party, which they saw as failing to represent the views of the working classes and indeed failing to remain loyal to their supporters (Bradley 1999).

Resistance to these campaigning tenants continued, both from professionals and local people. Many tenants organised themselves through mutual aid networks run by women, but groups were often fronted by male union-style ringleaders and some landlords were fearful of their militancy. Councils headed off some of these activities, either by incorporating tenants into their formal committees (from as early as the 1930s), or by setting up alternative, more formally organised, community associations (Grayson and Walker, 1996: 29).

2.3.2   The impact of the slum clearance programme

As time progressed, councils started to house people displaced by the slum clearance programmes arising from the Housing Act of 1939, which effectively placed a duty on councils to rehouse people from the poorest segment of society. In preparation for this, and in the light of the rapid expansion of council housing, the Central Housing Advisory Service (CHAS) was set up by the government in 1938 to explore and advise on the best approach to managing this new class of tenants, who were believed to require a more 'hands-on' style of management (Cairncross et al, 1997). The consequent review considered the contemporary mode of philanthropic management practices, and the potential requirements of this new class of tenants, and concluded that management needed to go beyond simple rent collection. The outcome was to develop more intensive management strategies similar to those used in the previous century, whilst ensuring that the landlord's property was protected. Tenants were to become 'housing-minded' and would not therefore neglect the landlords' 'asset or property' (McDermont, 2004). Thus a new style of property management emerged in council housing, which

included, amongst other things, training and support for poorer tenants around issues of work, budgets, nutrition and pensions (Spink, 1998).

2.3.3 Housing and the welfare state

After the Labour victory in the 1945 election, the government introduced a series of legislative measures which were in essence extensions and additions to previous legislation, brought together in the Beveridge report of 1942 (Malpas, 2003). Services funded under what was now deemed to be a modern welfare state were administered by a bureaucratic state system underpinned by the principle of universal entitlement, and were intended to secure social cohesion, solidarity and citizenship, which placed a high value on social rights and a commitment to full employment. The declared purpose of the welfare state was to raise standards by means of five main pubic services: education, health, what came to be called personal social services, social security and housing. People now had access to key services, such as healthcare and education, many of which were free at the point of delivery. In addition, redistributive taxation policies, based on the notion of fairness and an attempt to mitigate inequality, were developed and delivered within the context of Keynesian economic policy, which supported the state's commitment to full employment and an acceptance of the rights of trades unions to be consulted by government on issues of national policy (Lund: 1996). This approach was broadly supported by the people, and in particular, the middle classes (Balchin, 1996). However, commentators reflecting on this period point out that the Fabian philosophy that underpinned welfare provision was more concerned with the mechanics of provision than the 'qualitative experience of the service consumers' (Cole and Furbey, 1994:68).

Public rented housing was seen as a social good, to different extents, by both the right and left of the political spectrum prior to 1979. It was apparent that if the provision of housing was left solely to the free market, a sector of the community would never be able to afford to rent or buy. Housing, however, does not sit well with other forms of welfare intervention, as it has high capital and revenue costs and is vulnerable to the fluctuations of the market, and cannot therefore be delivered free at the point of access in the same way as health and education (Cairncross et al, 1997). Housing policy was also viewed by policy makers as an instrument capable of achieving wider social aims, such as creating a climate of social integration in new municipal neighbourhoods.

Local authorities continued to have a key role, through the building of more municipal housing for rent, and through ensuring the adequate provision of housing in their areas of operation (Grayson, 1997). Housing associations played only a very small role in these local plans (Malpas, 2000).

2.3.4   The post war period

After the Second World War, council housing was rapidly developed to meet the needs resulting from war damage and slum clearance programmes. Aneurin Bevan, the Health Minister in 1945, sought to improve space standards beyond those imposed under Addison (Cole and Furbey, 1994), and the Department of Health was given the responsibility, through local authorities, for delivering the housing programme (Whelan, 1998; Hanley, 2007; Malpas, 2003). In consequence, 80 per cent of housing completions between 1945 and 1951 were in the public sector. From 1945 to 1955 both Labour and Conservative governments continued to increase the building programme, and tower blocks and large estates began to dominate the urban landscape. In 1954, at the height of the programme, 220 924 homes were completed in one year. However, the Conservatives achieved this by reducing quality and space standards (Cole and Furbey, 1994).

The new class of tenants from the slum clearance programme continued to flow into municipal housing across the post-war period. The previous practice (of both housing association and local authority) had been to let their homes to the skilled working class, rather than the poorer and less skilled. This had been justified by the notion that there would be a trickledown effect, as better quality private rented accommodation would be freed up for the lower classes (Whelan, 1998; Somerville, 2002). However, as clearance programmes demolished the lower end of private rented accommodation, the local authority now had a duty to house those who had been displaced (Balchin and Rhodes, 2002). Unsurprisingly, acute housing shortages after the war led people to take direct action. Homeless families in Lincolnshire occupied an empty army camp, and such action spread until hundreds of camps were seized across Britain. By October 1946, 1 038 camps had been occupied by 40 000 families in England and Wales, and another 5 000 families were squatting camps in Scotland. That month Aneurin Bevan, the Minister of Health, who was responsible for the government's housing programme, accused the squatters of 'jumping their place in the housing queue' by moving into

buildings that would not otherwise have been used for housing purposes. The government then, in an about turn, offered the Ministry of Health 850 former service camps, which were later turned into council housing (squatting reference).

During this post war period, housing associations that had been formed from the 1850s onwards continued to work within their core communities in the metropolitan areas, but also lobbied government to secure state funding for reconditioning and building work. Each association had aims and approaches that reflected its founding principles, such as spiritual support, community facilities, education or practical support. Although they were marginal players in the social housing sector in terms of numbers, they had control over the allocation of their homes, and also over the management style and the resources that they used. There were no statutory pressures on these essentially private institutions. In addition, they often had access to charitable and private funding (McDermont, 2004:861).

Even local authorities had considerable discretion over the shape of housing management practice. They could develop the service according to internal priorities as long as they met their legal obligations and adhered to minimum regulatory standards such as those relating to allocations and repairs (Malpas, 2000). The character of local policy was determined by a number of stakeholders (managers, local politicians, funders and board members), thus creating a variety of organisational cultures and a variable quality of service (Spink, 1998). Those living in the accommodation, however, had limited means of influencing the way that services were delivered and had little chance of accessing a service from another provider (Burnet, 1978).

The interventionist and paternalistic style popular with housing associations started to impact municipal council housing between the 1930s and 1960s. On the one hand rent collection became of vital importance in order to service the loans from the Public Loans Board that financed the new house-building. Alongside this the changing discourse of social policy led to a more hands-on approach to tenancy enforcement, which began to change the culture of the housing management profession in the middle of the 20th century (Haworth and Manzi, 1999).

Cole and Furbey (1994) commented that, compared with other agencies within the welfare state, housing management was not viewed as a profession per se, but rather as

a set of different functions of the local authority that delivered a range of services such as rent collection, allocations and lettings, and tenancy management, seeing these primarily as a set of administrative practices. Despite the existence of the Institute of Housing as the professional body for housing practitioners, the profession was still viewed as a poor relation to, for example, social work or planning (Cole and Furbey,1994). The unified, almost holistic, approach advocated by the philanthropists in housing associations was not reflected in the way the service was delivered by local authorities (Balchin and Rhodes, 2002).

2.4   1960-1979: Campaigns, community and the growth of the housing association sector

2.4.1   The 1960s and 70s: the turning point

By 1960 half of all rented housing was still owned and managed by private landlords, who could choose whom they housed and in what way. This resulted in the exclusion of many potential tenants from access to this accommodation, and people from black and minority ethnic groups were particularly badly affected (Somerville and Steele, 2002). At the same time, residents in all sectors were starting to organise regarding housing-related issues, such as the practice by private landlords of evicting tenants and re-letting at a higher rent. In response to issues of racism, residents' groups such as the Notting Hill Peoples' Association started to provide a range of inclusive social initiatives such as playgroups and People's Centres (Grayson and Walker, 1996).

The year 1960 also saw the creation of the first tenants' federations (in London, Liverpool and Sheffield), and the return of large scale rent strikes (Cole and Furbey, 1994). Thus people were coming together to pursue common goals, either through the direct provision of services or through collective protest. During this period, radical challenges started to emerge from both left and right of the political spectrum, concerning the deliverability, effectiveness and financial sustainability of comprehensive welfare provision. Poverty and its alleviation, and the need to tackle discrimination faced by minority groups, were important issues for both central government and housing providers (Lund, 1996; Somerville and Steele, 2002).

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One of the unintended consequences of the slum clearance programmes had been the break-up of strong communities. These communities, whose members had previously occupied low-standard rented accommodation in Victorian-built areas, and who had survived with a high degree of mutual support and strong family networks, had been relocated in the 1950s, and their networks had become fragmented (Willmott and Young, 1962; Cole and Furbey, 1994). As a result, by the end of the 1960s the provision of large scale municipal housing was increasingly regarded as an expensive and unpopular failure, especially those estates that had been built using non-traditional methods and materials. In addition, council housing management was criticised as 'inefficient and repressive, a tool of social policy rather than empowerment' (Drakeford, 2000:52).

> The dominant values were equality and universalism, and this made it hard to distinguish between citizens and consumers (even when, as council tenants, the latter were paying directly for the service). Service users were meant to be – and generally were at first – grateful for what they were given. Redress could be sought by individuals through politicians. Anything more would have been regarded as undue influence, since the aim was to meet professionally-assessed needs through rule-bound allocation procedures that treated everyone the same. (Birchall and Symonds, 2004:17)

It was in this context that the political decision to force councils to adopt a specific approach to allocating properties was made, which led to one of the biggest changes in the profile of social housing tenants. The Homeless Persons Act in 1977 completely altered the ability of councils to determine whom they housed and who was considered 'deserving' (Hawtin and Lowe, 1998).

However, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the political establishment was challenged by those who felt excluded, which resulted in demands for inclusive citizenship and responsive services (Goodlad, 2001). There was an upsurge in tenant action and militancy, ignited by Conservative plans in 1972 to move to market-based rents for social housing, and encouraged by a new breed of professional support: the community development worker. These workers were often ideologically motivated, and sought to redress the balance of wealth and power in society. It is within this context, together with the burgeoning black tenants' and women's movements, that the empowerment, equality of opportunity and social inclusion agendas began to develop in professional circles. The community development workers were initially located in

social services rather than housing departments. That said, as early as 1970, staff were employed directly by tenant federations themselves: for example, by the Association of London Housing Estates (Hawtin and Lowe, 1998).

These attempts by tenants to influence their landlords' services were not dismissed out of hand by all. Hogget (1997) points out that some enlightened reformers had learned that there were benefits to be had in allowing those using state services to be involved in their development, and he comments that:

> They sought to reverse the process whereby the excluded had simply been enlisted as the grateful objects of urban renewal to include them as subjects who at least were worthy of consultation if not participation in such processes (Hogget, 1997:4)

2.4.2 Growth in the housing association sector

The Housing Corporation was set up in 1964 as a conduit for funds, and a focus for policy, for what was then a loose network of property owning charities, societies and associations. There began, in the 1970s, a move away from wholesale slum clearance towards wider area-based housing renewal, involving a greater range of agencies and voluntary sector support. A number of 'failing estates' were indication that mass-municipalisation policies were flawed, and new community-based housing associations should be developed as an alternative approach (Power, 1987). Existing housing associations were well placed to be key players in these initiatives and experienced a renaissance as they began to buy up and renovate street properties, thus regenerating and protecting urban housing communities. Together with the homelessness charity Shelter, the newly formed National Federation of Housing Associations[3] campaigned for a comprehensive system of housing development grants, resulting in the landmark Housing Act 1974. This brought housing associations centre stage in the provision of new social housing (Langstaff, 1992). The main allocation vehicle for development funding would be the newly revamped Housing Corporation, who would work with local authorities, (which now had responsibility for enabling the regeneration of urban areas under the Housing Act 1969), to fund the housing association sector (McDermont, 2004). The sector was not a unified whole at this time, and the plethora of charities and societies, with different aims, clients and organisational structures, had to register with

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[3] Later to become the Federation of Housing Associations

the Housing Corporation in order to receive grant funding for rehabilitation work, and later for the development of new build schemes (Malpas, 2003). As a result, there was a proliferation of new and refurbished housing association dwellings. The nature of these grant-funded, risk-free opportunities allowed local housing associations to expand over municipal boundaries to become regional and national organisations. Many new housing associations developed during this period.

Although housing associations were working in partnership with local authorities, there were still tensions around allocation policies and the way associations used their considerable discretion to pick and choose who they housed (Langstaff, 1992). Much of the rehabilitation work took place in existing communities, but accessing association homes was difficult for the residents of these communities who were poorly housed or homeless, because housing associations were perceived to be cherry picking 'high quality' or 'good' tenants (Cowan et al, 1999: 263).

2.4.3   Tenant involvement in municipal housing in the 1970s

Tenant involvement in council housing in the 1970s could best be described as a plethora of tenants' associations. Some of the tenants involved in the new out-of-town communities and high-rise developments worked extremely hard to try and make them a better place to live, despite the poor quality accommodation and the lack of facilities and services. In some cases tenants began to provide and fund services themselves. Tenants put a lot of work into making representations to council housing departments and their committees, and in some of the more forward thinking councils this was done with the support of the new professional class of community development workers and tenant involvement staff. Eleven per cent of English housing authorities had tenant involvement schemes in place (Richardson, 1977). It was at this time that the early Tenant Management Cooperatives started to emerge, where tenants received delegated powers to oversee the management of services in their communities. These were the forerunners of what became Estate Management Boards in the 1980s. Some of these groups went on to take a greater level of control in later years, while others withered away through lack of support (DETR, 2002; Simmons and Birchall, 2006). The arena for involvement was still community-based, and community development workers played a crucial role in reviving tenants' groups and connecting them with each other, along with the development of federations (particularly in the metropolitan areas).

These workers provided much needed resources and administrative support (Lowe 1989). They also focused on empowering people to work towards their own objectives and not those of landlords and other agencies and promoted ideas of inclusion and empowerment within communities, with a strong emphasis on collective actions and solutions (Smith, 1992). This, however, did not easily translate into the work of the committees and the landlord-led meetings that were beginning to develop in local authorities as a vehicle for tenant involvement as the 1970s progressed. Prior to 1970 only 11 tenant participation schemes had existed, but by 1975 46 local authorities had developed schemes. However, most of these were in metropolitan areas (Richardson, 1977)

2.5   1979 - 2000: New rights, new voices, new players

2.5.1   The Conservatives: context and philosophy

The Conservatives came to power in 1979 and instigated a distinct shift in priorities and focus. They identified high unemployment, high inflation, escalating public spending and low growth as signs of a collapse of confidence in Keynesian economics. This signified the beginning of a wholesale movement towards the neoliberal values of a free market, and a reduced role for the state in the direct provision of welfare. The 'New Right' challenged the ideology underpinning collectivist forms of welfare provision and focused on cutting escalating public expenditure. A monetarist approach to managing the economy was deemed the only solution to containing stagflation and dealing with rising industrial costs within the context of a growing global economy and the changing profile of labour markets. Access to unemployment benefits was to become more strictly means-tested, and eligibility criteria tightened, in an effort to reduce disincentives to work, thus reducing the cost to the public purse. Welfare and support were to function as a 'safety net' for those most in need: 'radical Tory politics fused with classical liberalism with traditional conservative themes' (Driver, 2005:257). Within this context, social housing now found itself characterised as a problem to be fixed, rather than a solution in itself (Balchin and Rhoden, 2002).

The new regime aimed to introduce the culture of the private sector into state provision. The goal was to move away from the comfort of a protected public sector that had no incentive to become efficient. Local authority powers would therefore be curtailed in

terms of both their functions and their degree of autonomy, including reductions in direct provision and local budgetary control. Central government bypassed and diminished the power of local authorities by channelling housing funds and regulatory functions through the Housing Corporation. It could be argued that by reducing the powers of local authorities in relation to housing, the government also reduced tenants' opportunity to influence policy through local democracy (Le Grand, 2000). At the same time the main manufacturing bases were in decline and trade union influence had been diminished, thus eroding the rights of citizens, and in particular, working class representation at the policy-making table. In addition Clapham and Kintrea, based on their research into community-based housing in Scotland, argue that the professionalism and relative power of stock transfer housing association management cultures was restricting the influence both of tenants and board members, in comparison with the smaller community-based housing associations in Scotland, which were more accountable to their tenants (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000).

2.5.2 Bringing welfare to market: Conservative housing policy

Key planks of Conservative policy in the 1980s were the privatisation of state owned assets and the contracting out of public services. This was partly an ideological challenge to collectivist provision but was also fuelled by a need to reduce expenditure. Private finance was encouraged wherever possible, public loans were reduced, and there were stringent new approaches to tendering for local authorities. Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) was employed as the primary procurement mechanism, and was thought to achieve efficiency through the market mechanism of competition (Balchin and Rhoden, 2002). It was believed that the primacy of the consumer, and their power to choose between providers, would lead to the rejection of poor services. The Conservatives saw the possibility of exit across a range of public services as the primary exercise of consumer power, and assumed that this would result in a migration from public to private sector services, and importantly, towards better quality, more efficient services. In housing, this manifested as the promotion of the tenant's right of exit from municipal housing, either via the large scale transfer of council housing stock into the housing association sector (which was deemed more efficient and customer-focused), or through home ownership. The latter was to be achieved by giving council tenants the option to buy their homes at significant discounts through the introduction of

the 'Right to Buy' (Housing Act1980), together with generous tax breaks for all those with mortgages. Rented housing policy was also reinvigorated with a view to creating more vehicles for its delivery. Policy-making thus focused on encouraging the private rented market, enhancing the role of housing associations in the provision of new social housing, creating a new financial regime for local authority housing, and providing council tenants with the choice to opt for a new landlord through Housing Action Trusts and Tenants' Choice. This was not a sea change in policy, but rather a gradual acceleration of previous ideas. However, the emphasis started to shift in 1986, when the Conservatives moved more directly towards a full-scale dismantling of the local authority housing sector through the transfer of housing stock to existing or newly formed housing associations which, as not-for-profit entities,[4] would be able to access private finance, unlike the public sector. This approach was broadly accepted as the most viable way forward by all shades of the political spectrum (Malpas, 2003).

It was during this period that a clear legal definition of a housing association was established. The Housing Association Act 1985 s 1(1) describes a housing association as a:87

> society, body of trustees or company established for the purpose of, or among whose objects or powers are included those of providing, constructing or the improvement of housing accommodation, and which does not trade for profit or whose constitution or rules prohibit the issue of capital with interest or dividend by the treasury whether with or without differentiation between share or loan capital.

Housing associations are generally registered as limited companies with restricted dividends, or as industrial and provident societies or charitable trusts. Housing associations come in many forms and sizes, but they are all governed by a committee or board of between seven and twenty members. Board members, prior to 2003, were all voluntary and were elected from a small shareholding electorate. Boards are required to have members with the requisite range of skills to govern the organisation effectively, to ensure a good quality of service and to ensure that the organisation stays financially viable. Housing associations have been widely described as self-perpetuating oligarchies that have neither a remit to represent communities (in contrast to local

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[4] Their not-for-profit status distinguishes them from both private and statutory organisations (Malpas, 2003)

authority members), nor are representative of the communities they serve (Spink, 1998; Hogget, 1995). Kearns, in 1994, studied the social composition of housing association boards in England, and revealed that members were primarily middle class, highly qualified white males from non- manual occupations. He found that two thirds were from the professional managerial groups, and that many were retired. Women represented only 35% of members, which was quite different from local authorities and other voluntary organisations (Kearns, 1997).

The Housing Act 1988 enabled housing associations (once again) to raise private finance without it being counted as public expenditure, which allowed associations to increase their programmes and carry the risks even when public expenditure was falling. Thus housing associations became the main provider of new social housing (Mullins et al, 1995). This, together with an emphasis on the delivery of new homes through planning gain arrangements with local authorities, resulted in changes to nomination arrangements, often stipulating 100 per cent nomination rights on all newly built association homes, thus giving local authorities control over the profile of new communities. The new housing association estates springing up on the edges of towns began to look more and more like those of municipal housing, and were to suffer some of the same problems as their municipal counterparts had ten years earlier, in terms of lack of infrastructure and facilities, transport and schools. However, unlike council housing, 'these homes were not under democratically elected control' (Balchin and Rhoden, 2002:242). There was also a concern to ensure that large estates were not dominated by a single landlord, and this led to a proliferation of multi –landlord estates, which according to Bowers and Manzi (2003) served to compound social exclusion and make community involvement even more challenging.

The new Conservative administration considered that the best way to achieve its ends was to address, early on in its term, the power held by public service professionals and their unions. They wanted to address the propensity of these professionals to limit the impact of government directives, and to establish a way to improve accountability to citizens or to the state itself (Durden, 2001). The environment of professional practice had to be changed, and policies for the management and delivery of welfare services needed modernising. The provision of housing management was a strong candidate for privatisation, or at least tighter regulation, to reflect private practice and promote

accountability to service users (Cole and Furbey, 1994).   A strategic approach to the delivery of welfare was to be adopted, using targets and accountability structures designed to respond to the customer more directly (Clarke et al, 2007).

2.5.3   Tenant involvement from the 1980s to 1996

2.5.3.1 The changing face of involvement

It was in this context that, from the 1980s onwards, tenant participation/involvement developed along two not altogether compatible lines. The first was a citizenship-based collective approach to representation. The second was a more individualist, consumer-focused approach. The former, with cultural roots in the history of the tenants' movement, was founded on conceptions of collective action and empowerment within the participatory democratic framework linked to citizens' rights. This was a far cry from the days of tenant action. The more consumer-based approach was based on the market insight methods used in private sector companies, but was also open to manipulation through a range of regulatory instruments and professional agendas (Hawtin and Lowe, 1998).

As already stated, social housing policy was being influenced by values of choice and exit, and the belief that, given the choice, tenants would choose to leave councils, which were perceived as wasteful, high spending and political (Power, 1987; Cole and Furbey, 1994). As part of the process of Conservative 'democratic renewal', policies and legislation promoting the involvement of service users and reducing the power of local authorities were brought in over an 18 year period, with mixed results.

> The Conservative consumer would become a fully-fledged citizen, with rights and duties in the governance of the country beyond the voting booth and the marketplace. This notion of the active citizen would be at the core of the government's strategy for "democratic renewal" and the "modernization" of public services. (Gustafson and Driver, 2005:528)

With the further aim of addressing criticisms of the effectiveness of housing management and the poor state of municipal council housing estates, the government introduced the first act that would give individual council tenants the opportunity to hold their councils to account by other than local democratic routes (Balchin, 1996; Burns, 2000). Thus the Housing Act 1980 introduced a legal right for council tenants to

be consulted on issues affecting the management of their homes and this was fleshed out in the subsequent 'Tenants' Charter'. While it did establish certain rights such as security of tenure, rights of succession and the right to sublet, it did not directly strengthen collective rights, apart from the right to information and consultation. Thus tenants finally had the right of exit, but only if they could afford it. The impact of the 'Right to Buy' was to change the social structure of communities, causing some estates to become residualised, and creating divisions between owners and tenants, and rent payers and non-rent payers. This, together with the changes in allocations and lettings policies, affected the desire of communities for collective identity and/or their ability to take collective action, as more statutorily homeless households were allocated homes, many of which were headed by a lone parent, or were increasingly elderly or vulnerable, and many of whom were in receipt of full benefits (Hawtin and Lowe, 1998). Some tenants who bought their homes, however, were unable to maintain the mortgages and other responsibilities of home ownership. The lucky ones were able to sell to local housing associations who allowed them to remain as tenants, which resulted in a scattered stock profile for many housing associations, with associated problems for housing management, and tenant representation and involvement, in those areas.

At the same time there was a change in the housing subsidy system, allowing the government to adjust the rate of subsidy to local authorities to correspond with projected rent increases in each authority area (whether or not the rents were increased in practice). This forced local authorities to raise rents to balance the accounts and, as rents rose over the years, housing benefit became the means to cover the increases for poorer tenants. This pushed more tenants into the benefit system, and potentially, the poverty trap. Housing association rents were higher still, as they were more closely allied to the actual costs of building and managing homes, although there was some grant support. Thus a higher percentage of tenants overall became dependent on housing benefit. It should be noted that the 'Right to Buy' initiative was not aimed at the housing association sector (Malpas, 2000).

2.5.3.2   <u>Improving services through tenant involvement</u>

Kearns (1997) points out that as early as 1978 the Housing Corporation accepted that housing associations should be answerable to their tenants, and that tenants should be enabled to influence policy and practice, and should be encouraged to have

representatives on the management committee. However the Housing Corporation was uncertain whether or not to promote full tenant enfranchisement, as this would affect the housing association's ability to manage its future responsibilities (Housing Corporation, 1978). As Kearns says, it is not therefore 'surprising that little was done to increase tenant participation within housing associations over the next ten years' (1997:60). In 1979 the government set up the Priority Estates Project (PEP), which ran throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Its initial role was to explore, with tenants, the housing management issues on some of the most challenging estates. Much of their work focused on encouraging the decentralisation of housing services, with a view to involving tenants directly in decisions affecting their estates, thus creating a model designed to achieve lasting improvement. The ideas of self-help and decentralisation fitted the Conservative philosophy of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The models of housing management and estate regeneration developed through PEP fed into the later Estate Action initiative, which brought new partners from the private sector into estate regeneration initiatives (Power, 1991).

Tenant participation workers (employed by the local authority) appeared during this period, following the trail-blazing work done by the PEP. However, they were frequently used to organise tenants to support and defend council housing, working with the authority to mobilise a 'no' vote in relation to proposals for stock transfer. Beyond that, the very nature of the work - which encourages tenants to get involved in the landlord's business and feed back their views - resulted in many situations where the landlords' and tenants' agendas diverged, leaving staff to manage the inevitable conflict. Landlord-funded tenant participation focused primarily on giving and receiving information, either by letter and survey, or at meetings. By 1985 only 5 per cent of local authorities funded tenants' associations to employ specialist workers (although most gave small grants for expenses and access to premises) (Birchall, 1992).

Running parallel to this were the campaigns of the tenants' federations and the growing cooperative movement, for a 'Tenants' Charter'. Birchall and Simmons (2004) point out that, for staff, the move towards a more mutual relationship with tenants was slow and painful; their resistance was entrenched in the deeply held beliefs that staff had the technical expertise to make the right decisions for tenants. Even when statute enshrined new rights to consultation and involvement, surveys of local authorities revealed that

progress was slow in incorporating tenants' views into the shaping of services. By 1980 only 33 per cent were involving tenants in looking at draft reports (Birchall, 1992).

Rights relating to tenant consultation were reinforced in the Housing Act 1985, which required councils and housing associations in England and Wales to inform and consult secure tenants, on an individual basis, on specific matters relating to the management of their homes. In particular, s 104 of the Act required landlords to give all tenants a written explanation of their conditions of tenancy, statutory rights, the landlord's repairing obligations and the arrangements for consultation. S 105 of the Act placed a duty on councils to consult tenants on any changes in housing management, and s 27 strengthened the existing procedures for the establishment of tenant management co-operatives (Spray, 1997). The Act also introduced the Tenants Guarantee through Section 36A – which provided further encouragement for consultation in the housing association sector.

At the same time, the Inquiry into Housing chaired by HRH Duke of Edinburgh (1985) recommended that tenants' associations be recognised and supported, and that a Tenant Participation Advisory Service for England be set up to do similar work to the organisation established in Scotland in 1981. The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS England) was set up in 1988 to be the national organisation working to promote tenant empowerment. It was initially a government funded body, but became self-funding in 2003, while continuing to access significant government grants for key national projects. The government-subsidised conferences run by TPAS were important in promoting the tenant involvement agenda for both tenants and landlords. For tenants, they provided the opportunity to meet with others, share experiences and learn new ways of working with their landlords. For landlords, they created an opportunity to get to grips with the changing agenda for tenant involvement and to share and promote good practice. However, at this time, tenants did not have an unmediated national voice, or representation at the policy making table, or indeed representation within their own organisations at a level where they could make a difference to the national policy agenda (Birchall and Simmons, 2004).

2.5.3.3 Increasing opportunities for choice of landlord and tenant control

The Housing and Planning Act 1986 contained amendments to the Housing Act 1985, which had allowed councils to delegate housing management to other organisations. S 16 of the Act gave the Department of the Environment powers to provide grants allocated specifically to help local authorities build the capacity of their tenants to undertake such work. This led to some tenants setting themselves up as Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs). For TMOs to work, however, there also needed to be considerable support from the landlord, and at this time most councils were not in favour of promoting TMOs (TPAS, 1994; ODPM, 2002).

At the same time, as a result of the decentralisation agenda, Estate Management Boards were emerging as a vehicle for increasing tenant control over local housing management decisions, but they did not confer the full control inherent in Tenant Management Organisations. These groups were supported initially as part of the Priority Estate Project (PEP) initiative and then through the Estate Action initiative, which was intended to revitalise run down estates. These projects were supported by organisations such as TPAS, and by professional housing consultants and trainers, as well as community development workers, and many councils found them a more attractive option than TMOs (PEP, 1999; Power, 1991).

The Conservatives still wanted accountability and choice for tenants and hoped that, if offered the choice either of ownership of their home or an alternative landlord, tenants would vote with their feet. This aspiration was reflected in the provisions of the Housing Act 1988, with its introduction of Tenants' Choice, which gave local authority tenants a right to choose an alternative landlord, and set out procedures for the balloting of tenants affected by any transfer proposals. This was a pivotal moment in the recent history of tenant participation, as councils initially lacked confidence that their tenants would want to stay with them, and so made what were probably the first real efforts to involve them more actively in improving services (Birchall, 1992). From this point onwards, most local authorities started developing forums or panels as a vehicle for consultation. In general, this type of consultation amounted to staff presenting worked up drafts of plans, policies and strategies to a single group of tenants, who met regularly in the council's offices, and who were invited to give feedback. In practice tenants would also speak to staff about various issues relevant to their local communities (Cole

and Furbey, 1994). It is unclear how much impact this approach had on housing management practice and services to tenants, largely because many councils and housing associations did not record the changes that resulted from consultation and involvement. Local authority tenants, however, could still lobby local councillors about council services and had therefore more options for representation than housing association tenants. The latter could still, of course, make representations to councillors, but councillors had little influence at this time over housing association practice.

The outcome of Tenants' Choice was disappointing for the Conservatives, as private companies were generally not interested in taking on the management of council housing. Moreover, the Housing Action Trusts (HATs), set up under the same legislation to regenerate some of the worst local authority estates, were seen to be a more efficient vehicle for transferring the ownership of council housing. Such estates would be transferred, following a ballot, to the control of these trusts, which were non-departmental government bodies with a board appointed by the Deputy Prime Minister. Each board had a constituency model, which guaranteed spaces for tenants, independent members and local authority members, and received funding for a fixed five year period, after which the stock would be handed on to a non-local authority organisation, which in general was a housing association (Mullins et al 1995). Through the creation of six HATs, 25 000 properties were transferred out of local authority ownership, at a cost of £231 million (Pearl, 1997).   This scheme was, however, controversial amongst tenants, because hard won tenants' rights were reduced in the new organisations. There were also concerns over funding and efficiency. As a result, there were a number of 'no' votes from tenants, and the programme ceased with the introduction of the Housing Act 1996 (Mullins and Murie, 2006).

Housing association tenants did not, however, have the same right to exit their landlord, but they did have other parallel rights. Housing associations were expected to comply with the requirements of the Tenants' Guarantee published by the Housing Corporation in 1994, which gave tenants the same rights to information and consultation as those for local authority tenants (TPAS, 2004). The constituency governance model, however, became the norm for all future stock transfers from local authority housing (Mullins et al, 1995).

Thus the rights of tenants in the two sectors began to converge. Association tenants, however, still appeared to be worse off, and this was further reflected in the proposed difference between tenancy agreements. From 1989, housing associations were required to let properties under the new assured tenancy agreement, which gave the landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities in the form of a personal contract (Housing Act 1989). This was seen as being less robust than the secure tenancy, enjoyed by local authority tenants, as the new assured tenancies gave more grounds for eviction, including a number that were mandatory. The new assured tenancies allowed associations to set their own rents in relation to the borrowing incurred in building the properties and the cost of meeting their repairing and management obligations.[5] Lenders could then have the comfort of knowing that rental income was sufficient to service the debt (Malpas, 2003).

The government was moving towards a more centralised and regulated approach to the monitoring of spending and performance in the municipal and housing association sectors, and introduced a performance monitoring framework in the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. This required landlords to demonstrate their accountability to tenants, as well as to the Department of the Environment. The Housing Corporation issued performance expectations, offering their strongest guidance yet on ways in which housing associations were expected to demonstrate accountability to tenants as well as to the Housing Corporation (e.g. circulars 3/78 and 11/80) (Mullins and Murie, 2006). This increasing need for accountability to, and consultation with, tenants was introduced partly in response to increasing concerns about the quality of housing management in both local authorities and housing associations. These had been highlighted in a report from the Audit Commission in1986 and further research sponsored by the DOE in 1987, both of which indicated that there were areas of poor standards in housing management (Cole and Furbey, 1994).

2.5.3.4 The moral discourse informing tenant involvement policy and support

These developments took place within the wider context of an increasing 'property owning democracy', the increasing residualisation of local authority housing, and an

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[5] They still had to meet a test of affordability, but housing association rents were substantially higher than council rents.

increasing gap between rich and poor, and the working and the not working. In policy circles the term 'socially excluded' was used to represent those with unequal access to social and economic resources. The Social Exclusion Unit pointed out that deprived neighbourhoods suffered disproportionately from poor health, poor educational standards, low employment, high crime rates and a lack of popularity and that these disadvantages worked against the people who lived there and reduced their opportunities for the future (SEU 1998). In 1989 Charles Murray, in an article in *The Times*, brought the concept of 'underclass' to the UK (Birchall and Simmons, 2004). He was referring to a certain section of the very poor and excluded in society, whom he perceived as having a set of socially unacceptable behaviours and values which he deemed detrimental to a healthy society (Murray, 1998). The press has promoted this notion of an underclass as the reason for society's ills, drawing a recurring negative stereotype of a young single mother with unruly children, who has never worked and does not hold the same values as past generations. She prefers, and expects, to live off welfare benefits and to be provided with state housing as a right. Thus her child-bearing is seen by the public as a way to jump the queue for social housing. However, the popularised image of the underclass, as depicted by the media, became inextricably linked with social housing as a whole in the minds of the public, and all social housing was fast becoming the tenure of last resort. The new housing association estates were beginning to experience the same stigmatisation as local authority housing, and became a similar focus for policy intervention and 'community development' approaches, and in some cases, regeneration . Page (1993) pointed out that the child to adult ratios on new housing association estates that were being built would be unsustainable.

Furbey et al point out that tenants and their communities came to be seen as representative of the dependency culture - a product of the welfare state - and thus candidates for reform both as individuals and as groups. In this context tenant involvement represented a vehicle or arena to challenge dependency, reform the self, and create enterprise (Furbey et al, 1996).

The culture of housing management and the national policy that shapes it had its roots in 'the discourse of universal rights notions of deserving and undeserving poor, a legacy from the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act' (Haworth and Manzi, 1999: 154). This moral dimension of social policy shapes professional practice and resource focus.

Social housing has become the poor relation of public services due to public concepts of the underclass and the regular attentions of the popular media, which have served to stigmatise the tenants and to some extent the profession.

Commentators talk of a moral panic leading to policy solutions that are judgmental or punitive, more rigid interpretations of what is acceptable behaviour, the idea that those excluded are responsible for their position and need to be brought back in line (Hoggett, 1997; Flint, 2004). As the 1990s progressed this translated increasingly into an enforcement approach to tenancy management, with stronger legislative powers to evict and punish, and more prescriptive and restrictive tenancy agreements (Flint, 2004; Haworth and Manzi, 1999), creating echoes of Octavia Hill's reforming of the lawless poor. This, coupled with the restriction of access to those most in need, has increased the power and control of professionals over a more vulnerable tenant and prospective tenant base, in both housing associations and local authorities. It is in this context that tenant involvement in practice has to be viewed.

2.5.3.5 Increasing the scope of tenant involvement

By the late 1980s, landlord-tenant dialogue had been established in 80 per cent of local authorities. However, this ranged from surveys alone in some authorities, to involvement in committees and the establishment of TMOs in others. The majority fell into the former category (Cairncross et al, 1990). In 1991-2 the government substantially increased its s 16 grant funding for training (to £4.9 million), as part of a wider commitment to promoting estate regeneration and tenant management, and in an effort to encourage independence and autonomy (Furbey et al, 1996). Research by the Department of the Environment in 1992-3 revealed that 117 TMOs had been established or were in an advanced stage of development (DOE, 1994). Following this the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 introduced the 'Right to Manage', giving council tenants a legal right to set up tenant management organisations and to take over the management of some or all housing management functions. Although tenants now had the right to explore options for tenant control, many did not know about it, and many social landlords did not inform their tenants, and did not encourage or support them to do so. In addition the range and scope of training that was permitted to be funded under the scheme was criticised for being too narrow and based on a rigid range of competencies that did not take into account the context and culture of

the tenants who might come together to develop an option for tenant control (Furbey et al, 1996).

Another opportunity for tenant involvement and for increased accountability to tenants was the introduction, as part of the 1993 Act, of 'Compulsory Competitive Tendering' (CCT) for housing management functions, with a requirement for councils to inform and consult tenants on CCT matters and to provide information on CCT contracts (PEP,1994). However, many contracts continued to be allocated to in-house teams, where services had been, and continued to be, less sensitive to the needs of tenants (Balchin and Rhoden, 2002).

Tenant involvement in governance was starting to increase in the housing association sector through the process of stock transfer. Early research on Housing Action Trusts by Platt et al (1990), explored the roles and activities of involved tenants, and revealed both the benefits and difficulties of including tenants in formal committee structures. Of particular interest were issues of accountability and representation. This and other research, together with an NFHS/TPAS report (1991), the Hart report (Platt et al 1987), and an influential review on Co-operatives undertaken by the Department of the Environment entitled *Tenants in the lead,* revealed the potential benefits of tenant involvement and recommended that it be promoted by the DOE and the Housing Corporation (DOE, 1988). This led to a consultation paper on the development of a Housing Corporation grant funding scheme and a Tenant Participation Strategy in 1992, which was followed by the 'Tenants' Guarantee' in 1995. These regulatory instruments focused on encouraging housing associations to adopt good practice in tenant involvement, supported by Innovation and Good Practice funding from the Housing Corporation, which was made available to housing associations for the development of innovative approaches to tenant involvement.

This resulted in many community level initiatives, such as mapping communities and community needs, and encouraging community leadership in regeneration projects, along with the employment of specialist staff and consultants. The drawback for many associations was that their projects had to have national relevance, and that funding would be short-term. Much of this work focused on services and community rather than involvement at a strategic level. Traditional housing associations were reluctant to

involve their tenants at board level, with only 40 per cent having a tenant on their board by 1990 (Kearns, 1994). Quite apart from this, there were still concerns over the role and function of tenant involvement in housing associations. How in practice were housing associations discharging their duty to involve tenants? The Hancock Report in 1995 maintained that simply having a few tenants on the committee of a housing association did not adequately constitute tenant involvement, and that tenants could not be expected to speak on behalf of the wider tenant community (Hancock Panel, 1995). Kearns (1994) undertook a governance survey which again revealed an ongoing resistance to tenant representation in the board room. Only 12% of committee members were in favour of tenant power and influence, and Kearns concluded that firmer regulation, together with the dissemination of information about good practice, were necessary in the housing association sector (Kearns, 1997).

At the same time 'Housing Plus' was introduced, which emphasised a wider role for landlords in social and economic development (Power, 1991). 'Housing Plus' was implemented on some of the larger estates that were seen to be suffering similar problems to local authority estates. This adoption of non-housing objectives was seen as increasingly necessary in order to halt the decline in poor, marginalised communities and improve housing associations' engagement with communities concerning the solutions to their problems, often using a community development approach with dedicated staffing. Many of the older housing associations were already providing more than just bricks and mortar, in line with their philanthropic aims, which had been developed in the previous century. However, many of the 'traditional' associations that had developed from the 1970s onward did not, and felt that limited resources should be focused on development rather than on activities which they considered to be properly the province of other agencies. This debate was to continue over the next twenty years. The associations that embraced this new agenda were able to bring additional resources and facilities into communities, and involve their tenants more actively in the development of the new economic and social infrastructure, leading to improved communities and improved housing management services. Success depended on a high level of corporate commitment and sustained strong partnerships with other agencies, leadership and an enduring dialogue with the community (Kemp and Fordham, 1997).

Importantly, over the 1980s and 1990s, federations of tenants' associations formed themselves into two larger groups. In the council sector, in 1997, the National Tenants Organisation and the National Tenants and Residents Federation combined to form the Tenants and Residents Organisation of England (TAROE). In 1996, the housing association equivalent had been formed: the Housing Association Tenants and Residents Organisation of England (HARTOE), but the potential for these two organisations to work together was never realised.

Thus over this period, a growing and government-led movement towards the involvement of tenants emerged across social housing, through requirements for consultation, participation, choice, and increasing control options, along with associated training and education to develop capacity. However, the fact that most of these initiatives were very much top down and imposed by government and regulators meant that landlords were often less than committed to the proposals, and tended to see it as a box-ticking process at best. Moreover, the measures, as viewed here in the wider context of developments in social housing, can be seen to be more in the service of a political agenda than in an intrinsic belief in the value of tenant involvement itself (Gayle and Newbolt, 1999).

2.5.4   New Labour – policy and key aims

When Labour came to power in the landslide victory of 1997 they inherited a strong economy and a level of taxation that could be used as a base for increased public spending. There was a political commitment to reducing inequality. This was not 'Old Labour' but rather a more pragmatic party, still rooted in social democratic ideals, but willing to embrace the managerial reforms and drive for efficiency imposed by the Conservatives. At the same time, New Labour was working towards the key, and sometimes contradictory, goals of choice and equity in the delivery of public services (Clarke et al, 2007).

Labour's construction of the 'citizen consumer' of public services built on the Conservative themes of choice and accountability. In the case of housing, this meant that the views of tenants were seen as essential to an understanding of the impact of housing services, and their views and involvement were to be used to improve the quality of services and to alter the balance of power between professionals and tenants.

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The 'citizen consumer tenant' had valuable knowledge regarding his or her own situation or condition, and this was to be seen as legitimate and authorised (Clarke et al, 2007). The role of the citizen consumer was to work with providers to address the inequalities in the system for accessing effective services, and to shine a light on taken-for-granted institutional discrimination 'inscribed within the policies, personnel and practices of public services' (Clarke et al, 2007: 37). Lister states that partnership 'is the linchpin and the new managerialism, the organisational glue that holds it together' (Lister, 2003:429). Barnes et al point out that focusing on the engagement of citizens and communities in public decision making is central to the modernising agenda as 'this type of participation is capable of improving the quality and legitimacy of decisions in government' (Barnes et al, 2003: 379).

This, however, needs to be seen in the context of the increasing residualisation and rationing of social housing. Hills (2007) pointed out that by 2004-5 a third of people living in social housing had incomes (adjusted for family size) in the poorest fifth of the income distribution, and 70 per cent were in the poorest two-fifths. He pointed out that in the 1960s and 70s, 20 per cent of the richest tenth lived in social housing, whereas by 2004-5 hardly any were in the top fifth. Between 1981 and 2006 the full-time employment rate of social tenant households had dropped from 67 to 34 per cent, although there was a significant increase in part-time working, reflecting the increase in lone parent households. This brought the percentage of working households to just under 50 per cent. Thus tenants in housing association homes were likely to be less able to take on the role of the citizen consumer without a reasonable level of support, and inclusive practices (Hills, 2007).

An important theme in Labour policy was investment in human capital to improve economic opportunity. During their second term in government, Labour wanted to invest in communities and develop what was termed civic renewal. Key rhetoric was about building services around the 'interests of service users rather than the convenience of producers' (Newman, 2006:10). Service users could now be consumers in a modern inclusive welfare environment where 'inequality was to be addressed by valuing diversity, where consumers were given the opportunity to articulate their demands, needs and wants' (Clarke et al, 2005:172). Commentators point out, however, that Labour has had to wrestle with the competing demands of different strands of social and

economic policy, which have been working against each other. For instance, the constraints on resources are at odds with consumerist, choice-based approaches to service delivery. The need to manage service user expectations in order to keep within deliverable limits is a fraught and constantly contested process. The continuing theme of choice within a context of restricted resources involves negotiation with funders, professionals and services users, which has proved to be extremely challenging for providers (Clarke et al, 2007).

Meanwhile there was a further development of accountability systems through the use of target setting, regulation and arm's length management, using the increased powers of QUANGOs (Clarke et al, 2007). In the case of housing associations, increased accountability was delivered through the Housing Corporation. For the associations, this increasingly prescriptive involvement of the regulator created considerable costs in terms of time, effort and, essentially, money: the 'regulatory burden' (Mullins and Riseborough, 2000). Associations were expected to achieve certain goals and standards, and report to the regulator using 'self-assessments'. They were required to submit a range of key performance information. Lead regulators would visit associations and look at policies and procedures, and check that systems were in place for delivering development programmes and other regulator defined objectives effectively (Housing Corporation, 2002a). Commenting on the changes in the development of housing management, Pearl (1997) pointed out that 'from a position of insularity and paternalism housing managers have been exposed to the probing scrutiny of an extended range of stakeholders, forcing a major reassessment of the mechanics of the professional approach' (Pearl,1997: 224).

Building on the pioneering work of the Conservative administration, the Labour government continued to encourage local authorities to transfer their stock either to a newly created housing association or to an existing one, which would enable the new organisation to access private finance. By February 2003, 143 local authorities had carried out 180 transfers, comprising 738 000 homes. In 2000, Labour introduced the Decent Homes Standard, which was to be achieved by 2010.   They made it clear that transferring stock to a housing association would provide a means of improving sub-standard local authority housing at a time when public funding might not be available, and this was part of a wider government agenda of accessing private finance to support

public services. Labour believed that stock transfer would bring the additional benefits of greater tenants' choice and participation, and would therefore have the potential to be a better option for tenants than remaining with the local authority, even if the local authority had funds available (Malpas, 2003).

2.5.5   Labour and tenant participation

2.5.5.1 <u>Increasing accountability and value for money</u>

Labour wanted to make sure that social housing providers consulted their tenants in a structured way and that services such as repairs, housing management, and allocations and lettings were regularly reviewed. The Best Value regime, introduced in 1997, became a statutory requirement in the Local Government Act 1999, replacing Compulsory Competitive Tendering. Best Value required local authorities, in particular, to review their service delivery, compare their performance with others, and demonstrate that they have embraced the principles of fair competition in deciding who should deliver services. Tenant consultation is an essential component of the Best Value process, which requires the views and expectations of local service users and residents to be reflected in the outcome of service reviews. The Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate carried out regular inspections to ensure that landlords were meeting government requirements on Best Value. Housing associations were not subject to the strict application of Best Value, but were expected to adopt its principles in their approach to continuous improvement frameworks (Housing Corporation, 1999a).

In 1999, the government also issued the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts, with the aim of encouraging tenants and councils to work together to improve housing services and tenant participation arrangements. The guidance required all councils to negotiate an agreement (Compact) with their tenants, setting out the arrangements for tenant involvement based on 'core standards' contained within the Framework (ODPM, 2003). An interim evaluation of Compacts, carried out in 2003, revealed that this initiative had raised the profile of tenant participation in many local authorities. Tenants' representatives felt that their hand had been 'strengthened' as a result of the introduction of Compacts. However, the staff and elected members all recognised that the vast majority of tenants had probably never heard of their existence.

The introduction of Compacts did not increase the involvement of tenants overall, but it went some way towards changing the dynamics of the relationship (ODPM, 2003).

Although the Framework did not extend to housing associations, the Housing Corporation encouraged associations to use approaches contained within the Framework as good practice. Some housing associations subsequently developed their own Compacts. However, many preferred to set up tenant involvement agreements, which outlined how the association would work with tenants, what areas they could be involved in, and to what level - in essence a service standard for involvement (Audit Commission, 2004). Central to both compacts and agreements was an explicit statement about the various opportunities to get involved with the landlord. Tenants could approach staff and ask to be involved, and in many organisations staff worked very hard to encourage them, given that the regulators expected tenant involvement mechanisms to be in place. These directives were directed at local authority housing, and it was left to housing associations to interpret the spirit of these initiatives and apply them to practice.

To reinforce this further, the Housing Corporation produced a raft of requirements and expectations about involving tenants and promoting accountability (although many of the recommendations were not compulsory). *Making consumers count - the next five years* (Housing Corporation 1998), focused on encouraging and supporting good practice that would make housing associations (or Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) as they were now termed) more accountable to tenants. They wanted to evaluate the extent and nature of tenant involvement in housing associations and to encourage innovation, supporting tenant training through grants to TPAS and PEP to subsidise costs. They also wanted to encourage associations to involve tenants in developing and monitoring standards, and possibly developing tenant controlled organisations where appropriate (Housing Corporation, 1998). Importantly they were keen to talk to tenants directly, so they recruited a Tenant Consumer Panel made up of experienced activitists including the ex-chair of the now defunct HARTOE, and members of TAROE. In response to the government push to widen empowerment, embodied in its publication, Quality *and choice: a decent home for all* (2000), the Housing Corporation published *Communities in control* (2000)**.** This developed the themes of what was now termed 'resident involvement' in housing associations, outlining the opportunities that should

be available, and offering toolkits and best practice examples. The move towards the use of 'resident' rather than tenant was regulator-led, based on the fact that communities comprised more than just tenants, and that many associations were providing services to a wider range of tenures. The underlying policy themes here included moving beyond basic participation to explore and develop choices about how services would be managed and controlled. The Housing Corporation wanted to respond to the demand for more tenant control through regeneration or stock transfer, and to embed strong community involvement in areas of newly built homes by, for instance, setting up estate agreements that would be monitored by local committees. Interestingly, at the time of its publication in 2000, there were only seven TMOs set up in housing associations, even though the power to do so had been in place since 1993, which gives an indication of the attitude of associations to the notion of devolving power to tenants. In contrast 202 had been set up in local authority housing, with a further 84 in development. The policy stipulated that tenants should be able to choose at what level, and in what areas, they would be involved, and to explore the potential for Estate Management Boards, Tenant Management Organisations and tenant controlled housing associations, in addition to tenant inclusion on conventional boards (Housing Corporation, 2000).

Around this time tenants were increasingly being offered a voice within the national policy arena. The Tenant Sounding Board was set up in 2001 by Lord Falconer, the then Minister of Housing, to include all categories of social housing tenant, and it specifically included representatives of TAROE (Milward et al, 2003). The Sounding Board was in addition to the Tenant Consumer Panel at the Housing Corporation. It is unclear how much of the good practice linked to these initiatives, which was being disseminated at this time, reached the tenants themselves, as only a few copies were normally sent to landlords, and it was up to them to circulate as they saw fit. Electronic access was becoming more common, but tenants needed to know that there was material available to be downloaded. Information about subsidised training courses was also sent directly to the landlord, but again it is uncertain how much of this information was given to tenants by their landlords. The Regulatory Code for Housing 2002 included specific obligations on associations to enable residents to participate in decision making. It contained requirements on the provision of information to residents; the mechanisms for residents to influence activities and become involved; the provision of a menu of opportunities for consultation and involvement, with a view to ensuring that

residents' views were taken into account; and measures to enable residents to acquire the knowledge and skills to undertake involvement activities effectively.

2.5.5.2 <u>Tenants and inspection</u>

In 2002 the Housing Corporation published *The way forward: our approach to regulation*, which outlined how, as part of its regulatory function, it would inspect housing associations, with the aim of assessing services from the tenant's perspective. The Housing Corporation was keen to involve tenants directly in its development of this new inspection regime. All key service areas were to be reality checked from the perspective of the tenant experience. It is worth noting that this was the first time that tenant involvement practice within housing associations was to be looked at specifically. Here the government, through its regulatory instruments, appeared to be acting as an advocate for tenants, in terms of defining and actively checking the quality of services that they should receive in a more active way. It also represented a significant change in the regulatory burden for housing associations, and an opening up of associations' practices to the public and each other, as inspection reports were to be published (on the internet) and open to public scrutiny (Housing Corporation, 2002a).

The Audit Commission inspectorate had already been operating in the local authority sector through its Best Value inspections. However, there was no published guidance for housing associations to enable them to understand the standards expected, and the approach to inspection beyond adherence to the current regulatory code. Housing Corporation pathfinder inspections were undertaken in 2001, working with tenants as lay inspectors to find the best way to proceed, and inspections proper were started in 2002. The Audit Commission and Housing Corporation inspectorates were merged in 2004 under the umbrella of the Audit Commission, and a standardised approach to inspections (both housing association and local authority) was published at that time, known as the *Key lines of enquiry* (KLOEs). These, and in particular KLOE 5, detailed clearly what was expected for a three star (excellent) or one star (fair) rating in relation to resident involvement. KLOE 5 covered: access, customer care and service user focus; diversity; tenant and leaseholder participation compacts/strategies; resources for resident involvement; the impact of resident involvement; and the value for money of resident involvement (Audit Commission, 2004). The full range of KLOEs which detailed expected standards and approaches for all aspects of the housing management

service, and were available on the internet along with inspection reports and the grades awarded. This was a great opportunity for active tenants to have information on what services were supposed to look like and to use it to influence their own landlords' work.

Meanwhile, in 2003 the National Housing Federation had launched its 'in business for neighbourhoods' initiative, a campaign aimed at correcting the perception that housing associations only provided poor quality homes for the poor, the deprived and the vulnerable - and little else, following the result of a MORI poll undertaken for the NHF in 2001. This was in some respects a return to the call to build the social and economic infrastructure associated with 'housing plus' projects. Landlords were thus encouraged to work with private sector partners and agencies to increase employment, regenerate areas and develop the capacity of residents to get involved in shaping and maintaining their communities.

The Housing Corporation, in partnership with the Audit Commission, commissioned an extensive research project in 2004, which looked closely at corporate and governance-level tenant involvement in housing associations. This identified many concerns about the effectiveness and value for money of panels and forums, especially where tenants were involved in governance following a transfer from local authority housing. The capacity, role and purpose of many involvement initiatives were unclear, with many organisations focusing only on process – simply getting through the round of meetings. Housing associations were encouraged to assess all their involvement activities in terms of value for money and impact. This resulted in the withdrawal of funding from some panels, forums and community forums and federations, and significantly, the winding up of the Tenant Consumer Panel.   It also, however, heralded the start of more activity-based involvement initiatives, such as mystery shopping and tenant inspector/auditor projects, which were starting to emerge in the sector and which built on some of the pioneering work undertaken by the Wrekin Trust, which was funded by the Housing Corporation (Audit Commission, 2004).

A number of practitioners, and the inspectorate, have published information on the findings and good practice emerging from inspections. In addition, the Housing Quality Network produced a report in 2006 which revealed that 79 per cent of first inspections of housing associations were awarded 'one star' or less and, typically, one star organisations had not sufficiently developed tenant involvement structures and

processes. This showed that tenant involvement was not realising its potential to influence the work of associations (Housing Quality Network 2006). Writing in 2004, Cairncross et al, commenting on tenant involvement at the board level in housing associations, pointed out that much of the information on involvement at this level, and indeed the way governance was conducted generally, was anecdotal, as it was difficult to access these areas for the purposes of study because of the commercial sensitivity of housing association business. However, the involvement of tenants was increasing in the sector due to the influx of LSVTs.

2.5.5.3 Increasing the regulation of involvement

The Housing Corporation's *Involvement policy for the housing association sector* (Housing Corporation, 2004) came into effect on 1st April 2004. The policy built on existing tenant participation guidance and contained a list of expectations, including involving tenants in monitoring and reviewing; developing a range of opportunities; giving feedback; making funding available; and an expectation that tenant involvement would be at the heart of housing associations' corporate strategy, decision-making and ethos. To ensure that this was done, every housing association was expected to draw up a resident involvement statement in partnership with residents, with an annual action plan that would be assessed at the end of the year with impact and outcomes in mind. This was to be an essential part of the Housing Corporation's regulatory role. The interesting thing about this policy was that the Housing Corporation's Tenant Consumer Panel had worked closely with policy makers and regulatory staff to put together a policy that had some teeth, and which moved beyond good practice expectations. Ironically, a week after this policy was launched the consumer panel was wound up, leaving no input from tenants into the work of the regulator until the inception of the Tenant Sounding Board.

The Elton review in 2006 had a remit to look at ways in which the burden of regulation on registered social landlords could be reduced within the constraints of the existing regulatory and administrative framework. The steering group for the review included membership from Communities and Local Government, the Housing Corporation, Audit Commission, National Housing Federation, the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the Chartered Institute of Housing. The majority of recommendations focused on the Housing Corporation, concerning their approach to regulatory contact, but there were

some key areas relating to tenant involvement. These included the need to undertake some thematic reviews of the current involvement policy (2004); to take regulatory action against those associations that did not comply; and to ensure that tenant involvement was seen as core business, with a view to developing and supporting tenant-led self-inspection. Importantly, the review recommended that all housing association boards, including those of the traditional housing associations, should have at least one tenant member, or a member on the committee that deals directly with service delivery, and that the roles of tenants on boards should be clear and transparent, competency based and the approach to selection agreed with tenants. In addition the review recommended a risk based approach to inspections, which would reduce the regulatory burden for better performing housing associations. This meant that those traditional associations that had not included tenants on their boards were expected to do so.

Between 2004 and 2006 tenant inspection and mystery shopper projects started to develop more widely where organisations were willing to let tenants look more deeply at the quality of services, and the way they were delivered in practice. These groups did not, however, control their own agenda. Instead they worked, in essence, as unpaid employees of the association, producing reports and recommendations to senior staff. This contrasted with the Elton report's intention of creating tenant-led inspections, where tenants would have control over what they inspected and were given the resources to do so (Elton, 2006).

In 2007 the Housing Corporation published a thematic review of their involvement policy, and this revealed that some housing associations, and specifically some of the newer LSVTs, had failed to comply with the policy and accompanying regulatory circular. This was a consequence of uncertainty in the sector about how it should be implemented, and a lack of understanding regarding the issue of outcomes. The policy was revised, and guidance was published in 2007. This made it clear to associations that they must, together with tenants, put together a plan for the following 12 months, covering the key tenant involvement themes. At the end of the period they were required to assess how well they had achieved their outcomes - an 'impact assessment'. Much of the guidance focused on the building blocks of involvement and on how to be

inclusive. Interestingly, housing associations had only to demonstrate compliance by self-assessment and by publishing their involvement statements to tenants.

2.5.5.4 <u>Moving towards co-regulation through tenant involvement</u>

The Cave review (2007) followed on from this, with a remit to review the role and objectives of social housing, and to propose a regulatory and institutional framework capable of achieving those objectives. Tenants' views were included as part of a wide stakeholder consultation, which covered areas of employment, lifetime tenancies, the make-up of estates and increasing tenant satisfaction. The report was the initiating factor in the development of a new regulatory framework enshrined in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, which abolished the Housing Corporation and combined its funding duties with those of English Partnerships and Communities and Local Government to create two new bodies: the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenants Services Authority. The Homes and Communities Agency had a remit to deliver new homes and drive regeneration, with a focus on improving the quality and supply of housing, with an explicit commitment to sustainable development and good design. The aim was to deliver three million new homes by 2020. Housing associations and all other social housing providers were to become Registered Providers, and would be regulated to the same set of key standards. The regulatory function was to be delivered by the Tenants Services Authority (TSA). The aim of the regulator was to champion the interests of tenants, promote choice and challenge landlords to provide a high standard of service. In the autumn of 2008 the TSA carried out a major consultation exercise, called the National Conversation, to find out what was important to tenants and what had been their experience of services. The results were published in 2009 (see chapter 3, p. 102). The TSA planned to set up the National Tenants Voice in 2010, which would be a consultation forum for national policy. A year was spent carefully recruiting 50 representatives from across social housing and across the country. The new regulatory standards were to take effect from April 2010 and affected all social housing.

2.6   Conclusion

Economic, social and political pressures impacted heavily on the shape of housing policy across successive governments, and this affected the quality of housing, the level of housing subsidies, the focus of local authorities, the quality of homes built, the rent levels of private rented housing, the break-up and creation of communities and the development and focus of housing associations. Tracking housing policy, and the development of local authority and housing association housing, is helpful in understanding the way in which tenant involvement developed within this changing environment. Tenant action and involvement developed from a base of local struggle and poverty, as a protest against poor private rented housing at the end of the 19th century, and moved into a dynamic, though short, relationship with the working class labour movements, leading to the development of local authority housing. The policies for rents and housing management, and the conditions of these housing estates, created further issues for tenants across the 20th century. During this period there was a shift from protest and direct action to tenant involvement with the landlord rather than against the landlord, which was occurring within the context of a reducing local authority housing sector and an emerging housing association sector. Though tenants were given a legitimate voice they increasingly found themselves either as volunteer providers of facilities and services or as unequal partners at the policy making table. Thus tenant involvement activities have moved from a base of single identity collective action toward multiple identities within marginal, and increasingly vulnerable, communities trying to work in partnership with their landlords to improve basic services and infrastructure. From the 1980s onwards, individuals and small groups of involved tenants became increasingly incorporated into housing management and governance structures, dependent on funding provided or procured by their landlords, and supported by a professional staff. The role of staff was to build capacity, maximize the input of tenants, and achieve an increasingly prescriptive list of government aims imposed by non-elected governmental agencies in a climate of reduced resources. All around the country groups were working with their landlords from a position of isolation, and sometimes ignorance, of the resources and information available to them (unlike their landlords), thus furthering the imbalance of power between the parties.

In recent years the housing association sector has developed significantly in its role as the main provider of new social housing, and it has been the principal vehicle for transferring stock away from the local authority. The heavy regulation of the sector was intended to ensure a range of involvement opportunities to enable tenants to have an impact on the shape of services and the drive for improvement.

Other options for tenant control have not developed significantly in the housing association sector, and where they have, the primary development had been done prior to the transfer, or as part of the transfer process, from local authorities. However, despite the legislation and regulation in place, the approach of many housing association landlords (in particular) to tenant involvement and participation remains 'top-down' and appears tokenistic, with few outcomes and impacts published. Inspections from 2001-2009, and the KLOE guidance, have led to inspectorate-influenced involvement frameworks that challenge citizenship-based involvement structures and promote consumerist approaches, as well as challenges to staff practice. The shortcomings of traditional citizen-based structures, and the dubious effectiveness of tenants on boards, have become more apparent following several reviews commissioned by the regulator from 2004 onwards. However, regulators have been slow to use their powers to hold housing associations to account, despite their policy rhetoric. Voices remain fragmented and unheard, and efforts to develop and fund a national tenant organisation that could work with government and regulators to inform debate from a tenant's perspective have been neither successful nor well-supported.

In the next chapter I explore the literature that was available at the start of the research period relating to tenant involvement in the social housing sector generally. It focuses first on research into tenant involvement generally across the housing sector, and then (as this became available) on more focused work concerning the experiences of housing association tenants. The gaps that emerge in this literature have influenced both the direction and the scope of my own research.

CHAPTER THREE: WORK IN THE FIELD - BARRIERS TO RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

3.1   Introduction

The following points should be kept in mind when reading this literature review. The aim of the review at the outset was to establish my topic, and to confirm that my proposal to research specifically English housing association involvement at an organisational level would enable me to make a real contribution in my field. The literature served both to frame my topic and to support the value of a particular focus on the barriers that tenants experience once they have decided to get involved with their housing association. Interestingly, however, as I started to work my topic became increasingly a focus of study both for academics and regulators, meaning that the field evolved considerably over the ten years of my work. I needed therefore constantly to keep abreast of new developments and to adjust my approach accordingly.

With this in mind, the first section of the review explores the literature that was available at the start of the research in 1999. In this section I have focused on the areas of community development, regeneration partnerships, and local authority and housing association involvement, as all these arenas involve tenants, albeit to differing extents. There is of course an important parallel literature in the health and education sectors, but these settings involve a distinctly different range of actors and agencies, and exhibit a very different dynamic. I have therefore excluded that body of research from my review.

The second section is devoted to the barriers identified in both the earlier work already touched on and in the later research published over the subsequent ten years. At this stage I restricted myself to my specific research focus, because the pool of literature was wide and much of it focused more on processes, projects, and the motivation for involvement than on barriers to successful participation. For this reason I omitted some studies altogether and focused only on the relevant parts of others, noting that information on barriers was often a subsidiary element of 'lessons learned'.   The identified barriers, however, started to form a picture and served to frame and support

my research. Some of this literature also related to my theoretical approaches; where relevant, this material is discussed in Chapter Four.

The third section looks at some large scale studies that gathered material across social housing, with the majority focusing primarily on housing association practice, although a few had a slightly wider remit. Most of these were published either by professional bodies or by the regulator and emerged during the research period, and explored housing association practice. The final section establishes the gaps in the literature, and explores the potential of my topic and focus to make a real contribution in the field. Thus my research is not only rooted in the literature available at the time of its inception, but has been shaped along the way by subsequent developments.

3.2   Tenant involvement: the literature available at the start of this research

A considerable amount of literature exploring tenant involvement (not all housing-specific) was generated from the 1970s onwards. The early work focused on collective action, its impact, and the reasons why groups mobilise. Later work focused on participation and empowerment, much of it looking at the effectiveness of policy interventions, and evaluations of the structures and systems that landlords had put in place in response to regulation and statute. Most of this work can be categorised as exploring power and ideology in involvement processes; as evaluative (either project or issue-based); or as prescriptive (state sponsored good practice linked to regulation). Further information on some of the theoretical developments through research is covered in the theory chapter.

3.2.1   Power and ideology based literature

When I started my research much of the theoretical material available was to be found in the social movement and collective action literature. These studies include Lowe's (1986) evaluation of Castell's theories on social movements, and Elmer et al's (1990) work on group boundaries and collective action. Similar 'rational choice' theories have been used to explore a range of contexts, from urban regeneration and community development projects to local authority tenants' groups, and have, in particular,

concentrated on motivations for involvement, why and how tenants mobilise, exploring their interaction with the state and other agencies Bengtsson (1998). My specific area of interest concerns how individual tenants come together, from a mix of neighbourhoods / geographical areas, to work together with professionals in bureaucratic settings. Often these groups contain a mix both of tenants who are there as representatives of their estate, neighbourhood or even county (and hence have a representative mandate), and tenants who are there solely as individuals in their own right. This contrasts with the previously more common model of tenants coming from a single location and with a single purpose who are working to change things in their locality. The tenants I am interested in are looking at wider policy and strategy issues that could affect thousands of tenants in different parts of the county or country.

With this in mind I looked at the developing body of literature exploring power and participation in social housing, regeneration projects and community development. Collins (1998) studied a community partnership that was failing as a result of tensions between the groups involved. His focus on discourse, using critical discourse analysis techniques, highlighted the strains and tensions reflected through the genre of the spoken word. This exposed the hidden conflicts between the different social groups which would not otherwise have been registered. In particular it revealed the way in which the partnership speech genre had been imposed upon the community, and showed how this had ultimately been rejected by the group. This work revealed interesting material about inequalities, power sharing, conflict resolution, co-option and accommodation within the participatory environment, in its attempt to offer insight into what happens when bureaucratic systems are opened up to the world of ordinary people, what Jackson (1999) refers to as 'lifeworld' influences. Jackson (1999) carried out an in depth study of a community forum in crisis, which looked at complex subject positions and relationships between participants, and explored the use of power. This study brought to the fore the issue of public spaces, and accompanying discursive practices, versus the 'lifeworld' system of tenants, and the problems associated with the interface between the two. These findings show that partnerships between tenants, landlords and other agencies, despite the rhetoric, remain essentially agency-led, and that activities and approaches were dominated by professional language and professional modes of working, most of which are unacknowledged. The studies serve to shed light on, and add a useful dimension to, the reasons why interventions and

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partnership working are fraught with problems, and are relevant to my consideration of housing association corporate involvement and governance.

Research undertaken by Atkinson (1999) investigated the discourse informing national policy in an urban regeneration setting, and how it serves to reinforce and reproduce existing social relations. In a similar vein, the work of Haworth and Manzi (1997) explored the moral discourse informing housing management practice. Both studies revealed that a strong moralist perspective was informing policy and practice, which runs counter to empowerment approaches and serves to maintain the control of power holders. It follows that if the parties involved in the tenant involvement game were more aware of these influences, and had the skills and confidence to address them more openly, and in a supportive environment, then involvement might work better. However, a study by Furbey et al (1996), exploring the discourse informing training and support for tenants in social housing, revealed that the focus, range and scope of training was limited to a set of skills and officially sanctioned competencies, where tenants were seen as candidates for reform rather than empowerment and education, which is not to say individuals did not become empowered to some extent through the act of being trained. It is no wonder that tenants who get involved continue to experience disempowerment, many becoming deeply suspicious of the rhetoric of partnership and capacity building. They are frequently disparaging of notions of empowerment as promoted by the organisations and agencies with which they work, as their exposure to these practices increases. This group of studies reveal that interventions are informed by inaccurate or limited social constructions of the people, problems, and communities involved.

Other writers, such as Oliver (1995), Hogget (1997), Barnes et al (2003), Jones (2003), Simmons et al (2005), and Clarke et al (2007) explore, and discuss in depth, the wider issues that underpin the structural inequality at the heart of the dynamics of the process when individuals and groups become involved with state-run services. This is especially relevant in the case of social housing tenants, where many are located in areas of high economic and social deprivation. They also emphasise that government and national policy makers have not acknowledged the many studies which have shown that government aims to regenerate and reinvigorate communities and improve services have only partially been delivered. This is so, despite continued initiatives and funding,

over a period of 20 years, promulgating a commitment to empowerment, collaboration, partnership, devolved decision-making and inclusion. Despite acceptance of the existence of structural inequalities and social exclusion, there appears to be an increasing emphasis on the notion that those who have been excluded or disempowered are responsible for their own exclusion, and therefore can and should effect the solution to their own predicament, thus pathologising and individualising the source of inequality to a greater or lesser extent (Flint, 2004; McKee, 2009).

Simmons and Birchall (2005) looked at the ideological move to turn public service users into consumers through the increased use of market type mechanisms, claiming that their interests had been failed because they had not been allowed to be real partners in a way that would actively shape services and hence redistribute power away from providers. Thus the moral discourse informing social policy intervention, the power of elites, and strong provider interests, represents a significant barrier to effective, empowering involvement. This is never acknowledged in involvement practice.

That said, local authority tenant involvement, urban regeneration, and community development and partnership activities continue to be funded and promoted, and are a constant site of interest for both academic and government-funded research, some of which has provided both a basis for national policy development, and information and guidance on good practice for practitioners.

3.2.2 Evaluative literature

The bulk of the literature comprises evaluative material, some commissioned by government, regulatory bodies such as the Housing Corporation, or the institutions that inform professional practice within the housing world, such as the Chartered Institute of Housing, the National Housing Federation or the Tenant Participation Advisory Service. This research is often commissioned, and undertaken by university departments or consultants, though notable institutions such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, as well as independent academic research, has contributed to a developing body of empirical work. This literature can be split into two broad types. One is the individual case studies of a specific project, which seek to establish whether the project met its aims and objectives, and to explore any problems that occurred, with a view to arriving at a set of good practice recommendations. The other focuses on particular issues or

themes, for example 'community leaders in urban regeneration', from which, once again, good practice recommendations are drawn and theoretical frameworks employed. Some of this literature has included theoretical explorations, and typologies were developed, or existing ones used, to help explore and order the information. One of the most cited is Arnstein's (1969) typology of involvement activities, based on their effect, which has been widely deployed in a range of sectors to expose the tokenistic approach to involvement, and this is explored in more detail in chapter 4. Cairncross et al (1994) researched types of local authority housing services based on their underlying philosophy (consumerist, traditional or citizenship based) in conjunction with Clegg's (1989) framework of power model, which revealed the dynamics of power and the games involved. Somerville (1998), exploring how empowerment and institutional change can occur, developed a typology based on the direction of actions and outcomes ('top down' or 'bottom up') and Birchall (2002) looked at types of tenant, based on their motivation or behaviour as an involved tenant.

More recently Simmons and Birchall (2005), while exploring motivations for getting involved, revealed some interesting factors about staying involved. They developed the concept of the 'participation chain' for exploring and describing involvement activities, and found that skills and confidence were important both for getting started in involvement, and in supporting higher level participation. These attributes were also considered to be important in enabling the recognition of issues, such as a sense of deprivation, which might lead to a desire for change. Tenants need, however, to be aware of opportunities to participate. For involvement to be successful it is necessary to have a positive feedback loop which in turn reinforces a personal commitment to participation and the development of group identity (Simmons and Birchall, 2005). It follows that for a group of involved tenants to work well with their housing association landlord, they would need skills and confidence in the first place, a problem that requires resolution - leading to motivation, early positive experiences of working in partnership with their landlord, and the ability through the experience to develop a sense of collective identity within the group. This would seem unrealistic in the context of the involvement environment, especially given the issues of social exclusion and geographical separation between involved tenants in the housing association context. Moreover, given the imbalance of power between the provider and the service user, and the business culture of housing associations (which have a strong executive leadership

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culture and unelected boards, together with a disposition towards consumerist rather than collectivist modes of consultation and involvement), the likelihood of these conditions being met would seem remote.

The aim of these studies and evaluations was not to challenge professional groups per se, although they sometimes did, but rather to enlighten and enable them to be more effective. In most cases the studies focused on gaining an understanding of the experience and process of involvement, with a view to expanding this either into new areas, or through using new techniques. Most of the evaluative literature on tenant involvement explores projects based within localities, and examines the effectiveness of partnership and collaborative working.

At the start of this research, I found very few empirical studies that specifically focused on the involvement of tenants within the governance and corporate structures of housing associations, as against the activities of tenants' associations in localities or community development and partnerships that involved housing association tenants. As well as the studies already mentioned, there had been some exploration of tenants' interaction with committees and housing staff, but this was mostly undertaken within local authority housing (Richardson, 1977; Hague, 1990; Bevington, 1991; Power, 1991; Barran, 1992; Philips, 1992; PEP, 1994; Cairncross et al, 1997; Lloyd and Wilcox, 1997) or within community and regeneration partnerships (Smith and Jones, 1981; Lee and Mayo, 1984; Watson, 1994; McArther et al, 1996; Cole et al, 2000; McCulloch, 2000; Coaffee and Healey, 2003). Useful information about barriers is evident in these studies and is outlined in more detail in the next section, which also contains more recent work. However, the difference in funding, culture, regulation, history, development focus, accountability and autonomy of housing associations (outlined in more detail in Chapter 2) would suggest that the dynamics of involvement at a corporate level within housing associations are likely to be very different from those within councils and other partnerships, thus affecting the extent and impact of barriers.

The private and business nature of these organisations has resulted in very little in depth research into involvement practice before the late 1980s. One of the earliest examples of research (Platt et al, 1987) was funded by the Housing Corporation and focused on the qualitative aspect of involvement practice in ten housing associations. This was followed by an NFHA/TPAS publication in 1991 that explored practice ten housing

associations; resulting the publication of the first good practice guide specifically for housing associations. The Housing Corporation, in partnership with TPAS, then showcased various forms of involvement, positive practice and lessons learned, based on a workshop in 1994 (Blewitt and Garratt, 1995). Kearns (1997) study focused on the composition of committees and explored views about involving tenants and the scope of their potential role, and its inherent difficulties. TPAS was sponsored once again to look into the attitudes of private finance providers to tenant involvement, particularly in relation to the governance structures of housing associations. In contrast to the prevailing belief that funders were not happy about tenant involvement at committee level, they found that, in general, funders were positive about the influence of tenants (TPAS, 1996).

Interestingly, Gayle and Newbolt's (1999) research some twelve years after Platt el al (1987) revealed the continued existence of key barriers across all aspects of involvement and governance, resulting in the publication of a manifesto for change. There were also studies on housing association practice in communities, focusing on Housing Plus, (Kemp and Fordham, 1997) and on new housing association estates (Page, 1991). Interestingly, in many of these later studies, much of the methodology involved questionnaires to housing associations asking them, for instance, how much training they gave to their tenant board members (Pawson and Fancy, 2003) or what structures were in place to support involvement (Aldbourne Associates, 2000). The results are likely to be skewed by associations' desire to present themselves and their approach to involvement and support in a good light. It is not until involvement is explored in situ or at depth that a different picture emerges.

This body of housing association material had limited insight into *why* activities turned out the way they did. Gayle and Newbolt did, however, highlight a number of problems that tenants and staff were still struggling with: issues that no-one else was debating or researching at that time. Their work was aimed at generating debate and a more honest stock-take on what was really going on in housing associations.

3.2.3 Prescriptive based good practice literature

The prescriptive literature refers to good practice guides linked either to government policy directives relating to tenant involvement or to other key policy themes such as

'Best Value'. These guides and directives set out the requirements to be met in order to comply with the regulatory/advisory policy framework in place at any given time, and how it could be delivered effectively. Case study material is frequently used to support the recommendations. However, in most of these publications there was a tendency to focus predominantly on the ways in which involvement activities could be undertaken (i.e. the process). Only basic information was provided about the potential barriers to tenant involvement and how to deal with them, although this information was still useful in helping practitioners to plan their projects and to develop involvement frameworks. Examples of such publications include *The national framework for tenant participation* (DETR, 1999a), *Communities in control* (Housing Corporation, 2000d) and a series of publications from the Housing Corporation, titled *The big picture*, which brought together some of the evaluations of the work of the Innovation and Good Practice funding in 2001 and included a CD, containing a directory of involvement. TPAS and PEP continued to publish a range of good practice papers and books, as well as making available downloads. PEP, for example, published *Involving tenants in CCT* in 1994. The already mentioned *It's a better way of working: tenant participation in housing associations* (NFHA/TPAS) was published in 1991, and TPAS went on to publish *Tenants together* in1992 and *Developing good practice in tenant participation* in1994. These straightforward 'how to' books were based on specific projects and highlighted to practitioners how to meet their regulatory involvement obligations.

3.3   The main barriers to involvement identified in the literature

Within the literature, 'barriers to involvement' is not generally considered to be a subject in its own right. More often the identification of barriers is embedded in wider analyses, or located within good practice guides. This section explores a wide range of literature, including the literature that emerged after the research had started, with a view to gathering together all the information to be found on barriers and categorizing it into two main themes: barriers to getting involved in the first place and barriers to sustaining effective involvement. The primary focus of this research is on what happens after tenants get involved rather than why they do, or do not, get involved. I have, however, included some of the information on barriers to getting involved as this helps to set the context, to acknowledge that there is some overlap between the barrier categories, and to ensure that the barrier problem has been framed as fully as possible.

3.3.1 Barriers to getting involved

There is considerable literature on why tenants do not want to get involved; it is a central theme of many of the project-based evaluations. One reason often cited for non-involvement is previous negative experience (DETR, 1999b). For example, it is not uncommon for staff to stereotype tenants and communities as homogeneous passive partners and to treat them as such when delivering services and implementing involvement activities, which tenants understandably find off-putting. As a consequence, some tenants will only attend one meeting, or talk to just one member of staff, and rule themselves out of any further involvement (McCullock, 2000). This issue has come to the fore in more recent studies: for example, the ODPM (2006) exploration of community involvement and citizenship, drawing on interviews and case studies with councillors, staff, managers and interested citizens, and research into involvement in regeneration initiatives by Beresford and Hoban (2005).

This stereotyping by staff of tenants, and indeed whole communities, rests on the perception that tenants are lacking in capacity, yet this can be a direct consequence of the organisation's attempts to shoehorn them into corporate practices without considering their needs and abilities. The experience, for instance, of being catapulted into formal meetings, can result in feelings of powerlessness for some tenants, which leads in turn to an avoidance of future involvement (Platt et al, 1987; Beresford and Hoban, 2005). Tenants may also have had negative experiences with individual staff in a non-involvement capacity, and vice versa, which affects the tone of any future involvement, and indeed the likelihood of it occurring at all. For tenants who have been previously involved, it is unlikely that they will be persuaded to return to the tenant involvement arena unless they are able to cite for themselves some level of achievement, such as learning something, making a difference, or gaining in personal confidence (Housing Corporation, 2007a). Where the landlord organisation has not followed through on promises made to tenants, has failed to report back on the impact of their work, or has failed to acknowledge their input, tenants are likely to perceive any future involvement as a waste of time, and those who have never been involved may be deterred (EU, 1997; NHF, 2007). In addition, tenants may have interacted with a range of agencies in the past in efforts to access services and influence the shape of such services (Beresford and Hoban, 2005). Such past dealings with 'authority figures' or

public services, which often have gate-keeping or policing roles, will affect the likelihood of future involvement and dialogue with a housing provider.

However, Beresford and Hoban also pointed out that just because people live on the same estate it does not mean that they see one another as 'equals', either in their neighbourhood or as participants in tenant involvement; in reality they may define themselves in a way that can be seen as divisive and discriminatory. This results in some tenants being excluded from involvement, and those whose voices are consequently unheard are frequently identifiable by where they live, gender, race and class (Uguris, 2004). Moreover, the National Housing Federation research *What tenants want* (2007) identified that the commonly used term 'them and us', usually used for describing the relationship between staff and tenants, was also used to describe the antagonistic feeling between leaseholders and tenants living on mixed tenure estates. Tenants often felt that leaseholders got a better service and were treated differently by housing staff. This affects the sense of community, or collective identity, and undermines potentially shared interests. The research also found that staff failed to understand these issues when designing approaches to involving tenants (NHF, 2007).

Beresford and Hoban (2005) referred to the lack of female involvement in the community development activities they were studying, and how that might reinforce assumptions about the role of women at home and their exclusion from community involvement. This, however, would appear to run counter to the history of involvement, where women took part in rent strikes and supported a mobilised community, as outlined in Chapter Two. This may indicate that some agency-led community development does not take account of women's needs and ways of working. There is considerable literature on the lack of involvement of people from other ethnicities and 'harder to reach' groups (PEP, 1994; Somerville and Steele, 2002; Uguris, 2004; Blakey et al, 2006) and, importantly, the lack of strategies to tackle this, despite an awareness amongst organisations that the issues exist (DETR, 1999b). It must be noted that social landlords have had specific duties to broaden their involvement approaches, and develop inclusive practices, in all the regulatory instruments published since 1992, yet involvement from these groups has remained marginal in both social housing and community development.

In addition, there are considerable social cleavages within subgroups in communities, and within harder to reach groups. Blakey et al (2006) pointed out that agencies are more likely to engage with people who are already engaging in other spheres, such as male leaders within black communities. Their research into the involvement of people of South Asian origin in British communities revealed that agencies found it particularly difficult to engage with some sub-groups within harder to reach groups as a whole. In particular, they found that South Asian lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and indeed women in general, were rarely involved. Uguris (2004) points out that the intersectionality between race, gender and class creates multiple power differentials, leading to complex levels of exclusion, which do not fit well with policy makers' rather simplistic conceptions of individuals and communities.

Another aspect of power often missed by staff working in communities is the negative impact on active tenants of the power dynamics on estates. Power (1991) points out that aggression is often expressed towards participating tenants, which results in feelings of alienation. These tenants are seen within their communities, with or without justification, as busybodies or nosy neighbours, as having special privileges, as thinking of themselves to be above other tenants, or as failing to represent the view of the community, instead representing only their own views (NHF, 2007). Bad feeling towards active tenants, who themselves feel overburdened and over-used, has led many to stop participating and others not to want to get involved (Spray, 1997).

Recent research into successful empowerment mechanisms, commissioned by Communities and Local Government (2009), explored large numbers of empowerment initiatives in order to identify common threads of success, and conducted discussions with many different practitioners with a view to identifying challenges to implementation. This research revealed the reason why the 'usual suspects' who get involved were more often than not the tenants who already had the most 'social capital'. Social capital, it concluded, is not brokered evenly in communities, and those who are most attractive to the service providers that want to consult are those who have the skills, networks, linkages and time to participate. These tenants then gain yet more social capital. This linkage in turn creates 'professional' participants, who are used repeatedly, purely on the basis of their organisational familiarity, and their ease of access for the staff in charge of such endeavours. Over time they become perceived as

having fewer representative qualities and a greater likeness to professional consultees (Rowe and Devanney, 2003; Mayo and Taylor, 2006). Indeed, some community activists have become so adept in their roles that, in the face of stiff competition for grant resources, they have come to be characterised as 'grants gangsters' by those allocating money for community initiatives (Wilkinson, 2005: 19). Those who are not connected, with less social capital, time and capacity, 'become more excluded or choose to shift their activities to more informal forms of collective action, where the rules may work more in their favour' (Skidmore et al, 2006: 233).

Apathy and lack of a meeting place are also perceived as a barrier, as are the tensions around tenants' expectations, which may be realistic and unmet, unrealistic in the first place, or perceived as provider controlled, and these are bound to influence tenants' decisions about whether to participate (Platt et al, 1987; Blewitt and Garratt, 1995). Interestingly, service users do not see themselves as apathetic or unwilling to be involved: rather studies across a range of situations have found that it is their years of negative experiences, arising from a lack of commitment or responsive action from service providers, that have resulted in cynicism and an unwillingness to engage (Audit Commission, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005).

A further issue is that of the opportunity costs of involvement, which can be considerable (ODPM, 1999). Bengtsson (1998) and the NHF (2007) have both pointed out that time given to tenant involvement could otherwise be devoted to the interests of self, family or the wider community, and this is inevitably a factor in someone's decision whether or not to get involved. There is also the fear of getting too involved, exacerbated by a lack of clarity about exactly what is involved in 'involvement', so that potential participants do not know whether they can manage, or meet the expectations of the staff or other tenants in a particular project or initiative (Cairncross et al, 1997). Personal circumstances are mentioned as a barrier, but often only as a general concept relating to the marginalisation of the community as a whole (Gayle and Newbolt, 1999). An individual's health, caring roles and work will all impact on the ability and desire to participate. Curno et al (1982) and the DETR (1999) have both pointed out that it is only those who can manage the time, and adapt to the rigid structures and timescales imposed upon them, who will feel able to participate. This affects the make-up of who

is likely to become involved, and to become board members in housing associations, where tenants have to fit into existing bureaucratic frameworks.

Those tenants living in rural communities, or in areas that are geographically isolated from the main office of the organisation, are more likely to identify with their village or local community rather than their landlord. Self-identity, distance from where the main involvement activities take place, and living in scattered stock can all function as a barrier to involvement (DETR, 1999c). This isolation can be compounded by transport difficulties and social isolation, both of which obstruct traditional routes to involvement. For involvement in committees, panels, forums and boards the venue is often the head office of the housing association, resulting in more tenants from nearby areas becoming involved in the association's corporate undertakings than those further afield.

However, many tenants only want to be involved where there will be some tangible benefits in their own locality, as in, for example, a modernisation programme (Watson, 1994). Cairncross et al (1993), in their study of local authority involvement dynamics, revealed strong evidence of collective action or orientation over specific issues, but this generally occurred only when personal views about services or situations had come to a head. This resulted in issue-specific, time-limited group action or involvement, which ceased once the problem, was resolved. It has also been found that people are more likely to take part in consultation and involvement if the agency approaches them in a setting where they are already coming together for another purpose, such as schools, playgroups or other groups in their own localities, rather than in statutory spaces set up for consultation (Blakey, 2006; DETR, 1999b). Influencing housing management policy in general may have little meaning for people, and may be perceived as having limited impact on tenants and local communities (Cole et al, 2000).

In addition, there would appear to have been a progressive reduction in the number of community-based tenants' groups, as indicated by Tunstall and Coulter's (2006) research into the conditions on twenty estates over a period of twenty-five years. They suggested that this reflected a move towards a more themed approach to involvement, which focused on specific services, policies and issues, and which took place within the corporate environment. They also found an increasing focus on consumerist forms of involvement, such as surveys that are responded to on an individual basis, and a move away from community-based collectivist or citizenship approaches which has the effect

of removing the direct link between local involvement and clearly visible tangible outcomes.

It has also been suggested that the lack of desire to be involved in shaping service provision reflects the reduction in volunteering in the wider society (Freeman et al, 1999; NHF, 2007). However, in many instances, it may be that tenants are generally satisfied with their current level of service, are busy getting on with their own lives, and feel that they have neither the need nor the desire to get involved with their landlord in this way. As Page (2000) points out, in his research into tenants' views in three local authority neighbourhoods:

> 'While most participants were keen to have their say and wanted to be listened to, what they said they really wanted was high quality services delivered competently and without undue delay by others paid to do it, rather than having to control the management of services themselves.' (Page, 2000:86)

3.3.2 Barriers to sustaining effective involvement

The barriers to sustaining effective involvement, as identified in the literature, fall into four broad themes: the consequences of involvement for tenants; the resourcing issues affecting both tenants and staff; issues that inhibit effective involvement for both staff and tenants (such as skills, culture and power sharing); and the governmental directives and regulations that are imposed from outside.

3.3.2.1 <u>The consequences of involvement</u>

The consequences of involvement fall into two main groupings: those relating to overload, and those relating to what might broadly be termed 'role confusion'. Much of the 'case study' research has explored the consequences of involvement for tenants, and has found them to be often unintended and unforeseen (Beckford et al, 2003; Gayle and Newbolt, 1999; Watson, 1994). As tenant, organisational and governmental expectations increase, so the burden on individual participants can increase in tandem. Alongside this there is a tendency for participants in tenant involvement to find themselves becoming direct providers of welfare in the local community, by running events and activities, or by being a conduit through which services are accessed and complaints made (Audit Commission 2004). Moreover, tenant involvement staff often

forget, or discount, the demands made on the time of their 'volunteers' (DETR, 1999b), which can lead to overwork, a reduction in the campaigning function of tenants, and sometimes to burnout (Lowe, 1986; Weiwell and Gills, 1995). In the case of community partnerships, providers often left the task of disseminating information to the wider community to the tenant representatives, and expected coherent feedback from their communities via these representatives. These providers did not see information dissemination as the joint responsibility of tenant representatives and staff (Platt et al, 1987; Maguire and Truscott, 2006). In addition, some commentators expressed concerns about the tendency of other service providers and agencies, who were seeking to consult and involve their own service users, to call increasingly on already active tenants for their own consultations, which resulted in 'consultation overload' (Craig et al, 2004).

The other prevalent issue for active tenants is that of role confusion, which can also lead to conflicts of interest. Active tenants who were also board members often found themselves compromised by their role, especially where major decisions were being made about the future of the housing stock, through conflicts of interest between their roles as both board member and tenant representative (Platt et al 1987; Beckford et al, 2003). Over time, however, it is not uncommon for tenants, whether board members or not, unwittingly to adopt the agenda of the professional organisation, and indeed they often become quite protective of the organisation: an issue highlighted by Somerville (1998), and which he termed 'capture'. Moreover, experienced involved tenants will often see themselves as ambassadors for the organisation, and will try to present it in the best possible light, by virtue of having been drawn into an 'inner sanctum' which accords them status and perceived respect. They may achieve 'insider' status, and use privileged information, relationships and power to achieve wider goals at the cost of criticism from peers (Craig et al, 2004; Skidmore et al, 2006). However, status as an 'insider' is likely to compromise the ability to take an independent stance, and thus they give up the power that comes from being an outsider. This inevitably waters down the potential for effective representation of tenants' issues and viewpoints, and can reduce involvement to lower, more marginalised levels (Craig et al, 2004). In addition, tenants are not always viewed in the same way as other board members, who see tenants as playing only a limited role on the board, and as not having the skills and abilities to take part in debate despite the training provided (Platt et al, 1987; Kearns, 1997). For many

induction and training were not provided (Platt el al, 1987; NFHA/TPAS, 1991). Pawson and Fancy (2003) found that staff were often frustrated that they could not get tenants to raise their game to consider more than parochial issues. As Kearns (1997) points out, however, there is still value in the symbolic role of their presence and in giving legitimacy to the transfer process.

Linked to this is the confusion between being representative (of a community) and being *a* representative (of that community), which is a confusion to be found amongst both involved tenants and local communities (Kearns, 1997; Barnes et al, 2003; Audit Commission 2004). This has been a particular issue for governing groups in community based initiatives and on boards. In these settings tenants were expected to be individuals whose priority of membership was to the board, and who were seen as bringing with them knowledge of receiving services in the community. They were not expected to represent the views of a constituency, but this was often not made clear (Mullins et al, 1995; Audit Commission, 2004). Where representatives had been elected, and considered themselves to have a mandate from a constituency (as in many of the LSVT housing associations), this difficulty was compounded. However, over time, these tenants tended to lose their initial focus, and instead of representing the issues important to tenants, they would get diverted into other roles, including becoming a resource and advocate for individual tenants, becoming an ambassador for the organisation, getting absorbed into the staff team, or taking on the role of 'gatekeeper', thus restricting access to others in order to preserve their position (DETR, 1999b; Beresford and Hoban, 2005).

This dilemma has also been explored in the context of Local Strategic Partnerships. Here, research revealed that community representatives including tenants were either considered uninformed amateurs or, once skilled and informed, were seen as not representative of the community from which they had been recruited (Maguire and Truscott 2006). Milward (2005) found that despite their amateur status, tenants felt that they could still be 'professional' and should be treated as such. Those that acted most like professionals were more attractive to organisations (Uguris, 2004). As Craig et al (2004) observed, managers and staff ,when consulting, tended to cherry-pick the more 'professional' and/or compliant service users, and steered away from key individuals

who were deemed 'unhelpful' or 'difficult'. Such practices are likely to lead to a rather cosy and stagnant set-up.

There was also confusion over the involved tenant's role in an organisation. Staff working with tenants in governance roles at a community level (such as in neighbourhood forums and regeneration partnerships), or within their own organisations, complained that the tenants could not think strategically, and instead saw themselves as lobbyists campaigning on local issues. As a result, staff tended to feel that organisational purposes and agendas became 'hijacked' by those who could 'shout the loudest'; whilst tenants complained that, after endless consultation, there was still a lack of response to the views they had expressed (Gayle and Newbolt, 1999; Wilkinson, 2005; Audit Commission, 2004).

Research by the NHF (2007) found that tenants as a whole tended to believe that tenant board members should not only be chosen by tenants, but should also have more formal communication links with the wider tenant community, so that they can be apprised of issues that are affecting them, and have a route to enabling their views to be heard by those at the top table. In addition, they found that tenants also felt strongly about having the right to vote, whether for a tenant board member, or an issue on the estate. Where the formal structures were not working well, tenants wanted wider, more innovative, and less formal opportunities for involvement (NHF, 2007), and the opportunity to challenge the structures and strategies if they were deemed ineffective by those participating (DETR, 1999). This leaves tenants with the problem of where they can take their dissatisfaction if they feel that involvement structures are failing, or they lose trust with staff.

3.3.2.2 Resourcing issues affecting both tenants and staff

Resourcing issues affect access to appropriate education, training and capacity building (Furbey et al, 1996; Wilkinson, 2005). Unequal access to facilities such as meeting rooms, and modern methods of communication such as the internet, can make effective involvement more difficult. However, service providers have not taken the opportunities that *are* provided by new technology to widen the options for their tenants to be involved in issues of their own choice, through the use of blogs, electronic discussion forums or texting (Audit Commission, 2003). New technology can also

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allow those who usually go unnoticed to be heard in a way that suits them, whether it be because they are busy with childcare or paid work; or because they have concerns that they are not comfortable to express in a public forum or in an identifiable way; or because they are excluded from formal structures for some other reason (ODPM, 2006; Beresford and Hoban, 2005). There is an appetite for a personal as well as a collective 'say' for housing association tenants, and the use of modern technology could help to achieve both in ways that are convenient and accessible to tenants (NHF, 2007).

There have also been widespread problems with access to independent advice and support, quality literature on good practice, suitable work and meeting space, and transport, all of which can be a source of conflict and dispute (DETR, 1999c; Watson, 1994; Somerville,1995; Spray, 1997; PEP, 1994; TPAS, 1996). Watson (1994) identified independent support and advice as crucial to the success of a particular regeneration programme in which tenants worked effectively and in partnership with the local authority. In this case, the consultant helped tenants to negotiate with the council throughout the duration of the project, whilst the tenants had the power to fire the consultants at any time, which significantly changed the balance of power within the relationship.

For the housing association sector, the lack of access to Section 16 funding, which enabled council tenants to access independent advice, training and information, was a real resourcing issue. The grant funding that was available to housing associations through public moneys was only there to support innovation and good practice initiatives, so bids had to demonstrate that what was proposed was ground breaking, and any funding obtained was short term (Housing Corporation, 2002a). Accessing other funding streams for specific projects also led to issues of sustainability, as most external funding for projects was short term (one or two years only) (Wood et al, 2002). Funding for mainstream tenant involvement and community development activities had to come from mainstream budgets.

Even where there was adequate staffing and resources, together with 'buy in' from frontline staff and commitment from senior managers, middle managers could effectively thwart meaningful engagement. Research into local strategic partnerships and community development revealed poorly coordinated projects, a shortage of staff skilled in community development or involvement activities, unclear roles for staff, and

a lack of outcomes, leading to confusion amongst both staff and participants (ODPM, 2006). Staff often felt threatened by the pressure to integrate involvement into their jobs and business practices, and considered other aspects of their work to be more important (Maguire and Truscott, 2006).

3.3.2.3 Further issues that inhibit effective involvement (for both staff and tenants)

There are many issues that have been identified in the literature as inhibiting effective involvement. These include lack of meeting skills, the use of 'top down' prescriptive approaches, lack of a shared agenda, group dynamics, external pressures, use of language, the impact of class, culture, gender, race, sexuality and disability, and the failure to implement policy. Somerville (1998) identified lack of meeting skills as a major factor. These can include deficits in the ability to prepare adequately for meetings, and the ability of staff and tenants to manage conflict within meetings, both within tenant groups and in partnerships (Jacobs et al, 2000; Jackson, 1999; Power, 1993). McArthur et al's (1996) work on community partnerships also highlighted the problems groups have in achieving consensus. and Simmons and Simmons and Birchall (2005) research into involvement in housing services commented on the lack of awareness amongst tenants of the dynamics they created, and the way in which such dynamics could deter other tenants from getting involved, especially where the group has been working together for some years. Such dynamics could also lead some staff to exclude contentious issues from meeting agendas because of their inability to deal with the resultant aggravation from tenants, or the arguments between tenants at meetings. Leaving group issues unresolved discourages attendance, and can leave inexperienced members vulnerable to uncontrolled group dynamics (Maguire and Truscott, 2006). Carr (2007), in a review of user involvement in social care, pointed out that disruption and tensions were inevitable; that staff had to be able to manage criticism; and that, in reality, service user involvement often challenges the fabric of organisational cultures and is an essential element in change management.

Organisational change, empowerment and service improvement can be hampered by the top down, prescriptive approach to involvement promulgated by both staff and external policy directives. There has been an assumption that staff will determine the shape, structure, process and location of involvement activities and, for the most part, will control the agenda even in situations where there is a tenant or community chair

(Cairncross et al, 1997; Maguire and Truscott, 2006). This can be extremely disempowering for the participants involved. Craig et al (2004) found that landlords often viewed involvement as an 'add-on' rather than something that should be intrinsic to policy setting and decision making. They observed that landlords tended to steer tenants away from the issues that were important to them, focusing instead on the needs of the organisation to consult tenants on this or that policy, which served to build tension, as did the failure to act on suggestions put forward as part of consultation exercises. Indeed this top down, controlling approach may give a clue as to why the dynamics of tenant involvement so frequently fail to work. Failure to listen, failure to offer meaningful engagement, not bothering to attend meetings, and failing to act on issues in between meetings, are all cited as key reasons for tension and the eventual breakdown of communication (Beresford and Hoban, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005) and Blewett and Garratt's collection of housing association case studies (1998) raised issues around the communication of, and feedback on, the outcomes of involvement activities. In the more recent NHF research (*What tenants want*, 2007), 39 per cent of tenant respondents said that they would be more likely remain involved if they felt that their involvement would make a difference, and one respondent was quoted as saying: 'The association always set the time, the agenda, but never ask what we want. It's always about them.' (NHF, 2007:29)

The lack of a shared agenda between landlords and tenants is well-exemplified by Millward's (2005) research into ways of getting tenants involved, which focused on the publication of a menu of involvement choices. This followed on from a regulatory requirement to have a well-publicised 'menu' of choices about what tenants could be involved in, a point reflected in later research by both the NHF (2007) and TSA (2009). However, the menu, as Millward points out, was intended to be a menu of issues, rather than processes or types of engagement, and indeed, that is what tenants were looking for. Landlords, however, interpreted the menu as a menu of options that focused on the processes of involvement, for instance meetings, surveys, web chats, and so forth. This is an example of where landlords have apparently taken on board the regulator's requirements, but without grasping the spirit or meaning of the underlying intention (Millward, 2005).

There appears to be limited practical understanding of how power relations work, whether between tenants as individuals or between tenants and staff, and in particular, how this impacts on the work of organisations. Thus staff have often struggled to develop a meaningful relationship with involved tenants, and this impedes productive outcomes from the tenants' point of view. For many commentators this is bound up with the unwillingness of professional groups to share power, which is seen as linked to a belief by staff that tenants lack the capacity to take on the responsibility that comes with sharing power, and hence the assumption that important decisions are better left to the professionals (Maguire and Truscott, 2006). Some staff are suspicious of the motives of those who do get involved, and this has been identified in a number of studies (Somerville, 1998). On the other side of the coin, tenants report that they feel they lack any real influence, that their involvement is tokenistic, and that the professionals are unwilling to share power and to trust them. This is demonstrated by the failure to involve them before decisions are made, and the unwillingness to devolve decisions to them, or even to decide which issues were suitable for public scrutiny and which were too complex (Collins 1999 and Jackson 1999). Although landlords recognise that involvement should be on-going, the research shows repeatedly the lack of any tangible results from consultees' contributions, in the form of decisions and actions taken. This is cited as a major deterrent to sustaining tenant involvement in the longer term, and is exacerbated by the unwillingness of 'professionals' to hand over the control of projects to their service users to give them meaningful long-term involvement. It also highlights landlords' inability to develop a shared view on the purpose and potential outcomes of involvement (Audit Commission, 2003), and that 'bottom up' pressure from tenants and the 'top down' managerial approaches of the organisation are incompatible, because of the lack of any shared vision of how involvement should be conducted, or indeed its purpose.

Linked to this is the difficulty for all parties in adapting to the constantly changing parameters of involvement resulting from policy changes and changes in organisational structure, reductions in funding, professional notions of 'good practice', and staff turnover. These difficulties particularly affect tenants because of the fragility of most tenant organisations and initiatives. Developing rapport, trust and useful networks and lines of communication takes time and effort, which is squandered by constant change (ODPM, 2006; Collins, 1999; Gayle and Newbolt, 2000). Tunstall and Coulter (2006)

noted that, whilst many of the active tenants had been involved with their landlord over the entire 25 year period of the study, there was only one member of staff that had any knowledge of the community, and their experience had only been garnered over a period of three years. This is an area of disruption that can have a significant impact on involvement structures or within groups themselves.

Other major influences on involvement are the impact of class, culture, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability, which have the potential to affect the shape of involvement and access to it, the roles people may take in groups and the dialogue between staff and tenants. This particularly affects the willingness to take portfolio or officer roles, or to join the board. It follows that debating with a set of retired lawyers, accountants, business people and surveyors, of whom the majority are white middle class males, is likely to be very intimidating for many of the tenants who join housing association boards (Kearns, 1997; Platt et al, 1987). NHF research (2007) revealed a number of other reasons why tenants do not engage with their landlords. Lack of confidence was an issue for many tenants, and this stopped them from attending or continuing to participate in meetings. Low levels of literacy also made involvement in panels and forums difficult, as it quickly became apparent that the ability to read and digest policy documents was essential for effective participation.

Other barriers occurred through the use of complex and technical language, which tended to result in the exclusion of some groups. Investigations in this area revealed how stereotyping, power dynamics, culture and class issues have impacted on involvement structures (Platt et al, 1987; Hastings, 1999; Uguris, 2004; ODPM, 2006), although gender has not been explicitly examined in this arena.

ODPM research (2002), on the methods used successfully by the private sector to improve products and services, revealed that although housing associations were being forced to operate in an increasingly competitive environment that reflected the dynamics of the private sector, there was a reluctance to embrace the benefits of a consumerist approach to involvement and customer-focused practices. This was considered to result from the arduous, costly and time consuming task of changing organisational culture, and a wariness of risking failure through raising customer expectations, when staff were uncertain about their ability to deliver such changes.

Moreover, Audit Commission research found that landlords have a tendency to interpret the good practice literature rather literally and rigidly. They do not appear to have the ability to change or adapt what they have built to suit the changing needs of participants over time, whether that be an increase in the numbers of tenants wishing to get involved, a broadening of the make-up of involved tenants, or adapting the support offered to enable tenants to meet the changing needs of the organisation, including an increased focus on outcomes and impact (Audit Commission 2004).

3.3.2.4 <u>Governmental directives and regulations</u>

Governmental policy changes have been found to impact directly on funding streams and on the types and methods of tenant involvement. Many good projects and structures are terminated as a result of such changes. Moreover the complexity of the constant stream of new initiatives serves as a significant barrier for both staff and tenants, who in consequence are frequently unable to take full advantage of the opportunities available (often through capacity constraints) (EU, 1997; Gayle and Newbolt, 1999). For example, the requirement for a Compact to be agreed with tenants (ODPM 2003) - which was to detail how the organisation would work with them and the priorities and support systems that would be put in place - was well received by many organisations, and tenants were actively involved in their development. However, there were wide variations in the quality of that involvement, and the Compacts themselves varied hugely. Moreover, only some were reviewed regularly, or were used to support the service and maintain standards, even though they were seen to be a good thing (ODPM, 2003). Similarly, the 'Best Value' requirements for local authorities, when reviewing services, to consult and involve tenants in a formal way, following a prescriptive methodology, was applied in varying ways (and sometimes not at all). All social housing organisations are supposed to follow a programme of continuous review of policies and services, based on Best Value principles that include the involvement of tenants, but the approach that many organisations take often does not involve tenants in the right places, doesn't involve tenants at all, or in some cases, organisations have failed even to carry out reviews (Audit Commission 2004; HQN, 2006). Similarly, the Housing Corporation's Involvement Policy and its attached regulatory circular of 01/2004, were applied in a range of ways, but many did not lead to increased accountability or improved outcomes from involvement. The Housing Corporation was

at pains not to prescribe a methodology for involvement. However, it was very prescriptive in what it wanted: i.e. for residents to be at the heart of decision making, services that reflected residents' priorities, and for residents to be involved in ways that suited them. This left many associations at a loss to know how to approach the task, and this weakened the policy's impact (Housing Corporation, 2007).

As already mentioned, exploration of tenant involvement in governance structures, in particular within housing associations, was not apparent in the literature before 2000, when this research began. It was therefore not clear how associations carried out their involvement activities in this area, nor were the outcomes of such activities clear in relation to service improvement. Specifically, there is no record of the views of tenants who had been involved with their landlord over a period of time. Specific projects were highlighted in some of the literature, but there was no indication of whether these reflected the general day-to-day practice of housing associations.

3.4   Focused work on housing association organisational practice commissioned by the regulator since 2000

During the period of my research a number of studies were conducted, particularly within housing associations, with a view to finding out how tenant involvement was being carried out in practice. These studies were part of a process of evaluating the impact of policy and regulatory directives. For example, Aldbourne Associates (2000) published *A study of tenant participation in RSLs* two years after the launch of the Housing Corporation's policy *Making Consumers Count* (1998). This study was sponsored by the Housing Corporation, with the primary aim of assessing the baseline of activity in housing associations in terms of type, level and extent of tenant involvement. The methodology comprised a survey of 322 associations, and it revealed some interesting statistics. Sixty-five per cent of the associations neither monitored tenant involvement using performance indicators, nor had a strategy to develop the involvement service, and for 81 per cent of associations, tenant involvement represented less than one per cent of revenue budget. Moreover, the study found that only one per cent of tenant involvement budgets were controlled by tenants, and in most cases it was the association that decided how this money should be spent. Although there was some

evidence of service improvements as a result of tenant involvement, in general there was no movement towards any sort of tenant control. On a more positive note, 71 per cent of the associations had tenants on their boards. Tenants rated tenant involvement activities as more successful than the landlords did, and the study revealed that there was no positive correlation between money spent and success. However, for nearly all the associations surveyed, 'success' was not being measured, and where it was possible to identify success, it was in the areas of community development or regeneration, where there were more concrete or tangible outcomes.

In comparison, a contemporaneous national study of local authority policies on tenant involvement by Cole et al (2000) reflected similarly that tenant involvement was not a vehicle for moving towards tenant control. Although some local authorities were taking significant steps towards supporting tenants' groups, there did not appear to be any consistent strategies for helping tenants' groups with their organisational development. In addition, the study revealed that published tenant involvement policies tended to be very much 'top down' affairs rather than being a product of discussion and negotiation. While there was some consultation occurring as a result of the 'Best Value' regime and the requirement for tenant Compacts, there was little sign of tenant involvement being structurally embedded in the infrastructure of local authority processes and reviews. Thus they concluded that there did not appear to be any great evidence to suggest a commitment to entering into a meaningful dialogue with their tenants.

Around the same time (in 2000), the Housing Corporation was piloting some types of organisational involvement activities within 22 housing associations in relation to the Best Value programme. They did this with a view to introducing a voluntary version for housing associations of what was a mandatory framework for service improvement in the local authority sector. The principal positive outcomes from this pilot were an enhanced role for tenants, and improvements to services. This led to further work, which focused on six housing associations, and explored ways that tenants could get involved in setting, defining and monitoring service standards (Housing Corporation, 2000). The Corporation also sought to find ways of reaching tenants who normally did not get involved in traditional representative structures. For the Housing Corporation:

> Our starting point is that participation by residents in the activities of their landlord is essential to effective decision-making on services and implementing

investment and regeneration proposals. This goes back to the heart of our expectations about performance and Best Value for registered social landlords. (Housing Corporation, 2000: 2)

The involvement themes explored in these case studies included involving tenants in: designing a local lettings policy; a 'Best Value' review of service charges; the design process; joining a panel; developing a DIY guide to consulting tenants through focus groups; and planned maintenance schemes. The outcome of this work was published in 2000 as *Taking the lead: good practice in tenant involvement* (Housing Corporation, 2000e). It advocated a range of approaches to making tenant involvement successful, such as ensuring that adequate time was given to consultation, that adequate resourcing was made available, and providing incentives to encourage people to participate, and it made explicit the benefits and successes that could be achieved. This shifted the focus away from tenant involvement in localities and towards tenant involvement in organisation-wide issues and reviews. The Housing Corporation was spelling out to housing associations what was required. However, it did not issue a specific regulatory circular at this point, but continued to commission research and develop good practice guides. For instance, it looked at private sector practices to establish how customer involvement had been developed there, to see if this could be translated into the work of housing associations (Housing Corporation 2002). It also developed good practice publications, culminating in the publication of the 'Big Picture' series, a collection of guides demonstrating good practice gleaned from the 'Innovation and Good Practice' grant-funded projects (Housing Corporation 2001).

In 2003, the Chartered Institute of Housing published the results of Beckford et al's research into the relationship between social landlords and tenant organisations. This included an analysis of over 100 questionnaires completed by tenants' groups and federations, interviews with representatives from national tenant and support organisations, and a survey (undertaken by the Housing Corporation) of 40 housing associations and 40 local authorities. This research took an in-depth look at organisational practice, and found that tenant involvement was not part of the culture of housing organisations and, contrary to the previous research by Aldbourne Associates (in 2000), that there was a direct relationship between resources invested in tenant involvement, and its effectiveness. It highlighted issues of power and communication,

the potential for breakdown in relations, and factionalism within tenant groups. This research also revealed that landlords were still not doing enough to reach the 'harder to reach' groups, and lacked the skills to support tenant involvement effectively (Beckford et al, 2003).

Later research into the impact of tenant Compacts in the local authority sector (ODPM, 2003), and the development of Tenant Management Organisations (ODPM, 2002), together with the Audit Commission study (2004) of the costs and benefits of tenant involvement, confirmed that tenant involvement, now termed resident involvement by the regulators, was considered to be a good thing, a necessary thing, but for the most part, something that was still not embedded in organisational practices (Audit Commission, 2004). For Birchall (2004), the recent research confirmed that there was still a lack of commitment amongst staff to ensuring that tenant involvement policies were realised in practice.

In 2007, the National Housing Federation put together the Tenant Involvement Commission, (a short-life working group of consultants and experts), with a view to exploring what tenants really wanted. This was the first time that the NHF had concerned itself with the needs of tenants directly. This research was conducted using a deliberative tenants' forum, involving a hundred tenants in Leeds who had not previously had experience of tenant involvement activities. Leeds was selected because it reflected the rest of England in its tenant make-up and profile, and its mix of housing associations. The final report, *What tenants want*, indicated that tenants wanted good quality basic services with optional add-ons. The findings confirmed that tenants felt there was a lack of commitment to tenant involvement from housing associations, and that tenants wanted to be involved in a personal way that was meaningful to them as individuals, but with the possibility of meaningful collective involvement as well. Furthermore, they were openly reluctant to participate unless they could be convinced by their association that it would really make a difference (NHF, 2007).

This theme was echoed in the Tenant Services Authority's first piece of research in June 2009, the 'National Conversation Phase One Findings', which collected the views of 27 000 tenants from all types of social housing across England, and in the region of 1 000 landlords. They found that tenants wanted tenant involvement to make a real difference, rather than to follow the tick-box approach that they had experienced in the

past. The research revealed that 55 per cent of housing associations had said that tenant involvement was not integral to their way of doing things, while 41 per cent had said it was 'central to their decision making structures'. Yet 20 per cent said that they did not understand their tenants' needs and could do more to find out what they wanted. Only 28 per cent felt that they understood their tenants well and actively sought their views. The TSA findings (2009) also showed a surprising and marked difference in satisfaction levels between involved and uninvolved tenants (58 per cent and 78 per cent respectively). No analysis was offered in the report regarding the driving factors behind these results. Comments throughout the research indicate a pervasive perception and experience from tenants that being involved makes little difference, and that any outcomes or results from their donated time are not communicated back to them, discouraging them from further engagement.

In 2009, Leeds Tenants' Federation conducted their own survey of their members, using focus groups to find out what tenants wanted. They came up with exactly the same findings as the TSA and the NHF: tenants did not want tenant involvement to continue as a tick-box exercise. However, their tenants also raised the issue of power imbalances within the involvement process, and the lack of any mechanism to address this. It is interesting to note here that when tenants conduct their own research, the issue of power imbalance is readily identified, whereas it is not mentioned in any government-sponsored research.

It would seem that involvement continues to get a poor press amongst tenants. In the Housing Corporation tenant survey of 2006, only half the respondents knew whether or not tenants were involved in decision making with their landlord, only 28 per cent felt that their landlord listened to what they had to say about services, and only 31 per cent recalled being asked to comment on their landlord's services in the last twelve months. Despite continued support for tenant representative groups, only 8 per cent of respondents indicated that they would feed back their views in this way. By comparison, in the TSA Existing Tenants Survey 2009, 58 per cent said that their landlord took their views into account when making decisions, but 20 per cent said that they were not taken into account at all, compared with only 12 per cent in 1995. Satisfaction with overall opportunities for involvement remained relatively static at 56 per cent in 2008, as against 54 per cent in 2000. However, in the later survey tenants

appeared to be more supportive of 'consumerist' involvement via surveys (26 per cent) than representative involvement via formal groups or associations (17 per cent). Interest in becoming involved with governance was even less popular amongst tenants, at 9 per cent (TSA, 2009). It is however one thing being asked to comment on services via a survey and another to be a board member or on a forum or at the date of writing the new scrutiny groups auditor groups emerging in the housing association sector. These studies do not really attempt to understand how housing associations really practice involvement and the experience of those involved as they tend to rely on survey feedback from organisations and tenants who may or may not be involved.

3.5   The gaps in the literature – framing the research

At the start of 2000 the literature review revealed that there was a lack of independent qualitative data on the experience of both involved tenants and professionals in the area of tenant involvement in the corporate undertakings of housing associations. The research that was available was mostly project based and was either sponsored by interest groups with their own agendas or was intended to showcase a housing association's innovative approach. The dependency on sponsorship or the commissioning of work meant that the approach tended to be limited to the brief created by the sponsoring or commissioning body which resulted in research undertaken over a short time period. To me it seemed that the story was never fully told, because there was a vested interest amongst the parties in presenting participation initiatives in a positive light, in order to encourage other associations to open up their housing practice to tenant scrutiny and involvement, and to ensure that future funding was not jeopardised. The body of work on local authority involvement, and in particular community partnerships, has been well developed over a long period and could be a good comparator. That said, there are likely to be some key differences in the experience of housing association tenants as housing associations are distinct bodies, with a stronger provider dominance, more independent governance structures and practices, a strong business culture, and a greater reliance on consumerist approaches to involvement.

The literature review has revealed a number of important gaps in knowledge and understanding. For example, there had been limited consideration of the experience or impact of tenant involvement in policy making, policy reviews or governance in associations, whether through voluntary boards or panels and forums. As already mentioned it was difficult to gain access to such arenas. In addition, there were few studies of situations where tenants were working within the organisation, or that looked at who got involved at this level within the organisational structure, and the barriers that they experienced. There was also limited information about how staff and practitioners were supported in order to enable and empower tenants in their involvement activities. The impact of gender, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, disability and class remained underexplored, as did the reproduction of inequalities in tenant involvement structures.

The literature published over a 20 year period reveals a wide range of barriers, some of which have constantly recurred across the time period. Landlords have maintained a tight control over the involvement process and even at the time of writing there is limited evidence of tenants making any impact through these mechanisms. It is also important to remember that, at the start of this research, the whole process was taking place behind closed doors.

Thus my research attempts to fill a very real gap, by exploring and explaining the experience of involved tenants working with housing associations in their corporate undertakings in panels and forums, as well as on boards. The literature review indicated that there was a need for a greater understanding of the dynamics involved in this particular area. For this reason the role of power and control is a major strand of my work. For me, the literature that most reflected my experience was to be found in some of the community partnership work undertaken in the 1990s. However, I did not want to use a 'single project' approach, as I wanted to get a sense of housing association practice across a range of organisations, thus getting closer to a picture of the sector as a whole. Importantly, involvement needs to be studied in situ as it unfolds, as well as tracked over a longer period of time.

The following chapter outlines how I approached the challenge of finding a theory that would help me to chart the dynamics involved, and to explain my findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORECTICAL PERSPECTIVES

4.1   Introduction

My review of the literature revealed a considerable amount of information on barriers to, and problems with, involvement and highlighted some persistent barriers that continue to exist both within housing association and local authority housing, and within the wider context of community development. That said, involvement within the organisational structure of housing associations was only just starting to emerge in the 1990s, and at that time was not open to state scrutiny in terms of its practice. Moreover, the new panels and forums that were forming within housing associations had not yet been opened up to academic interest; consequently there was limited information on the culture of involvement.

 A number of commentators writing at the turn of this century have stated that theoretical frameworks to help explain and understand tenant involvement across a range of settings have been underdeveloped within the literature (Hawtin and Cooper, 1998; Cairncross et al, 1997; and Birchall; Simmons, 2005; and Cole, 2008). In the context of the findings from the literature review, as well as the social and political context of tenant action and involvement over approximately the last hundred years, I consider that any understanding of successful involvement, as outlined in my definition, must include power. Richardson (1983) points out that outcomes cannot be predicted with any certainty, and for that reason she does not include power in her definition. She does, however, acknowledge that power is present in all aspects of social life, but considers that its inclusion in a 'definition does nothing to aid understanding, partly because of the difficulties in establishing what is meant by power' (Richardson, 25:1983). My approach is different: I contend that power is an intrinsic part of both the process of involvement and the outcome. In short I agree with Foucault (1977) who argues that there is no place beyond power. I acknowledge that attempting to understand or define what power is and how it operates in respect of tenant involvement is far from easy. Despite the difficulties, however, one has to search for it in and between the various interest groups in order to grasp how it is understood and used by the various parties, and how these understandings operate to create identities, reproduce inequalities, maintain current structures of disempowerment, or block improvements to services. For this reason, the theories that I

explore in this chapter concern conceptions of power and agency, including game theory; power and control through discourse; and a variety of typologies designed to enable the researcher to structure and elucidate the activities of both tenants, housing practitioners, councillors and governors involved in participation. These include typologies of actors, organisations, the empowerment process and other principles informing the organisation of activities, many of which link into ideology and power in different ways. Some of these are mentioned in the previous chapter but are explored in more detail here.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into two main sections. The first explores the theoretical perspectives available as I searched for models to enable me to understand my findings, within which are some interesting examples of research into involvement using theoretical frameworks. The second section outlines the two theoretical models that I selected, and explains their relevance to the research.

4.2   Exploring available theory

4.2.1   Theories of power

Many researchers exploring tenant involvement have used conceptions of power and ideology to enable them to explain the processes, structures and dynamics that shape tenant involvement. These approaches are shaped by the different views of what power is and how it works which is different depending on which theoretical standpoint is taken. Lukes (1974), in his seminal work on the three dimensions of power, challenged previous pluralist views by unravelling, from a Marxist perspective, the ideology informing the structures behind the power in social groups especially opening up the idea of individuals not operating in their own best interests. This became a dominant theory for exploring power in the 1970s and early 1980s. Lowe (1986) investigated Castells' wide-ranging study of social movements in the 1970s, including tenant organisations, from a Marxist neo-structuralist perspective. For Marxist and neo-Marxist theorists, power structures based on the relation between capital and labour shape people's interests, desires and beliefs in a way that may be contrary to their real interests, instead supporting the interests of capital. Such a conceptualisation is useful in explaining why tenants are vulnerable to the provider interests of their landlords and the wider society in which they are located, and also accounts for the fact that tenants are limited

in the power that they can bring to bear through collective action. Lowe's application of this view, which was based on Castells' work in the 1950s and 60s, has been criticised for creating a theoretical proposition based on a narrow study, in which the framework emphasised the role of agitational activity over other forms of participation such as the social and welfare activities of tenants (Cairncross et al, 1997). Clegg (1989) points out that this represents an incorrect understanding of power which is concerned with what power is rather than what power does.

While these specific criticisms might not totally negate the usefulness of the theory, it is clear that these approaches tend to stereotype players and oversimplify the picture, and hence fail to account for much that emerges empirically from studies in the field. Of particular interest here is the limited value that Lowe places on welfare and social activities, preferring to focus only on a radical change in power relations that could be achieved through collection action. I think that Lowe was right to do so, as in essence the active tenants end up working unpaid to ameliorate the inadequate service from their social landlords, turning their energy away from what he sees as the real issue. His explanation for the co-option of active tenants into bureaucratic systems, which serves to neutralise any attempt at radical change or indeed sharing of power, was interesting to me as my focus of research is precisely what happens to tenants after they have been co-opted. That said, I think that involved tenants are not as truly captured and as disempowered as Lowe suggests.

Studies of tenant involvement based on game theories initially emerged, in the 1980s and 1990s, from 'rational choice' perspectives, and are closely linked to ideas about power and agency, which are based on Olson's (1975) seminal work *The logic of collective action*, and have been used to explain non-participation. Olson developed an approach that theorised aspects of group and organisational behaviour. His premise was that unless the numbers in the group were small, rational self-interested individuals who weighed up the costs and benefits of any given action would not act to achieve their common or group interests, even if it was clear that it would benefit the whole group. Individuals would seek to free-ride, and the public good (provided through collective action) would not be realised. This perspective went against traditional views held by political scientists of the day that people would act in their collective interests. Olson studied organisations in America, such as trades unions, pressure groups and interest groups. From this he concluded that for collective action to take

place there must be other incentives, which he termed 'selective incentives' i.e. rewards for membership or punishment for free-riding etc. Hawtin (1998), however, considers that game theory lacks analysis of the ideological underpinnings that shape the outcomes of games. Actors are not simply rational, utility-maximising individuals that have all the facts to hand to make the right decision at any given point. As Gamson (1992) and Klandermans (1992) point out, grievances, expectations and the costs and benefits of various activities and choices, are socially constructed within a collective context, and these need to be taken into account in any conceptualisation. Looking at the study of games at a micro level, Marwell and Oliver (1993) point out that actors tend to pursue strategies that reflect both self-interest and social norms such as fairness and equality. These critiques indicate a need to reframe the theory to take into account the many variables seen to be relevant to any construction of individual motivation and/or collective action.

Rational choice theories have since been reframed within mobilisation theories, which are primarily concerned with why people get involved, rather than what happens after they get involved. However these theories have some interesting aspects which can be applied to groups once formed. One example is the contention that many people have grievances significant enough to motivate them collectively, and that the key obstacle is lack of resources. Collective action requires an aggregation of resources, which in turn requires a level of organisation. Questions emerge such as where are the resources available and how are they organised? Those involved need to seek out third parties to support their campaigns as well as using their own members: how do they do this and to what extent does the state facilitate or impede action? Micro mobilisation theories have developed within this framework. They are considered more flexible and use a conception of actor that is both rational, meaning constructing and socially embedded (Klandermans, 1992). This allows the researcher possibilities for exploring the decision making process of participants and serves to create a broader theoretical base where actors are seen as socially located or embedded within group identities. They are rooted in social networks based on their race, gender and class, offering a model of a 'meaning-constructing actor, who draws cultural materials from his or her social location and interprets them along with others' grievances, resources and opportunities' (Mueller, 1992:7). Mueller contends that a person's consciousness of his or her grievances is constructed within the actual 'group experiences of domination and inequality and the compromise with the more powerful culture of wider society

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(Mueller,1992). Bengtsson (1995) used a version of Rational Choice that in effect employs empirical evidence to reconstruct games based on the information gained in a way that helps the researcher gain a better understanding of all the parties involved and the different approaches adopted in changing contexts and different arenas where parties may change goals and approaches accordingly to achieve their aims; what he terms nested games. These can then by compared using a typology of organisation. His earlier work published in 1998 explored within the Rational Choice Framework differing motives of tenants, dynamics between tenants in terms of retaining and initiating co-operation, roles of collective consumption, collective work and collective decision making, the physical and social makeup of the estate and tenure as variables in building a theoretical frame (Bengtsson, 1998). Cairncross points out that using game theory in this was does not given enough information on the many factors shaping the outcomes of games. What is interesting is the level that people are aware of what others are doing and why and how they see themselves with the activity.

My own research required a theoretical framework that could account for meaning construction and the influence of structures that could be applied practically. Thus I was interested in theories that explored power through the relationship between discourse and structures, as initially conceptualised by Foucault (1977) and developed further by Giddens (1984). These theories have served to change the landscape of social science in more recent times through new conceptions about how power relationships are embedded and reproduced, and the dynamics of power and ideology, which address some of the criticisms of earlier approaches. For Foucault, power 'is both embedded in and effectuated through a crucial combination of knowledge and language, or what is called discourse' (Goverde, 2000: 13.). This is the process whereby individuals perceive and explain social reality and construct their identity, and as a result it affects the decision-making parameters through which individuals can operate. It follows that the underlying structures of society are legitimated through this process, becoming embedded in conventions and the structural bases of organisations.

For Giddens, the emphasis is more on what structures do and how they give us the capacity for action as agents. His theory of structuration points out that actors have knowledge of both the structures and the rules, and can therefore decide what to do and how to act in order to achieve their ends. He maintains that they know what is likely to work and what is not, and

where they are located in the structure in relation to others and to the resources they have to draw on, together with the various constraints and opportunities. Thus for Giddens, actors act reflexively within their knowledge base (Giddens, 1984). These theories rest on the premise that people are to some extent conscious of influences on them, and are continually reconstructing their view of self and the world around them as new information or learning from interaction becomes available. If, however, a person's experience is constantly negative, and they are labelled by professionals or others as marginalised, vulnerable, at risk or as not contributing to society, how then will they construct themselves through the process of acting reflexively, and to what extent can positive interaction with agencies and others within one's own group serve to undo these views?

How the actors or agents see themselves and the environment in which they operate is a key factor in this research. Here there are two groups (tenants and housing association staff), with broadly different values, cultures and resources, who come together to achieve certain aims. The dynamics of the discourse and structures are key components in the investigation. Each group may have different ideas about why they are participating, who they are, what they can do, what they seek to achieve, and even about the context in which they are operating. They may be largely unaware of the ideological base of their own actions and reasoning. Moreover, as already discussed, the concept of social or public housing itself has been subject to dominant discourses based around notions of the deserving and undeserving poor (Murray, 1996). This affects the context and creates boundaries in which tenants, and the housing staff who deliver services, operate; importantly it continually shapes the construction of individual identities within groups and the focus of resources.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Clegg (1989, 2000), along with Goehler (1997) and Haugaard (1997), have developed theoretical frameworks that build on the work of Giddens (1977) and Foucault (1977). These aim to take account of both structure and discourse and show the processes whereby change, and transformation of structures and ideology, can take place, through unravelling the mechanics of strategy and interaction between groups in organisations. Goehler points out that this move to 'more convergent theorisation gives us new conceptual tools which enable us to understand contemporary transformations of social order with a higher degree of sophistication than was previously possible' (Goehler, 2000: 39). Building on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Clegg (1989) developed a model

that is aimed at expressing his idea of organised groups playing organised games set within the context of rules embedded within discourse and structure. Clegg's 'three circuits of power framework' shows the mechanics of games and strategy in a wider context of structure and meaning based on how structures and meanings are challenged or reproduced within a variety of settings. It is particularly useful for exploring group dynamics where there is a disparity of power between members of the group and where more complex strategies are employed by actors to attempt to achieve their ends. Important in this model are the three levels at which action can take place and the different impact these may have on the organisational field itself, and secondly, what Clegg terms the rules of the game. Issues such as resources, rules, membership and meaning construction are all taken into account in this model. This approach therefore has the potential to fit well with tenant involvement in panels and forums, and helps to explain why things do or don't change over time, as well as enabling the researcher to unpack micro-level initiatives.

Cooper and Hawtin et al (1998) have suggested that this theory is only useful for exploring interaction within organisational settings, and does not address wider ideological issues lived out in the communities. However, Clegg's framework, used at all three levels of the circuit, does have the potential to address the process whereby ideology is constantly reproduced, and can highlight the extent to which actors are conscious of this. Cairncross et al (1997) used Clegg's model to analyse the relationship between councillors, housing managers and tenants in three different types of local authority housing organisation, based on a typology of traditional, citizenship and consumerist cultures. This work brought the idea of the game of involvement into more mainstream thinking. The model was useful for microanalysis, from which generalisations and deeper understandings could be drawn. It is particularly well-suited to exploring governance or committees, panels and forums in action, but does not fully take account of many of the activities that take place outside citizenship forms of involvement, such as community development. Nonetheless, this more narrow focus has the potential to add to the body understanding

4.2.2 The discourse of involvement

A number of interesting studies have focused on exploring the use of power in groups at a micro level, particularly in community partnership settings. These used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary tool for planning the research framework and analysing and evaluating findings. This approach is based on the premise that 'the language used offers a potentially powerful way of charting conflicts between groups in a developing situation' (Collins, 1999: 58). Researchers endeavour to de-mystify ideology and power though the systematic investigation of spoken, written or visual data; in this sense language is seen as a social practice which serves to either reinforce or transform power relations (Wodak and Meyer 2008).   Collins studied a community partnership that was failing as a result of tensions between the groups involved. His research highlighted the tensions reflected within the genre of the spoken word, and served to register the conflicts between the different social groups involved, and in particular, the imposition of the partnership speech genre. In particular he found that the tenants in the group instinctively rejected the genre of partnership as an imposition of something that was not really happening and in that sense resisted the imposition by acting powerfully by actively rejecting.

I found this work particularly helpful in the development of my own thinking around theory, but it was not a methodology that was suitable for my own research, as I planned to explore tenants in a number of settings, which ruled out this type of intensive approach. Nonetheless, his work serves to highlight that the imposition of titles such as tenant, resident, customer, citizen or consumer are powerful acts initiated from powerful others. Included in this are descriptions of the focus and purpose of the involvement process as involvement, participation, engagement and consultation. It follows, as already mentioned in Chapter Three, that the discourse informing training, policy and the state's focus in the resourcing of involvement activities are based on largely incorrect and simplistic assumptions about people, places and problems, which in turn lead many to be socially excluded, and limit the potential for empowerment or shifts in power relationships within the involvement arena (Furbey et al, 1996). Indeed the whole rationale for involvement for some commentators is informed by, and based on, the premise that active citizenship in the form of this type of participation locates the responsibility for alleviating problems arising from structural inequalities with the citizen rather than the state or the authority in question (Goodlad et al, 2003).

4.2.3 Typologies

Typologies are commonly used in the study of involvement, and are often used for case study material, as they help to structure the debate, and serve as an organising principle from which to investigate relationships between different elements. Both organisations and participants can be classified within a number of general themes.

4.2.3.1 <u>Typologies of actors</u>

Actors in the arena of tenant involvement can be the frontline staff and managers of social landlords, local councillors, and board members, as well as tenants. Understanding their orientation and approach to their specific role can be useful.

Political scientists, in analysing attitudes of councillors to their role, make a common distinction between 'tribunes' (ward based) and 'states people' (those who are more focused on general policy implementation). Newton (1976) attempted to identify the different dimensions of the councillor's role, and his typology comprised parochial, people's agent, policy advocate, policy broker, and policy spokesperson. Gyford (1984) elaborated on this approach by devising a more complex typology, but this was dismissed by Cairncross et al (1997) on the grounds that some of the types were too indistinct to be usable, and also that it was overly simplistic in its analysis of the councillor's role and attitudes. Instead they preferred to stay with the simple distinction between 'tribune' and 'states people' and apply it to a typology of organisations.

Birchall and Simmons (2004), in their work on user power in public services, identified five types of activist and related their various characteristics to the level and nature of their participation. They identified, from least active to most active, what they described as 'marginal participants', 'scrutineers', 'habitual participants', 'foot soldiers' and 'campaigners', with the largest group being 'habitual participants' (in their study 37 per cent of participants), and the most active group (campaigners) forming 19 per cent. Their research looked at user involvement in a variety of contexts, and through identifying the various motivators and barriers to participation for the different types of activist, concluded that there were key points to consider from an organisational point of view when encouraging tenants to become involved in participation activities. This model is useful in that it creates a manageable framework within which the researcher can consider the characteristics of

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individual participants. Whilst I initially thought that this typology might be useful for structuring some of my research material, I felt that my focus would have required me to profile all participants in the many groups and structured the collection of material in a completely different way. The barriers focus meant that my outcome would tell me more about which people got involved and why rather than give me an understanding of the organisation's dynamics and why barriers occur.

4.2.3.2 Typologies of organisations

Cairncross et al (1997) developed a typology of housing departments in relation to the type of local authority. They outlined how 'traditional' authorities tended to display a certain set of characteristics in relation to their primary focus, view of tenants, information flows and issue focus. In their analysis they make a distinction between 'traditional', 'consumerist' and 'citizenship' authorities, each of which displays distinctive characteristics, and are closely aligned to the discourse of traditional, consumerist and citizenship ideology. This approach has less relevance to this study because housing association cultures are different from those of local authority housing departments (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000). Moreover, since Cairncross et al's research there has been increased regulatory influence by the state in determining the way that associations should be governed and their priorities organised, and a general move to a more consumerist approach to welfare provision. A more recent study by the Audit Commission (2004) divided housing associations into two categories: consumerist and collectivist. This reflects, to some extent, the differences between traditional and LSVT housing associations, although this is not always the case, as the culture of an organisation can sometimes be determined more by its history and the effect of regulation and inspection. My research concentrates on what is often referred to as traditional involvement structures of the type that were prevalent in housing associations at the turn of the century, as distinct from the market insight approaches to consultation and information giving, which were just starting to gain popularity with housing associations at that time. However, housing associations, including many LSVT associations, are likely to be located towards the consumerist end of the spectrum of characteristics and philosophy, which reduces the usefulness of this model in the context of my research.

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4.2.3.3 Typologies based on organising principles

Miller et al (1995), studying the American experience, categorised participation according to organising principles, which allows exploration of the life cycles of groups, and their relationship with the wider society, including shifts of focus over time. This typology includes organising through residence, through consumption, around identity, self-help and mutual aid, through advocacy, organisation of organisations, and mixed models. Their analysis charts the history and potential for change and sustainability, with an emphasis on resources. This model fits well with community action and community development types of activity, as the tenants have common ground in terms of identity, consumption, self-help, residence, resource issues and locality; indeed some set up and run their own groups (with varying degrees of support). However, it fits less well with tenant involvement at an organisational level, where the structures are set up by staff for organisational purposes, where staff and managers interact with the group on a meeting to meeting basis in a formal setting, where tenants are separated from their communities, are from different localities, and are not encouraged to represent their community in the activities they undertake. In addition, the work that tenants undertake in these particular structures does not always benefit their own community or locality.

4.2.3.4 Typologies based on types of participation

Much of the literature on tenant involvement written before 1999 uses a version of the 'ladder of participation' (Figure 4.1), developed by Sherry Arnstein (1968). The ladder of participation is hierarchical, and is often depicted as follows (from the bottom up): providing information; seeking information; listening to the unsolicited views of service users; consulting; dialogue, negotiation and bargaining; joint management; choice; and control (TPAS, 1994). Most official documents prior to 2004, and literature designed to help service users participate, have used this model as a starting point. Indeed, regulatory agencies use it to guide providers towards particular modes of participation. Sometimes one particular method becomes preferred, and is the only one connected to funding. Looking back at Arnstein's original ladder, one can see that it has been changed considerably over the years and much of its eloquence has been lost in that process. Arnstein was very much aware of the limitations of the typology and points out that:

The ladder juxtaposes powerless citizens with the powerful in order to highlight the fundamental divisions between them. In actuality, neither the have-nots nor the power holders are homogeneous blocs. Each group encompasses a host of divergent points of view, significant cleavages, competing vested interests, and splintered subgroups. The justification for using such simplistic abstractions is that in most cases the have-nots really do perceive the powerful as a monolithic "system", and power holders actually do view the have-nots as a sea of "those people", with little comprehension of the class and caste differences among them (Sherry Arnstein, 1969: 219).

The model does not, however, address the blockages to successful tenant involvement or explain how these occur. Moreover, the characteristics of some rungs could be applied to other rungs, and there could therefore be as many as 100 rungs in a real life model.

Citizen control	
Delegated power	Degree of Citizen Power
Partnership	
Placation	Degree of Tokenism
Consultation	
Informing	
Therapy	Non participation
Manipulation	
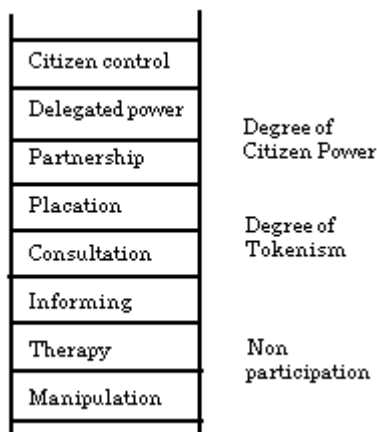
Figure 4.1: Sherry Arnstein's original ladder of participation

A number of commentators (Cairncross et al, 1997; AC, 2004; and Cole, 2008) have, rejected Arnstein's model on the grounds that there should be a menu of opportunities for involvement, and that different methods and approaches were needed to fit different circumstances. Indeed, the 'hierarchy' approach implies that opportunities higher on the ladder are considered to be 'better' participation, but tenants can be poorly involved at any level on the ladder. For instance, a feeling of empowerment and influence - over the quality of services delivered to tenants can happen at more than one level of the ladder, for example

if the information given by tenants to staff through consultation exercises is acted upon, and a difference is experienced by the tenants themselves. However, if in practice the consultation agenda is controlled by the organisation, as are the outcomes, and these outcomes are not fed back to the tenants who took part in the consultation process, this can further reinforce feelings of lack of influence and disempowerment. Thus a tenant could be a board member (situated towards the top of the ladder) and yet not feel fully involved, or could feel constrained by the accepted practices of governance within housing associations. He or she may feel that the board is unaware of the reality of life on the estates, and of the failures of staff to provide the service, but will have no voice because he or she cannot frame this information in an acceptable way, or cannot access the agenda to bring the topic to the attention of other board members.

Although this model is useful for outlining the different approaches to participation and involvement, and their positioning in relation to empowerment, or 'citizen power' as Arnstein calls it, this model has, as already stated, been simplified, and too much emphasis has been placed on the type of activity depicted by the rungs of the ladder, with insufficient consideration of how these relate to the degree of tenant power involved. Most of the involvement and participation examples identified in my research focus on the area referred to as 'degrees of tokenism', which relate to placation and partnership rungs on the ladder, though they potentially touch on 'citizen power'. In short, this model cannot show me the process and dynamics of involvement activities, but it can provide an overview of the range and scope of activity. Interestingly Cole (2008) points out

> The whole field of inquiry has become much too cluttered with ladders, and quasi-ladders, ever since and that too much time has been invested in gauging which 'rung' any particular measure, policy, organisation or programme is hanging from. It has overshadowed the urgent need for more dynamic analysis of different modes of engagement with tenants in different types of landlord organisation. (Cole, 2008)

4.2.3.5 Typologies based on motivations

In 2004 the Audit Commission (2004) rejected the 'Ladder of Participation' and instead organised tenant involvement into three categories in terms of the motivation of the organisation rather than the tenants, i.e. service improvement, accountability to users, and

enhancing social capital[6] in communities. These motivations were ascribed by the research team, and reflected both the discourse of the two organisations that were funding the research (the Audit Commission and the Housing Corporation), and the general trend in regulation and inspection, which had a dual focus of service improvement and accountability. It is not clear how the housing associations in the study substantiated their claims of enhancing social capital as a primary aim (or whether indeed they had a clear conception of what social capital was), although it may well have been an outcome. The research however did reveal that value for money would have been a more realistic focus in practice as the necessary resources and support were in practice not made available to tenants to build social capital which was evident in this research. There has been no academic critique of this work as it was primarily intended to provide practical support for housing organisations and the inspectorate. I have excluded social capital as an aim of involvement within the context of my research as I don't think it is an aim in the majority of involvement practice and it would be relatively easy to show this in the findings. Empowerment and service improvement are more relevant concepts within the context of group work as they link more effectively to ideas of making a difference through involvement.

4.2.3.6 Typologies based on the empowerment process

Stuart and Taylor (1995) have developed a model for investigating the empowerment process which divides empowerment into four dimensions, based on the strategic options available to individuals or groups dealing with powerful organisations. They can be 'active' (e.g. participation and self-management, also known as 'voice'); 'destructive' (e.g. exercise of the right to buy, also known as 'exit'); 'passive' (with little or no activity, putting up with things the way they are, often known as 'loyalty'); and finally 'alienation and withdrawal'. Somerville (1998) comments that this looks more like a cycle of disempowerment. For instance, the passive approach could not be considered an empowerment process. He contends that Stuart and Taylor have not developed their concepts sufficiently to enable the researcher to break down the activities and understand the flow of power between them. Instead he maintains that typologies exploring the empowerment process could help the researcher to make sense of the conceptual and empirical variety involved in the study of

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[6] Portes (1998) defines social capital as the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership of social networks or other structures.

participation. He points out that the majority of literature on empowerment tends to focus on a psychological approach rather than one of collective action, but also draws attention to the connection and overlap between psychological empowerment and the collectivist action associated with tenant involvement. Referring to Harrison (1995) Somerville points out that the literature, for the most part, has not gone beyond 'therapeutic' strategies such as self-help, mutual aid and support as a means of enabling people to improve their quality of life.

Somerville and Steele (1996) contend that traditional models of representative democracy are flawed and that new institutional arrangements will be necessary to overcome what they term the 'collective action dilemma' inherent in public services. They explored a range of involvement frameworks in Sweden and the UK in which they evaluated, in principle, the potential of different institutional arrangements. These included marketised arrangements, forms of partnership with landlords, and tenant control, such as Tenant Management Co-operatives, which they evaluated against a typology of effectiveness, representativeness and shift in power. Each involvement framework was found to have strengths and weaknesses across these three elements. Partnership (which represents the type of involvement in this study) was found potentially to have medium effectiveness, high representativeness and medium power shift.

They point out that for the outcome to be positive across the three elements, effective mechanisms are needed to ensure representativeness, competence and democratic selection: essentially tenants need to be incentivised and appropriately and externally supported to ensure that they are competent in their roles. Somerville and Steele acknowledged that this was not happening in 1996, and based on my findings from the literature in Chapter 3, it was still not happening in 2008/9. The institutional arrangements outlined could never be representative of the diversity of views and needs in any tenant or public service user community, primarily because of the low number of users involved and the difficulties inherent in downward accountability to their constituencies, especially in larger housing associations. In addition, the strengths outlined for the partnership approach to involvement and the potential shifts in power suggested by Somerville and Steele may not reflect what is happening on the ground. Somerville (1998) went on to develop a more detailed model, concentrating on both outcomes and empowerment. In my view this had more practical value.

The second model, referred to as 'empowerment through residence', is designed to unravel the content, pattern and direction of the empowerment process in involvement activities. Although the term 'empowerment' itself can be seen as a concept with a constellation of meanings, for Somerville (1998) it is seen as a process whereby 'people's control over their lives is increased' (Somerville,1998: 233). He maintains that this can be achieved through a range of activities, and that these activities can be explored by the researcher.

Looking at various participation activities, Somerville (1998) goes on to make a distinction between 'top down' and 'bottom up' initiatives, i.e. those taken by the landlord (top down) and those initiated by the tenants themselves (bottom up). For instance, in any given example of involvement the researcher can apply four key questions to explore the outcome in terms of the longer term impact, which may on the one hand indicate the potential for empowerment, or alternatively, the reinforcement of the status quo. These questions are concerned with the direction of action, whether 'top down' or 'bottom up', and the dependency effect, whether it is increasing or decreasing. It is also important to establish the extent to which institutional change is achieved: is it radical, reformist, or reinforcing of the status quo? This depends on the way the interaction is mediated and most importantly, who are the beneficiaries: are they elites, groups or individuals? Not all activities are empowering, nor do people necessarily engage in activities to become empowered. Indeed as Somerville points out:

> Participation without empowerment is a confidence trick performed by the controllers of an activity on participants in that activity. To the extent to which the trick works it must be disempowering rather than empowering. (Somerville, 1998: 234)

Top down and bottom up descriptions have been used a great deal in good practice guides. However, they have not illustrated the dependency effect that Somerville addresses in his model, which is a significant and underexplored issue when researching the engagement of tenants in the involvement and governance process. Exploring the question of who benefits from participation and involvement activities also allows the researcher to investigate further the motivations behind, and the impact of, tenant involvement, both on the tenants themselves and the organisation in question. In my view, the concept of empowerment is of central importance to involvement, both in the community and in the boardroom of housing associations. Crucially it is a useful test to establish who in the end benefits, or is

empowered, and what the prospects are for this empowerment to be maintained or built upon in the longer term.

Cooper and Hawtin (1998) point out that this model is quite similar to their own. However, they consider their model to be an improvement on Somerville's because it highlights the '"motor" driving the entire process - that is, the conceptual arena where different historical and ideological perspectives compete to dominate the policy aims and objectives for resident involvement' (Cooper and Hawtin, 1998: 85). Somerville's typology allows the difficulties inherent in the practice of involvement to be revealed. Importantly, it shows how organisations conceive and implement national policy based on their views of tenants and organisational values which may be counter to the spirit or ideology underpinning national policy at any given time.

4.3   Preferred theories: substantive descriptions

In the following section, I explore in some detail, the theories that I have selected as the framework for my research. I have based these choices principally on the need for a practical model with a sound theoretical base that takes account of structure and agency. The primary purpose of the models is to aid me in understanding what happens and how it happens, by exploring the dynamics in and between groups and their relationship to power. I base my reasoning on the methodological options open to me in terms of access to data and resources, and my own experience before doing this research. I have chosen two theoretical models that complement each other. Firstly Clegg's (1989) circuits of power framework enables me to explore specific dynamics of involvement in terms of the potential for transformation in the power relationships between organisations and tenants; secondly Somerville's (1998) typology helps me to understand the nature of the transformation in terms of the longer term prospects for empowerment in tenant involvement

4.3.1   Outline of Clegg's 'circuits of power' (1989)

Clegg's 'circuits of power' are a useful framework for examining instances from the case study associations where the primary group (the panel/forum and board members) are involved in working with the staff in their corporate undertakings. The rules (policy, protocol and accepted practice) of this particular activity (involvement) are set by the association, and the tenants may or may not have been consulted about these. The opportunities for tenants to

initiate change that improves services, or to change the way in which tenants are involved in both strategic and operational matters (i.e. the rules), are areas of tension. What follows is an outline and diagram of the theoretical model developed by Clegg, which shows how power flows and has the potential for transformation.

4.3.1.1 Circuits of power

Stuart Clegg (1989) developed his 'circuits of power' model to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of power relationships, both in organisations and in the study of the state and politics. A diagrammatic representation of his model is set out in Figure 4.2, which should be referred to as the different levels of the circuit are described. Clegg argues that the dynamic, relative nature of power is not accounted for in many theoretical perspectives popular in the past, especially those that have their roots in the work of Hobbes (1660). Instead he bases his approach on the writings of Machiavelli (1532) and the work of Foucault (1977), Mann (1980) and Callon (1986). Clegg maintains that power should be thought of as a phenomenon that can only be grasped relationally. In his view it does not exist as any concrete entity that can be owned, but is a product of relations. Power is possessed only in the way that the relational conditions that constitute power are produced, and is relatively fixed.

> Power is simply the effectiveness of strategies for achieving for oneself a greater scope of action than for others implicated in one's strategies. Power is not anything nor is it necessarily inherent in anyone: it is a tenuously produced and reproduced effect which is contingent upon the strategic competences of actors who would be powerful. (Clegg, 1989: 33)

At the base of this theory of power are conceptions of organisations and how they operate. For Clegg, organisations are not expressions of a single rational principle but a location of decision making and action within a complex set of rules, identities and pressures. He thinks of organisations as: 'Locales in which negotiation, contestation and struggle between organisationally divided and linked agencies is a routine occurrence' (Clegg, 1989: 198). His circuits of power model can be used to understand how organisations develop and transform through the conduit of 'the rules of the game' idea. It shows how power cannot remain static within one set of rules and practices, and that power is subject to dynamic flux as a result of pressures from outside and within the various circuits of power. Therefore, Clegg maintains,

'power is best approached through a view of more or less complex organised agents engaged in more or less complex organised games' (Clegg, 1989: 20).
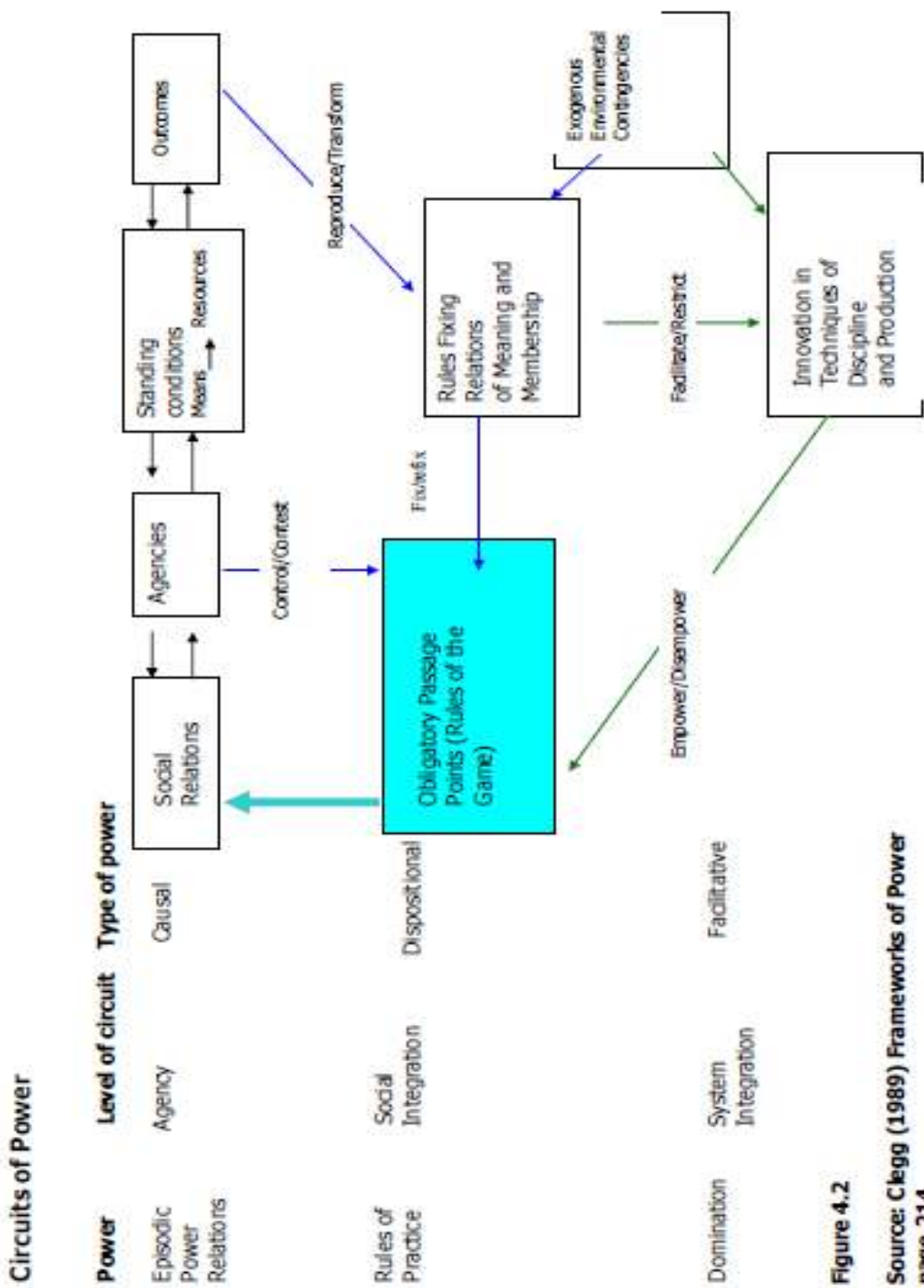
Figure 4.2

Source: Clegg (1989) Frameworks of Power page 214

4.3.1.2 Key concepts in the model

Rules, i.e. obligatory passage points, define the way agencies (individuals or collectives) have to engage in order to take part in the game. It is in this arena that the actions of agencies can change social relations and thus the power relationship between different groups. Clegg points out that 'rules can never provide for their own interpretation' (Clegg 1989: 201) and that rules of practice tend to be the subject of contested interpretation. Whoever has the power to determine, or has the authority to interpret the rules, has more power in relation to the other agencies in the game. In this process discretion will be used in interpreting the rules, and where there is discretion, there will be resistance to what he terms the 'regulation of meaning'. Clegg develops this further and describes how discretion becomes a central paradox of power, as agencies in organisations have to delegate authority and therefore need rules. Where there are rules there is discretion, which can empower delegates and from which 'comes the taken for granted basis of organisationally negotiated order and on occasion its fragility and instability' (Clegg, 1989: 201).

It follows that the use of discretion needs disciplining to ensure that organisations function appropriately in translating the rules and practices throughout the organisation. By such means power relations are reproduced, thus maintaining stability and control. This may be achieved through direct surveillance, professional self-regulation, reporting mechanisms and standardised practices of accountability, which become the rules of practice and, in a broader context, ideology and accepted rationality. If interpretation is not disciplined, Clegg argues that 'new powers will be produced and existing powers transformed' (Clegg 1989: 202).

Defining the problem, and achieving the necessary alliances in the 'game', are essential to achieving the agencies' ends, and are an important part of the process of shifting or transforming power relationships. An organisational field can contain a number of agencies - there will be those who are currently controlling the obligatory passage points, the rule makers and 'gate keepers', and those that have an interest in changing the rules in favour of their own priorities, if they are unable to get their priorities met within the rules. Drawing on the work of Callon (1986), Clegg expands on the requirement for, and agreement about, what constitutes any given problem or issue, what meanings are attached to it and what needs to be done to solve it. An agency that wishes to challenge the status quo has to enrol others (i.e. agencies) into their view or understanding, known as the enrolment process. This collective

positioning requires a strong commitment if it is to become a stable representation throughout the process.

> Enrolling others to one's conception is a strategy in which formulation of one's own and others' interests may play a strategic role. It is one of the devices whereby we attempt to stamp our agency on other thing. (Clegg, 1989:204)

Clegg identifies three levels in his circuits of power theory which are described below.

1) The agency level of the circuit

Many agencies (individuals or collectives) do not seek to change the rules because they believe they cannot do so. Instead they continually attempt to be better at working within the rules. The 'working within the rules' approach is represented within the first, or agency level of the circuit in the model, which can be categorised as using a causal type of power, referred to as episodic power relations.

The first circuit starts at the social relations box and is followed by the box labeled agencies, (i.e. the individuals and groups involved). These may include two or more groups. Moving to the right, the arrows indicate what Clegg refers to as the standing conditions, which include the means or resources available to the different agencies. Finally the outcomes box denotes the outcome of any given dynamic action between agencies. Clegg's concept of social relations includes the nature of social relations between agencies and the context in which they operate. Agencies include those who seek to maintain the status quo and those wishing to change or achieve something: hence there will be a variety of agendas. These agencies are located within the 'standing conditions', which represent a complex environment centred on the unequal access to means and resources by the different agencies, and which in turn result in differences in the capacity to control the operation of the 'game'. This forms the basis on which the causal powers of agencies will be realised as an outcome.

> Episodic power is seen to derive from the capacities of agents grounded in resource control. The constitutive relations which prevail between agents can be seen to determine the nature of resources. (Clegg, 1989: 217)

Different agencies may understand the rules differently and some may have more experience in playing the 'game' than others. Agencies may not be good at forming alliances, or may not know where there are other agencies that might support them. Some agencies on the

other hand may have access to better material resources than others, and will have greater scope and knowledge to resist the pressure from a challenger, and/or have a greater ability to maintain their own priorities at any one time. Other agencies may not realise that they are in a 'game' at all, or may not realise the kind of game they are in. They are often acting from a completely different set of rules from those, say, of the rule interpreters/controllers, and may have little awareness of this. This is likely to occur where people from different classes, cultures and/or genders work together. There is always resistance in this circuit, depicted by the left-pointing arrows between the boxes. However, alliances between agencies may make a difference to the outcome, especially where a subordinate agency gets support from one of the more powerful agencies. A subordinate group may become more knowledgeable about the detail of the rules, and may use 'rational' arguments (around agreed meanings), centred on the rules, to convince other agencies of the value of the changes requested. This is especially relevant where a subordinate group had not in the past challenged the status quo in this way and the dominant group has not had to work hard to see off incursions into their power base. Clegg refers to these activities as resistance to oligarchic or integrative power viewed episodically.

Activities of agencies can change the rules of the game through key nodal points (obligatory passage points), and this movement is denoted in the figure by the arrow directly from agencies to obligatory passage points. Here the rules can be contested or reinforced, depending on the skill and resources of the agencies involved. These in turn affect social relations, and thus the circuit moves on. This activity represents a new circuit of power where agencies change or affect the rules of the game. If power relations are channelled only through the episodic circuit, then the configuration of existing rules and domination remains intact (i.e. is reproduced). In many instances, 'one off' or uncoordinated challenges from agencies are easily dealt with, through what Clegg terms as defeat, incorporation or exile. A dominant agency may work hard to ensure that potential challengers remain out of touch with each other so that groups remain divided. For Clegg, innovation and transformation of the system as a whole can only happen when **'practices of rule and/or existing techniques of domination are challenged'** (Clegg, 1986: 219). In this instance, the way means and resources are distributed will be reconfigured. The result is organisational outflanking.

Looking at the possibility of change in power relations as a result of continual resistance requires those agencies that currently control the rules to ensure that their governing power remains intact over time and space, and therefore requires what he terms as a 'diffusion of disciplinary techniques throughout the apparatus or any other kind of formal organisation (Clegg 1989:219). Clegg refers to Foucault's view, that this discipline constitutes the general formula of domination. Agencies may not have the strength or capacity to try to change the system at such a fundamental level.

2) The social integration level of the circuit

The model shows that some outcomes, where change occurs in circuit one (episodic power relations), can then influence the rules fixing relations of meaning and membership, which is part of the social integration circuit, and is concerned with fixing and refixing relations of meaning and membership. This circuit has a particular characteristic mode of organisational change. Clegg refers to Meyer and Rowan's (1977) term 'institutional isomorphism'. This refers to the way that people's identities and shared meanings get transmitted through networks, and exist as part of the stabilisation of power between different agencies involved in the enrolment process already mentioned. It is further stabilised through what Clegg terms the fixing of common relations of meaning and membership among the agencies, such that they know where they are in relation to each other.

Institutional isomorphic change is a way of explaining how change or innovation can occur in one part of an organisation or society and can become widely adopted throughout. This can occur through three mechanisms: coercive, mimetic or normative pressure. Those with authority in organisations can demand that new methods are dispersed using current structures of reporting and managing. Resources can be withheld by what Clegg terms 'nodally positioned agencies', until behaviours and practice are changed. Normative pressure materialises and is sustained through the route of professionalisation. He points out that:

> Other sources of pressure for isomorphic rules of practices will be the structure of labour markets generally and especially the competitive filtering pressures that operate through the phenomena such as 'credentialling' and 'internal labour markets' to produce low levels of variation in the salient membership characteristics of employees. (Clegg, 1989:229)

3) The system integration level of the circuit

The final circuit is the one associated with the domination element of power, which is institutionalised though the circuit of facilitational power. This is a form of system integration which is concerned with the material conditions of the techniques of production and discipline. This can lead to changes in the empowerment and disempowerment of certain agencies as a result of changes in the techniques of production of discipline, which in turn result from transformations within or without the system. This means, for example, that if technology in society changes (e.g. new forms of energy), these changes will favour certain groups and be not so good for others. The extent to which this changes power relationships depends on how strongly the ideology and rationality of the current setup is embedded within individuals and groups, so as to reproduce existing power relationships, or how well (or not) the changes are incorporated into existing frameworks and meanings. Clegg quotes Lockwood (1964), who points out that:

> Material conditions most obviously include the technological means of control over the physical and social environment and the skills associated with these means. They include not only the material means of production, but also what Weber frequently refers to as the material means of organisational violence. (Lockwood, 1964: 251)

Once a technological transformation (an exogenous influence) occurs, the relative empowerment and disempowerment of the agencies within the organisational field has to traffic through the obligatory passage points and may change them (the rules) altogether. This will affect social relations, and consequently the differences in resources and means available to agencies (the standing conditions). This will result in a change in outcomes, which will impact on meanings and membership, which will in turn reinforce the changes in the rules. This process further transforms these changes in technology and the subsequent ideology and techniques of discipline associated with it. This is an example of how organisational outflanking works and is what Clegg refers to as the 'basis for social control and social change. Hence each of the circuits of social and system integration will have to reproduce stable relations of episodic power, through fixing obligatory passage points, if they are to reproduce the extant organisation carrying capacity' (Clegg, 1989: 224). It follows that existing structures of domination are vulnerable to what Clegg terms as subsidence, disruption and innovation, which ultimately undermine entrenched structures.

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The box on the far right of the circuit refers to exogenous factors that can affect all the circuits, and may result in new power relations. For example, this may come in the form of government intervention, requiring organisations to operate in a particular way, which may empower certain agencies within the organisation. Alternatively, it could be a natural disaster or war. Endogenous change can also occur as a result of episodic power outcomes which change or transform the rules through the meaning and membership route, or through innovations in the production of discipline. Clegg's position is that 'exogenous change occurs as a result of environmental contingencies which interrupt and disturb the fixed fields of force or the circuit of wider social or system integration' (Clegg, 1989: 224). Clegg uses the example of the Black Death as a critical exogenous factor in the decline of feudalism. He tracks the process through the circuits to reveal how the greater power of exchange that peasants had, after the population was significantly reduced, was used to change the basis of the 'taken for granted' landlord-tenant feudal relationship. This resulted in a change in methods of agricultural production in England, and the subsequent growth of towns, followed by changes in methods of rule and politics. Clegg points out that, when we believe that power is fixed or cemented into structural relations, this represents power in its most reified form, which has been successfully reproduced through integrative circuits. Here social meanings have become abiding truths and the rationalities of discourse are assumed to be facts.

4.3.1.3 Relevance to this research

The circuits demonstrate the mechanics of organisational or social change, and the model serves to challenge taken-for-granted ideas about the nature of fixed power relationships such as those outlined by Lukes (1974).

As already explained, I decided to collect, over a number of years, a wide range of largely qualitative data, and then to look for the themes and dynamics arising from that data. To this end, Clegg's theory of circuits of power has proved useful for investigating the dynamics of tenant involvement, as his framework lends itself well to discussing activities within arenas where there are two or more groups with different agendas and unequal access to resources, each trying to achieve their own aims. Using the episodic circuit one can chart the progress of different activities over time and through events, to show whether there have been changes

in the rules of the 'game', and the effects, if any, on the other circuits, i.e. of social integration and system integration.

During the period of the study exogenous influences have influenced tenant involvement practice (i.e. the game) to some extent, and have brought about change in the way that involvement is conducted (i.e. the rules). These have been used by different groups in different ways to meet their own agendas. The model will help to reveal and explain these effects as evidenced in changed rules, meanings, discourse and outcomes.

This model is also useful for exploring power dynamics within forums and panels, and between forums or panels and the organisation. It is useful because any activity that takes place in the setting of the meetings, or in lobbying outside the meetings, can be accounted for through the model. For instance, an attempt by tenants to put an item on the agenda can be seen as an activity within circuit one. The tenants may be blocked by staff, but they may then go back and re-read the rules and use them to get their paper tabled. How tenants and staff construct themselves and their problems reveals much about their perceptions of their position in the social order, and what 'game' they think they are playing. This also indicates to the researcher that power has become reified within the organisational field. In the case of board membership, new tenant members may join the board and influence the way that tenant involvement is carried out within an organisation, by making friends with other board members and persuading them to help change the rules of involvement practice or structure, or simply the way things are done i.e. the rules of the game. This activity can be plotted through the other circuits. Finally, whether the tenants are successful or not (as there may be resistance from staff) can also be shown in the model and therefore enable the researcher to make more sense of the barriers to involvement. Commentators such as Bengtsson and Clapham (1998) point out that this model works well for analysing changes over time, both in the activities, and in the context of involvement.

As with any model, however, it has its limitations. For example, it may be that, in certain circumstances and over a long period of time, there will be no appreciable change and hence power will not transform. This would be evidenced at the episodic level, and would render the rest of the model void. Although this would be apparent to the researcher without the use of the model, if there is at least some transformation of power, even if only for a short time, the complete framework can be used to advantage.

A further limitation lies in the fact that the model is most suited to use in similar kinds of setting, such as a forum or board, with relatively few agencies involved. Two or three agencies will allow the dynamics of specific instances over a period of time to be tracked, but any more would create too many complexities. Furthermore, some judgments are still required by the researcher, as there will be discrepancies between the levels of change regarding the different players in any given situation. Active tenants may feel they have influenced services or made changes to the way involvement works, however staff may disagree. Some changes can clearly be accounted for – for example where new formal powers are achieved as a result of a challenge. However, simply acquiring formal powers may not represent empowerment if these powers are contested or are unable to be used. Finally, this is not a model that can be used to predict outcomes, but it does enable the researcher to analyse and understand the way in which certain events and behaviours result in certain types of outcome. Moreover, it may help the researcher to recognise similar patterns in a number of housing associations, thus helping to identify generic barriers common to the struggles of all tenants and organisations.

4.3.2. Outline of Somerville's 'empowerment through residence' (1998)

Somerville (1998) asks the question: 'What does it mean to empower people through the housing in which they live?' (Somerville,1998: 233). When exploring empowerment through participation it is essential that researchers have a working definition. For Somerville 'empowerment can be described as any process by which people's control over their lives is increased' (1998: 233). What increased control means depends on which area of society one is investigating, and requires specific description in each case. Generally it means increasing choice and freedom of action for people. Somerville poses a key goal for empowerment:

> That people should be in a position where they can freely choose a type of participation arrangement into which they wish to enter, and what they need to achieve it is the right blend of external support, democratic selection and civic education. (Somerville and Steele, 1996: 278)

The main thrust of Somerville's approach is concerned with collective control over housing consumption and management. He argues that people may participate in their landlord's

tenant empowerment agenda but not gain any more control over their environment or lives. The housing organisation may only want to seek information from residents in order to tick a regulatory box, doing little more than paying lip service to the government's agenda for tenants to have more 'say' and more opportunities to be involved in the management of their homes. The situation is complex, however: even if involvement is undertaken without any motive to empower, or without any real commitment, the activity can empower people in indirect ways. That said, 'increasing participation alone will not achieve lasting empowerment' (Somerville, 1998:235), and for change in the balance of power to take place, there need to be institutional arrangements such as joint committees and representation on boards, together with training and support. But even then, tenant control is not necessarily the answer as it can load unwelcome burdens of responsibility and pressure on tenants. The central theme of my research is located in precisely the area of these types of institutional arrangements, and thus using this approach is likely to shed some light on whether empowerment can be achieved.

Somerville contends that empowerment can be conceptualised as a process and can therefore usefully be understood in terms of a typology. He outlines a model which classifies action in terms of:

- Direction of action: The process of empowerment can be seen as principally top down or bottom up, and Somerville cites Sabatier (1986), on which this view is based. The process of empowerment can originate from those who have power and wish to see the balance shift towards those currently without power, or can start the other way round, with those without power seeking to gain power from those who currently hold it.

- The dependency effect: increasing or decreasing dependency is a key characteristic of the empowerment process, although sometimes dependency levels remain unchanged. Somerville points out that there is a tendency to assume that people become more independent as they become empowered. However, one may become more involved with a wider range of actors and agents, thereby increasing dependency, or develop interdependence within a group. An individual may thus feel equally valued, and be an effective member of the group, and hence empowered, even though they may feel constrained in other ways.

- Institutional change: moving towards conservative, reformist or radical outcomes will indicate to what extent the action challenges the status quo. By 'conservative', Somerville means the tendency to conserve and build upon existing structures and practices. 'Radical' can be conceived of as a complete change of structures, with the creation of new ones based on a different ideology or revolutionary change. 'Reformist' is more of a 'step by step' approach to reforming existing structures to create greater power sharing.

- Who benefits: individuals, collectives or elites may benefit through this empowerment process.

For instance, the 'right to buy' was a top down radical solution that benefited individuals.

More generally, Somerville points out that there is a specific flow of influence to tenants, whether as individuals, members of groups, or as tenants in general. However, just because a 'top down' approach is taken, it does not follow that power will necessarily flow to the tenants. It only means that the landlord initiated the activity and that tenants may, or may not, become more empowered through that activity. Somerville then goes on to classify methods of empowerment: knowledge, acquisition, statute, resourcing, agreement, and power transfer, against the four main headings above. He points out that these are intended to be practical rather than theoretical.

'Top down' processes of empowerment can be analysed in terms of: communication of information and education; conferral of rights; resourcing e.g. finance; and transfer of specific powers. In contrast, 'bottom up' processes can be analysed in terms of: increased formal and informal participation in collective activity; increasing exercise of the rights that have been conferred; increased assertiveness in accessing resources to achieve these ends; and increased pressure for participation in the decision making process (Somerville, 1998).

4.3.2.1 <u>Relevance to this research</u>

Empowerment can be an outcome, or indeed an aim, of the tenant involvement process. This model allows the researcher to look at process in terms of whether the activity works towards empowering people or not. In Clegg's terminology this would be an activity that works towards a change in the standing conditions, rules and relationships of membership and meaning. This approach is useful for this research as it frames and explains what is going on in each individual case study and can help to establish outcomes in respect of these elements.

This approach will enable me to consider (a) what real outcomes for tenant involvement there have been, (b) the extent that empowerment has been achieved for the parties involved, (c) which parties in particular have benefited, and (d) the potential for tenant involvement in the future. I can do this by looking at the activities and asking a series of questions that relate, firstly to whether the direction of action is either 'top down' or 'bottom up'.

From a 'top down' direction, I can then determine how tenants have been facilitated by the organisation through:

(1) Level of access to information and training, and how this has been delivered.

(2) The conferral of rights: how the organisation has designed the involvement structure and to what extent tenants were involved in this; the areas and activities in which the tenants have a right to be involved (for instance as a board member) or have control over specific budgets.

(3) Resourcing, both financial and staffing: the size of the budget, the level of staffing, and where the staff fit into the organisation (this includes what resourcing is put in place for tenants and for developing tenants groups and activities).

(4) The transfer of specific powers, which could mean control of a budget, a specified role for a group undertaking direct management, such as a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO), or rules that the board must have a specific percentage of tenants on it.

Looking at the 'bottom up' direction of action the four elements I determine are whether there has been an:

(1) Increased level of formal and informal participation in collective activity, evidenced by the observed levels and range of involvement in the organisation's activities.

(2) Increasing exercise of rights conferred, evidenced by tenants using their rights to move their own agenda forward, and by identifying what knowledge tenants have about their rights to involvement.

(3) Increased assertiveness in accessing resources to achieve these ends. This can be found by accessing the training lists, identifying what information is available and in what form, and from the stories tenants tell about their experiences in getting information, knowledge and resources and how much control they have had over the process.

(4) Increased pressure for participation in the decision-making process. The stories and surveys reveal unmet need, and frustration about tenants' difficulties in getting into the decision arena. Reading policies and observing practices reveal the extent to which tenants are involved in decision making and the differences between policy and practice. This allows the researcher to ask questions of both staff and residents about their level of involvement, both achieved and aspirational.

These questions are quite straightforward to answer, and suit a methodological framework based on case studies, where a great deal of concrete information is collected on how the organisation undertakes involvement activities. Using this approach with my case studies, along with the questionnaire responses, it should be possible to analyse much of the tenant experience around power. Ultimately these questions help to ascertain whether indeed power has been transformed, and whether the transformation will benefit the cause of tenant involvement.

The model, however, does not take account of ideological underpinnings, as I outlined earlier. In addition there are practical limitations to using this model, in that it requires a number of subjective judgements to be made, which may have been affected by my positioning (see Chapter 5). Issues such as conferral of rights are likely to be viewed very differently by the different parties involved (e.g. the tenants versus the organisation), and will also be utilised and implemented variously by different groups – this is more easily understood using Clegg (1989). The most problematic aspect of this model lies, however, in

trying to assess the type of change that has occurred: i.e. whether it is radical, reformist or conservative. Once again, subjective assessments have to be made. In addition, the differences between reformist step change and no change – or indeed radical change – cannot easily be judged in the short term. The model might work better where the period of study is longer. This would allow sufficient time to enable the identification of permanent changes through the transfer of formal powers to tenants, and also changes to the way involvement is conducted, and its impact on services and tenants. Short term changes may be easier to achieve, but may not be long-lasting. For example, just before a stock transfer, and in the first year following it, there is often a clear transformation in power relations, and indeed a feeling of empowerment or control over what is happening. But over time, new powers emerge, which transform the situation yet again, potentially leading to disempowerment of tenants or reductions in tenant control over the involvement process and outcomes. This happens when committees and forums become moribund due to lack of staff support or changes in involvement structures which would not normally be picked up in a short term study. All that said, given the duration of this study, the relative positions in which the active tenants find themselves over time can be identified to good effect.

4.4   Conclusion

The theoretical frameworks I have chosen will enable me to unpack both the micro and the macro dynamics in the involvement game, and generate greater understanding of the dynamic tensions and of the opportunities available to both staff and tenants to overcome the more obvious barriers to effective involvement, and enhance awareness of the more subtle pressures and barriers generated by the staff and by the tenants themselves. The following chapter outlines my methodology in practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE FRAMING OF THE RESEARCH APPROACH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out how I established my research focus and the methodology I adopted. The first section revisits the aims and objectives outlined in the introductory chapter, followed by a discussion of my own position in the research and details of the key players involved. I then discuss how I came to establish these particular research questions, based on my experience as an involved tenant and the gaps I had identified in the literature. The sections that follow outline the chronological journey through the research, including a section on my changing role as the project progressed.

5.2 Aims and objectives

My overall aim is to establish the barriers to successful tenant involvement in the organisational structures of housing associations, how they come about and why such barriers persist.

By 'tenant involvement in the organisational structures of housing associations' I mean the activities undertaken by tenants as part of their membership of a tenant panel or forum, or as a board member of their housing association, including membership of any sub-committee or working group arising from that membership, as described in Chapter One. For tenant involvement to be considered 'successful' it has, in my view, to be seen to be making a difference to services and/or the organisation's accountability to tenants, to be empowering, and to be inclusive in its mode of operation. (See Chapter One for more detail).

Objectives

In order to clarify the objectives of the research I identified a series of key questions:

- What are the characteristics of the involved tenants in terms of age, gender, skills and abilities, disability and ethnicity, and to what extent do these characteristics create or maintain barriers?

- What is the 'shape' of tenant involvement at this level in organisations? How does the structure and format of involvement, including the support available for participants, create and maintain barriers for involved tenants?

- What happens in practice, both in terms of outcomes and in terms of the way that interpersonal and organisational dynamics affect the possibility of success?

- Are some organisations doing better than others? In particular, are there differences between the relatively new Large Scale Voluntary Transfer associations (LSVTs), and traditional housing associations, given that tenant involvement is a mandatory element of the governance structure of LSVTs?

- How can the application of different bodies of theory assist in the understanding of why barriers to involvement arise and persist? Can a theory help to define a way forward that will enable tenant involvement at this level in organisations to be more 'successful' as defined within the research question?

Thus my intention is twofold. It is first to identify the barriers to successful tenant involvement in the organisational structures of housing associations, and secondly to examine the relationships within the involvement process. I seek, therefore, to unravel the methods used by the different actors to influence activities and outcomes, and also to examine the effects of those methods on the power balance within and between the groups of people in question, which I hope will shed light on why barriers occur and, importantly, why they persist.

5.3   Positionality: where do I stand?

In relation to the study of tenant involvement, researchers have, for the most part, come into organisations from outside, by joining a community project or neighbourhood forum, or as practitioners or consultants. In the latter case, the researchers would be

studying either their peers or their clients, in a situation where they were to some extent either power-holders or equals (Gayle and Newbolt, 2000). In contrast, I came to the research as part of a traditionally marginalised group in terms of power, knowledge, professionalism and resources. I was trying to study my peers, and the professionals who held the majority of the power, knowledge and resources in the involvement process. Beresford (2002) pointed out that there had been little research in the social policy field that had involved (in terms of informing the research) the service users who were being researched, let alone research that had been conducted by service users themselves. I considered, therefore, that I could bring a unique dimension to the study of tenant involvement. I was, and am still, an involved tenant, researching involved tenants and the organisations that they work with. This status created potential benefits, but also significant problems because of the prevailing attitudes of staff and organisations towards tenants. There were also the practical challenges of gaining access to staff, management and tenants in the organisations where I had no functional link as either an involved tenant or as a professional, and where I had no contacts amongst tenants or staff. In addition, at the start of the research most housing associations were operating in competition with each other, and were somewhat coy about their business and professional practices.

My role in the research was thus as an insider, setting out to explore the barriers that the tenant experiences to this type of involvement. The concept of 'insiderness' as a useful position (rather than a hindrance to the research process), has become more recognised in recent years, and brings with it the benefits of greater access to information and networks, together with the opportunity for continuous observation of participants as they go about their daily business. This enables a greater understanding of the way that roles and attitudes develop over time. Some commentators have, however, expressed ethical concerns over the covert nature of this type of approach, because the researched are often not aware that they are being observed. With this in mind I was careful always to be explicit about my research involvement. Nevertheless, I found that participants quickly lost sight of this as they became used to having me around, and this phenomenon has been widely observed and reported (Roseneil, 1993; Labaree, 2002). This did leave ethical concerns remaining, but in view of the use to which I would put the material I felt that this was an acceptable way of working. Moreover, I required

institutional approval for my work, and the University's Ethics Committee was happy with my proposal.

My 'insiderness' has impacted on the research in a number of ways. The framing of the initial question: 'What are the barriers to successful tenant involvement in housing associations?' is related to my own struggle, and that of my tenant colleagues, to influence the activities of the housing association with which I was involved. Like many involved tenants, I had projected certain negative characteristics on to the management and staff of the association, in an effort to understand why they were not responsive to tenant input, nor effective in the delivery of opportunities for tenants to be involved. I was all too aware, however, that this could have a significant impact on my ability to interpret my findings without undue bias. As Holloway and Wheeler (1996) point out in their discussions about health research conducted by nurses:

> They are already part of the setting and know it intimately. This might mean, however, that they are over familiar and could miss important issues or considerations. To be able to examine the world of the participant, the health professional must not take this world for granted, but must question his or her own assumptions and act like a stranger to the setting (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996:5).

As an involved tenant, I was aware of anecdotal themes in relation to tenant involvement and wanted to examine whether what 'everybody says' is really the case. These themes could be characterised by the following statements from managers and staff: that 'tenants are only interested in their own problems, they don't understand the bigger issues'; 'tenants are parochial'; 'they do not have the capacity'; 'we know what's best, that's what we are paid for'; 'they are not representative'; 'they do not understand the problems we face'. From the tenants, conversely, comments to me such as 'it's them and us'; 'it's tokenism'; 'they think we are all stupid'; 'they always discriminate against tenants'; 'they never listen'; 'they think we are second class citizens and should be grateful for what we receive'.

In short, I wanted to understand why tenant involvement did not seem, in my view, to be meeting the needs of the tenants, the housing associations or the government. I was, however, concerned that my somewhat negative perspective on this type of involvement

might be a stumbling block. If I were to look at tenant involvement from a starting position of believing that it worked, would I collect different material and offer a different interpretation of my findings?

I worked hard to challenge my assumptions, and considered carefully how I phrased my questions. I endeavoured to position myself firmly on the 'outside' of my research focus from the outset. It is important to note, however, that over the research period my identity changed significantly as I developed professionally and became, from 2003, a consultant within the sector, and became therefore a part of the corporate culture of these organisations. The potential for bias clearly remained, but it too evolved alongside the research.

The issue of managing the dual identities of scholar and practitioner has been articulated in social policy research by Finlay (2003), who notes her struggle with recording negative information about her work colleagues. In my research, the issue related to my views about my 'involved tenant' colleagues and the staff that supported them. However, the position was not straightforward. I was an involved tenant in two of the study sites, and had become a consultant supporting the tenant involvement process in others. In six sites I was simply a 'researcher' (an outsider), whilst in the remainder I changed from researcher to consultant during the progress of the research. This had the potential to be both confusing and enlightening, depending on how honest and reflective I was about my positioning at any given moment.

5.4   The key players

I set out to gain information in a range of ways from the following groups:

- the tenants already involved in formal structures inside the housing association;

- the staff, i.e. frontline staff, tenant involvement officers, managers, senior managers;

- non-tenant board members;

- my colleagues at the Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel, the Housing Corporation inspectorate and the Audit Commission inspectorate (post-2004);

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- specialists in the housing sector (TPAS staff, trainers and consultants) who had been involved in facilitating tenant participation, or supporting tenant involvement in some way during the early part of my research, in order to elicit their views about issues and areas of focus.

I wanted to cover a wide range of housing associations: between 1 000 and 50 000 dwellings in size, and covering local, regional and national associations, both 'traditional' and 'stock transfer', and including at least one BME association.

5.5   How the literature review informed my focus and approach

The literature review in Chapter Three identified a wide range of barriers to involvement in general, the majority of which related to community partnerships of one kind or another, often involving a range of agencies as well as the social landlord. Unusual though it is to focus on such a narrow issue as exploring barriers to involvement, my review revealed that many of the barriers that I and my tenant colleagues experienced appeared in the literature repeatedly, over decades, in a range of organisations and settings. However, apart from some notable exceptions (Power, 1991; Gayle and Newbolt, 1999) researchers generally did not focus on why things went wrong. Where they did, it was usually part of a focused study on an event or crisis in a particular group or organisation (Collins, 1999; Jackson, 1999). In general, researchers and evaluators were more likely to focus on what went right, and how the project was administered (i.e. the process) with some suggestions for doing better next time - the work of Blewett and Garratt (1995) being a typical example. In my research, the barriers that tenants and staff experience are the key focus from the outset.

My literature review revealed that, prior to 2000; there were few studies that explored the involvement of tenants in the corporate structures of housing associations. The Housing Corporation was just embarking on some case studies exploring how housing associations had embraced 'Best Value' (as outlined in Chapter 2), but there was little information available in the housing association sector on involvement practice, in particular in forums and panels. A number of good practice guides were published to advise housing associations (Housing Corporation 1999a, 2000a, 2000d) on how to

comply with the prevailing regulatory framework in relation to tenant involvement, but as far as the regulatory bodies were concerned, it was up to housing associations to determine how they developed tenant involvement. The principal requirement was for involvement to be seen to be taking place within the organisation.

In addition very limited evidence of actual outcomes (i.e. the difference made) from tenant involvement in housing associations at an organisational level had been published. There were also very limited routes for tenants to share their involvement experiences between organisations. There was, however, the annual TPAS conference, which was used as a showcase for good practice in both the housing association and local authority sector. The formal workshops and plenaries were generally positive and uplifting. At the same time the conference was used informally as an opportunity for both tenants and practitioners to share their experiences, and other conferences were used in the same way. Such meetings, however, were too expensive for most involved tenants to attend. As an attendee and workshop leader at many conferences (since 1995) it became apparent to me that there were issues of substance being talked about that were not sufficiently covered by the existing literature. These were viewed as persistent barriers to effective or successful involvement, and included:

- problems of the 'representativeness' of involved tenants - in particular questions about gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and age (e.g. why there was a preponderance of white elderly males holding officer positions within so many tenant involvement structures);

- the issue of role confusion for tenants (affecting both tenants and staff) – whether the involved tenant is primarily a tenant representative, or is expected to have primary loyalty to the best interests of the organisation, or whether their view is purely to be taken as one customer's point of view;

- whether involvement at this level really made a difference or was essentially tokenistic; were organisations simply going through the motions to comply with regulatory requirements?

- whether tenants really had the capacity to take part fully and contribute to the strategic and policy making elements of tenant involvement;

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- whether tenants were fit to be board members, with concerns expressed over capacity, behaviour and parochialism;

- why some involvement groups were hijacked by dominant people who would not share power with other tenants and who themselves gave staff a hard time;

- whether tenant involvement in this corporate arena was empowering for tenants (especially those organisations that had empowerment as a key feature of their involvement agenda);

- why tenants never seemed to get any proper feedback from managers and involvement staff ;

- why involvement staff found themselves in such a difficult position, wedged between the agenda of the tenants and the agendas of staff and managers.

Many of these issues reflected my own experience as an involved tenant. Why then were academics and evaluators not writing more actively about these issues? The likely explanation is twofold: that housing associations at that time functioned as private and competitive organisations that were not much open to public scrutiny, and that the research was generally sponsored by organisations with a vested interest in positive outcomes for tenant involvement and the encouragement of involvement frameworks. That said, I still needed to be careful that I was not locating myself at the other end of the bias continuum, given my initial 'sceptical insider' position.

5.5.1   The issues in the literature that influenced my approach

Within this literature I found the case studies located in other settings to be particularly useful (see Chapter Three) – especially those relating to community development and regeneration projects. These revealed a number of ways in which collaboration over strategic issues was problematic. Several studies demonstrated how the locus of control remained with those who were funding or supporting the initiatives, (i.e. with local authorities or professionals), rather than with the community (Atkinson, 1997; Collins, 1999; Hastings et al 1996). It was repeatedly observed that representatives on partnership boards did not reflect the diversity and complexity of the community itself nor, indeed, its interests. People and organisations had been excluded, or may have

excluded themselves, through their inability or unwillingness to engage with the necessary rules and processes involved (Rowe and Devanney, 2003; Mayo and Taylor, 2001). Such studies demonstrated significant barriers. I had expected that only a very small minority of tenants would have both the opportunity and the inclination to get involved with housing associations at an organisational level, but there was no data available at the beginning of the research to indicate whether those involved were representative of the tenant population, nor was there sufficient information on who was not included and why. Finding information on who was getting involved had to be a priority in the research: I needed a method for capturing it at an early stage. Hence my decision to carry out a survey of those involved (see Appendix A), which could then be compared with the available profiling information on social housing tenants as a whole, and where possible, that of housing association tenants in particular, with a view to establishing whose were the missing voices.

I was also particularly interested in the dynamics of groups and the related power issues. In discussions with other active tenants these emerged as a significant barrier to effective involvement, and were key to my own experience as an involved tenant. They are exemplified in Jackson's (1999) study of a critical moment in the life of a housing forum and Collins'(1999) study of the failure of a community partnership where he explored the way in which forums and boards were hijacked through the imposition, covertly or directly, of the structures and processes, language and reporting systems of public sector professionals, rolled up in the language of partnership, empowerment and inclusion. This to some extent reflected my own experience, and anecdotally those of my involved tenant colleagues. These studies, however, focused on a single issue or organisation over a period of time (either short or long), and it was always a period of intense activity, involving detailed observation and recording of events and conversations to enable the dynamics to be sufficiently explored. I wanted to study a number of organisations, and had limited resources. I had therefore to find a different approach that would be less intensive, but that would still enable me to explore the subject in reasonable depth.

My research aimed to explore forums, panels and boards, where the systems and processes were highly bureaucratic, and explicitly so. Unlike in community involvement, tenants here were expected to work with the organisation on its own

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terms. In some areas tenants were moving from involvement in a regeneration project, with its community-centred approach, into a totally different organisational milieu. Some may have had experience of failures and successes in the past. So how well did these involved tenants manage in a rather different arena, and were they able to assert their own agenda? And did the professionals they worked with manage to deliver their own objectives, if indeed they had any, other than to engage with tenants at this level? Had I been exploring one or two associations I would have been able to make the detailed notes and records required by tools such as Critical Discourse Analysis. I wanted, however, to explore tenant involvement in a number of associations, to find out whether there were common themes and dynamics operating from which a more general understanding could be generated about the shape and practice of involvement and how this creates or sustains barriers. I was also unsure of the extent to which I could achieve sustained contact with an organisation, and at the planning stage I was unsure about the depth to which I would be able to penetrate a single organisation, in order to follow an issue through to its conclusion. As an individual I had to be sensible about what could be achieved using a case study approach on a number of sites. I also wanted to be open to what emerged during the study.

5.6 Settling on a method

When thinking about exploring barriers to successful involvement, I felt it was essential for me to understand the lived experience of those involved over a period of time, which at the start of this research was to be six years. I needed information from the perspective of both tenants and staff. I was aware that in studies of tenant involvement in housing associations, tenants' voices were virtually unheard, particularly in the regulator-funded research that supported and informed the development of good practice guides. I was keen to place tenants at the heart of my research, whilst retaining a broad perspective on the interaction between all the parties involved, directly or indirectly.

I decided therefore to draw, at least in part, on the ethnographic research tradition, whilst keeping in mind the wider coverage I was also seeking to gain. As a participant in several of the research sites, I would be able to combine reasonably in depth investigation with a wider coverage.

Genzuk (2003) refers to ethnography as 'a social science research method. It relies heavily on up-close, personal experience and possible participation, not just observation, by researchers trained in the art of ethnography' (Genzuk, 2003:1). He points out that within ethnographical studies, research is not separated from the environment or natural setting, but occurs within it. There is an emphasis on trying to understand actions in relation to their cultural contexts and, importantly, research is seen as an inductive process. The key methods used to collect data within this framework, which include detailed interviews, observation and document review, in turn provide three kinds of data: 'quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents, resulting in one product: narrative description' (Genzuk, 2003:1).

Drawing on the work of Hammersley (1990), Genzuk clarifies in the following (bulleted) quotation that ethnography refers to social science that has most of the following features:

- people's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts, rather than under experimental conditions created by the researcher;

- data is gathered from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones;

- the approach to data collection is unstructured in the sense that it does not involve following through a detailed plan set up at the beginning; nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say and do pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is unsystematic; simply that initially the data is collected in as raw a form, and on as wide a front, as possible;

- analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role

  (Genzuk, 2003:5).

These principles are clearly reflected in my own approach. I set out to examine certain aspects of tenant involvement 'in situ', drew on data from a variety of sources, some of which I did not expect to be available to me at the outset, and I placed significant emphasis on qualitative findings and analysis. Although my research could not be defined as small-scale within the tradition of ethnographical research, nor is it in-depth

in the sense of one or two studies of single sites, it certainly has some attributes in terms of being an in-depth examination, with immersion in the context, and with data gathered through conversations, observations and review. I was open to seeing what themes and issues emerged, and wanted to discover whether there were organisations adopting a different approach or style.

From a theoretical perspective, as was seen in Chapter 4, I planned to use tools developed from organisational theory as the main basis for data analysis, in addition to the more common typological approach, to elucidate the process of tenant involvement and to inform possible future directions for policy and practice. The data collected is rich and records dynamic events that can easily be played through Clegg's model of power relations in organisations, thus explicating the games and strategies used by the players to gain power or to empower themselves. My approach is, I believe, distinctive in its use of organisational theory in a way that goes beyond the study of the organisation alone, to examine the way in which organisations incorporate (or not) the role of the 'concerned citizen', as championed by recent government policy statements (Clarke et al, 2007).

5.6.1 The research plan

With this in mind I needed to:

1. Identify the key players with whom I would engage, using known contacts and allowing those contacts to snowball.
2. Develop a survey of involved tenants to establish their overall profile, and their views on their experience.
3. Pilot the survey with a small group of tenants, make changes, and then agree the final questionnaire and approach with the school's ethics committee (HuSS).
4. Distribute the survey (in person and by mail), ensuring compliance with the individual data protection policies of each organisation, using verbal and written agreements. Input all data using SPSS and an Access database.
5. Develop a number of case studies:
   - ensure there is a reasonable mix of housing associations by size and type;
   - build electronic and physical files and record data on a spreadsheet;

- ensure that the process captures information on the shape of involvement and the experience of tenants and staff in each organisation and gives me an opportunity to explore dynamics as an observer or through interviews, and in my own association as a participant.

6. Continually evaluate, and adjust my plans as the research develops and material unfolds.

5.7   The research process

5.7.1   Gaining access to the key players

I had to approach organisations very carefully in order to gain permission to talk to their involved tenants. However, data protection issues created a significant barrier. I was generally prevented from accessing the names and contact details of involved tenants, although organisations interpreted the rules in different ways.   On the other hand, some organisations gave me access to a forum or panel meeting, at which I could introduce the research and asked tenants for their support. Within my own involvement network I approached chairs and other members of panels and forums to see if they could enable participation in the research. Although they were often keen to assist, this approach frequently took months, but in many instances successful contact was eventually made with the organisation in question.

Accessing staff and managers was more challenging, particularly in the early part of the research period. This became easier once I had established contact with the tenant participation workers' networks, and had started to undertake more consultancy work. I quickly used my existing networks to maximise my contacts, and my own landlord gave me access to staff within several regions across England. I attended conferences and used these opportunities to talk to staff in my study associations and to recruit from other organisations. As my consultancy work developed, managers became more accessible. I also built on the good contacts already established within my own association, and through my work on the Housing Corporation's Tenant Consumer Panel.

Between 2000 and 2003 my work on the Tenant Consumer Panel (a tenant advisory group) also gave me access to national policy makers. The panel worked with senior

staff within the Housing Corporation, the Home Office, and the Audit Commission. It was through this work that I had the opportunity to be part of two editorial boards for important pieces of research, one exploring the costs and benefits of tenant involvement in housing associations, leading to the publication of *Housing: Improving services through resident involvement* (Audit Commission, 2004), and the other exploring issues of governance in stock transfer housing associations, which led to the NHF publication of *Board effectiveness in transfer organisations* (2002).

The one group I could not access easily in the initial stages, for political and practical reasons, were the non-tenant board members i.e. the independent members and the local authority nominees who worked alongside the tenant board members. As a board member myself, I could not easily access board members of other associations because of the competitive nature of relationships between associations at that time. I really wanted to explore this part of the jigsaw, but my only opportunities were to listen to what tenants themselves said about other board members' attitudes, and observe what went on in the board of my own housing association. I recorded my observations on the papers as sessions proceeded. This approach was not technically covert, as all parties knew that I was undertaking research in this area. Over time, however, I think they forgot my research role, and this worked to my advantage, as I was able to observe the dynamics at play fairly untrammeled. I also found that mentally stepping into the researcher role during some of these meetings allowed me to maintain some clarity and poise in what were often highly charged situations. Once a year, however, I formally declared my position with the research and this was published on the association's website[7]. I felt that this was sufficient, and interestingly, one or two of the board members used to chide me about whether this work would ever be finished. It is worth noting, however, that later in the research period (from 2005 onward) I had the opportunity, through my consultancy work, to talk to other board members, and some

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[7] Each year Board members have to make a formal declaration of potential areas of conflict of interest, and submit a summary for publication on the association's website. As part of this process I was asked if I was still doing the research. and the organisations with which I was working.

chairs of boards, about their view of the involvement of tenants, their capacity to participate fully on a board and what they thought about the support tenants received.

5.7.2 Engaging with the key players

I was aware that I had to adopt different identities in order to gain the confidence and rapport of the various key players. When approaching tenants, I used my tenant credentials, which were very important in establishing their confidence, as problems surrounding trust of outsiders were common. I was often asked for whom I was working, or who was sponsoring the research, although some knew me from my national and local participation activities. Having established trust, I found that tenants were very candid, and liked to have 'off the record' chats, even taking me to another room to speak in confidence. The fact that I was funding my own research and was doing it for myself was viewed very positively. I often referred to my work as a 'project' or 'study' which I felt made it more accessible to others. I was considered part of the group and was expected to make the right noises about similar problems of staff and managers in my own housing association. I worked hard to remain as objective as possible, and was careful not to lead any conversations, though I did probe in order to understand tenants' comments more fully. I was aware of my ability to influence, and of my struggle between the role of an involved tenant, with many ideas and suggestions, and that of academic, observing what was going on.   However, I did my best to remain strictly in the role of observer and occasional information giver, and was careful never to get involved in the dynamics between the various parties. Although I was aware that even information giving would change the balance of power, I felt it necessary to give something, and to be supportive as a human being. Where I was fully involved as a participant my approach was completely different, as I was able to take full part in discussions, and took copious notes in meetings, and many interviews. There was no chance of taping sessions because of the sensitivities of participants. Even when I took notes in interviews, there were a number of occasions when tenants would say: "Don't write this down, but...". Much of the time in the interviews was spent listening to problems and issues of a personal nature and being asked for advice, which I gave on matters relating to housing management generally. I wrote up my notes as soon as I left the site to make sure that nothing was forgotten in the 'off the record' conversations, though I was careful not to attribute any information to individual sources.

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In contrast, when interacting with housing association staff I became the academic, and was very serious about exploring the problems organisations faced in sustaining effective participation and involvement. I used my networks (my Housing Corporation and housing association contacts, and the networks I had developed through my attendance at conferences) to establish contact with senior managers and chief executives, and thence to ask for access to their organisation, staff and involved tenants. I would go to housing-related social gatherings, and after a suitable period of socialising would say "I wonder if you can help me. I am doing this 'project' or 'study' on [if it was a confident housing association that thought it was good at tenant involvement] how housing associations manage participation. I am especially interested in good practice as many associations experience barriers. I am looking for those who may have overcome them. Could I talk to your tenants and tenant involvement staff?" If it was a housing association that was clearly struggling I would say "I am doing some research looking into the barriers to effective involvement and have been working with over 20 associations. If you let me include your organisation in my research, I can offer you general advice, but will not divulge information given to me by your tenants or staff". I would then get in touch with them about a week later. This approach was very successful. However, it took a long time to get through the bureaucracy of the Data Protection Act and eventually gain access to the involved tenants. One association knew me as an involved tenant and saw me as non-threatening – as a tenant doing a 'school project' of some sort. I overheard several rather patronising comments about 'Debbie's little bit of research' or 'her project for her college course' (17).

5.7.3 Selecting appropriate tools

As already stated at 5.5.1, I needed to conduct a survey in order to find out more about the profile of involved tenants and to compare this with available profiles of tenant populations as a whole. Early enquiries had revealed that housing associations did not keep any information on the characteristics of involved tenants, other than for tenant board members. The survey would also help me to explore other aspects of the tenant experience, as already indicated.

When it came to gathering information from housing associations, confidentiality was a major concern, and I put a great deal of effort into meeting with, and reassuring, senior

management about the approach I was taking. I was also aware that my research could inadvertently expose an association even if it was unnamed. I decided to take a case study approach, using a small group of matched peers, in order to make the data more representative. Eighteen associations were involved in all, including two large national traditional associations with geographically spread stock, two medium-sized regional associations (traditional) and fourteen medium-sized stock transfer associations. I decided not to look at small associations (under one thousand units), as their culture was distinctly different from the rest of the housing association sector[8]. Some of the housing associations that I was seeking to include asked me to do a small presentation to the tenants' panel on the aims of my research, which I did. I also met up with groups of tenant involvement staff. Where I was able to develop rapport with both tenants and staff, I decided that the housing association would work well as a case study, as I needed to be sure of a reasonable degree of co-operation. In particular, I needed to be sure that I could gain access to their strategies, policies, procedures and minutes. I was aware that if I only chose to work with those associations where staff were amenable, there would be a degree of bias in my sample, but this was counterbalanced to some extent by the cases I picked up through my consultancy work, where I had access, through more senior management, to a rather different set of departments.

In short I used a wide range of approaches in my work, some of which were not planned at the outset. These can be summarised as follows. My primary approach to tenant panels and forums was through the questionnaire survey, interviews with members, and observation. My primary approach to staff was through interviews, and observation of them at work. I also looked carefully at tenant involvement structures within each organisation and at the relevant documentation. My approach to managers was through interviews and observation.

5.7.4   Questionnaire development and distribution

When it came to designing the survey, I was keen to ensure that my methodology reflected the principles of ethnographical research, in terms of capturing the issues that

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[8] This was because of the differences in their resourcing, history and staff group size, and I felt that their inclusion was beyond the scope of my research.

were occurring on the ground. I therefore consulted five involved tenants, and enlisted their assistance in shaping the questions, to find out what was important from their point of view. I asked them what they saw as the barriers to effective involvement, and what was being talked about in involved tenants' circles generally. I ran two focus groups, one with the five tenants and one with one of the case study associations (11), using a meta-planning focus group method[9] to group participants' ideas and encourage them to indicate what they felt to be the most important issues. From this exercise, my own experience, the literature review, and my discussions with other consultants with specialist knowledge of tenant involvement, I was able to identify the general themes to be explored with tenants in the questionnaire. I was aware that I needed both quantitative and qualitative information from tenants, and so worked with my steering group to create open and closed questions, and opportunities for other comments. The group revealed that most previous surveys had used a tick box approach, with limited opportunities to add comments, and that some of the questions asked had had no meaning for them. This had meant that they were unable to communicate the issues that were important to them, and that they had been restricted to responding only on those issues that were important to the organisation developing the questionnaire.

Throughout the design phase of the questionnaire I had to devise methods of recording, coding and inputting the handwritten responses. For ease of analysis I decided to use SPSS for the quantitative questions and Microsoft Access for the qualitative information.

One of the challenges was to discover key information on educational attainment. I was particularly interested in the incidence of graduates and professionally qualified involved tenants, but did not want this to be obvious from the questionnaire as I knew that it would upset other tenants. I therefore listed a whole range of possible training and education experiences. The list served its purpose, but made the results more difficult to code and record.

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[9] A method of gathering views from focus group participants that requires them to answer two key questions about any given issue: 'what works well?' and 'what could be improved?'. The answers are written with large pens onto A5 'post it' notes or card, which are mounted on a large wall or board in themes which, after a discussion in the issues raised, are voted on for their relative importance.

I was also concerned that a written questionnaire format would exclude those for whom English was not their first language, those with literacy problems, and those with other particular needs and/or disabilities. However, I let tenants know, verbally and in writing, that the surveys could be completed over the telephone if required. This was organised through my lead point of contact in each organisation (a tenant or a member of staff). Feedback from tenants revealed that they had helped each other. Although this could have introduced a significant source of bias, I found a considerable diversity of responses between tenants within the same associations, suggesting that this was not a major cause for concern. I was only contacted twice for help with survey completion, and completed seven face-to-face surveys at conferences I attended.

The questionnaire was part of a range of methods used to elicit information from people and organisations, and therefore did not need to stand alone. At this stage I expected the return rate to be in the region of 25 per cent, as many associations were open about the problems they faced in getting tenants to take part in surveys. I was not deterred by this potentially low return rate because of the scope for triangulation with information from other sources, and because such data can throw up interesting results and lines of enquiry, even if it must be treated with caution. In fact, the response rate from individual associations was quite varied, ranging from 25 per cent in some organisations to 80 per cent in others, with an overall average of 57 per cent.

The questionnaire provided information in four main areas: the personal characteristics of involved tenants, which included economic status, age, gender, educational achievements, and the type of estate and property in which their home was located; information on current and past involvement activities; information on access to training and information; and information about barriers, successful outcomes and the positive and negative attributes of the staff supporting involvement work.

Before distributing the questionnaires, I piloted a draft with a small group of six involved tenants, and the comments that came back were incorporated into a revised version. Comments included practical information, such as numbering and formatting issues, as well as the inclusion of additional questions to make the survey more relevant and complete from a tenant's point of view. I also sent copies for comment to four specialist consultants in the field. I got much more feedback from the tenants, but it

should be borne in mind that consultants normally charge for their services, and I was asking for free advice.

The final questionnaire contained 85 questions across the four defined areas. Some questions were tick box; others were more open-ended, asking for examples, more information or comments. The questionnaire, together with the covering letter and introductory letter for housing associations (see Appendices A-C), along with my intended approach to managing and protecting the data, was then scrutinised by the University of Exeter school of Humanities and Social Science Ethics Committee. It was essential that the information, particularly on organisations, was kept confidential and that the Data Protection Act was observed when obtaining information on involved tenants. With this in mind, I decided to make my initial approach to tenants through the associations in the first instance, asking them if they were happy for the association to release their contact information to me. However, this proved to be impractical, because the process was taking up to six months, and involved a considerable amount of paperwork in order to comply with the Data Protection Act. I avoided this difficulty by asking housing associations if they would distribute questionnaires directly to involved tenants, along with a copy of the covering letter. This approach worked moderately well in those organisations that were themselves well organised. However, surveys could take months to be returned and the return rate was low. Another approach was to contact the tenants directly myself and get one of their leaders to take responsibility for distributing the questionnaire, but I had first to find these leaders. I did this by approaching people at the annual TPAS conference, whilst attending as a speaker or workshop leader, and this method worked rather better[10].

5.7.4.1 <u>Profile of associations and tenants reached using the questionnaire</u>

The questionnaire was distributed to 'involved tenants' in 2001-2, and was completed by 129 respondents from 22 housing associations. All of these were involved in a panel or forum, and 56 were either main board members, or in the case of the traditional associations, area or regional committee members (Table E5.1, Appendix E). These

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[10] With one association was able to get a tenant to take charge and recruit others in their association to participate. I otherwise got people to fill in the questionnaire over the three day period of the conference.

committees functioned as area boards, and hence the 56 board and committee members have all been referred to as board members for the purposes of the research, to distinguish between general involvement in the organisational structure and involvement in a formal governing role.

Of the 22 housing associations involved, three were 'traditional' housing associations and 18 were large scale voluntary transfer. However, the respondents were split fairly evenly between LSVTs (47 per cent) and traditional associations (53%). This was because there were a large number of respondents from one of the traditional housing associations (HA1) (47, of which 21 were area committee members). However, this association operated through, initially, relatively autonomous regions, which developed (from 2004) into separate companies, which in many respects had different cultures and functioned quite differently from each other, and the respondents were distributed across all nine regions (Table E5.2, Appendix E).

The housing associations were a mix of national, regional and more local associations, and were a mix of sizes. Three had more than 10 000 units of accommodation, although the large national association already referred to had significantly more, as did one of the others. Of the remainder, 16 had between three and five thousand units (the most common size of housing association, and prevalent amongst LSVTs), and the remaining three had between five and ten thousand (Table E5.3, Appendix E). The table below summarises the approach taken in relation to the twenty-two associations in which the survey was undertaken.

Table 5.1:   Questionnaire approach and outcomes

Number of HAs & surveys distributed	Method	Follow up	Outcome
14 associations 125 questionnaires	Personal contact with staff, followed by a letter, followed by a visit or posted parcel	5 x 3 follow up 3 x 4 follow up 8 months to complete	61 were returned from 10 associations: a return rate of 51% Codes (4, 5,7,8,11,17, 12,13,22,23,)
15 associations 25 questionnaires	Personal contact with the tenant at a conference or event. Gave each tenant one or two questionnaires, along with SAE envelopes.	4 had to be chased over a period of 3 months to obtain the returns	20 were returned from 11 associations: a return rate of 80% Codes (2,6,9,14,15,16,18, 19,20,3,10)
1 large association in 7 regions – 100 questionnaires	Contact through a central individual – letter to tenants sent requesting permission for the organisation to release names and addresses. All questionnaires sent directly to the tenants once permission had been granted.	Followed up once through all the forum and panel chairs. Took nearly 6 months to complete	All regions responded. 47 were returned: a return rate of 47%. Code (1) Regions/subsidiaries 1-7

From start to finish, the questionnaire took a year to develop, circulate and be returned, and it took a further six months to input the data. In all, 250 questionnaires were distributed and 128 were returned from 21 different landlords, an overall return rate of 57 per cent.

The initial data analysis was carried out in 2003, but as time progressed, further questions emerged for analysis, and because of technical difficulties in accessing the SPSS database, the data were eventually entered into an Excel spreadsheet and further analysed. In addition it should be noted that not every respondent answered every question.

As already indicated, the questionnaire was never intended to be a rigorous survey: I had to access involved tenants where I could, and rely to some extent on triangulation to test the quality of the information obtained. There were some obvious sources of potential bias: metropolitan associations were underrepresented, and a disproportionate number of associations were LSVTs, and were relatively small in size. A large number of tenants came from one organisation (47 - though this was mitigated by the heterogeneity and relative autonomy of the regions within that association)[11], and the number of respondents from the other associations varied between one and 11, though in most cases it was just a few. However, a wide range of associations were represented, including two very large national associations and a regional association, all with city properties within their portfolios.

Looking at the questions, in general they appeared to be well understood by respondents, and certainly the responses obtained were confirmed by the information from the case studies. However, I did discard three questions. First, a question about shareholders which had little meaning, not least because not all associations permitted shareholding amongst tenants (question 5). Two further questions were discarded because they were poorly worded and hence unreliable. These were question 10 about street properties and question 20 about tenant election. All in all, however, the questionnaire yielded rich data which was supported from a range of other sources,

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[11] However this did result in some skewing in relation to support for tenants, as described in Chapter 7

including the case studies, the review of inspection reports, and, where available, the emerging literature.

5.7.5   Case studies

Alongside the questionnaires, I felt that a form of case study approach would enable me to get beneath the surface of the organisations and build up a relationship of trust over a period of time. The research setting would be the premises of each housing association, which I would visit between four and seven times over the length of the research period. I would also spend considerable time on the telephone with, and e-mailing, staff and tenants.

The case study approach involved the following:

- a desktop review, looking at the overall structure of tenant involvement, along with the relevant strategies and policies. From this I was able to determine each housing association's approach and commitment to empowerment and involvement, through the language used in reports and the direction in which strategies had been developing. I was also able to assess whether their stated intentions were being delivered.

- interviews with both senior and frontline mainstream staff, along with specialist tenant involvement staff (also referred to as practitioners). From these I was able to assess the attitudes, knowledge and skills within the organisation, and whether the management and wider staff group were positive about tenant involvement.

- observation of meetings, and individual interviews with tenants, which enabled me to look at the dynamics between the tenants themselves, and explore their views of the barriers.

- follow-up interviews with the case study associations after a year to eighteen months, where I was able to gain access. This gave me an indication of how the housing association and tenants had moved on, highlighted any new challenges they faced, and demonstrated their capacity to deal with the previous barriers identified. In addition, eleven case studies were followed up after between two and five years, to see what had changed and whether the same tenants were still involved.

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- the standard questionnaire was also used in the early case study associations, where the timing of the case study coincided with the wider questionnaire distribution. This gave me a more rounded picture of the involved tenants' characteristics and views, in a comparable format across a range of housing associations. The questionnaire was not used in the later case studies because of the need to provide a snapshot within a given time frame. It was therefore used in eight of the seventeen case studies. It is important to remember, however, that its overall distribution was wider than the case study associations discussed in this section.

I was aware that the extent of my access was going to vary from one association to another, and in some instances I could only get very limited access to the housing association and its policies. In general my access was more limited in the early stages of the research, and improved as the research progressed. I also had to work within other constraints. Most projects of this size would have involved a team of researchers, yet I was working alone. In addition I had limited financial resources, as I was entirely self-funded. More positively, I achieved a great deal. Towards the end of the fieldwork I put together a matrix showing the level of penetration achieved in each housing association. This information is given in Electronic Appendix 4, and is summarised in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2   Case study approach: a summary (outlined in more detail in Electronic Appendix 4 and example of one case in more detail in Appendix J)

Org code	Type	Size	Activities undertaken (review = desktop review plus interviews with staff and tenants and observation)	Survey	Start	Finish
7	LSVT	Med	2 full reviews plus four visits for updates	Yes	2002	2008
1	Trad	Large	On-going throughout the period as a participant observation, focus on 2 regions & board plus reviews and stories	Yes	2000	2008
24	LSVT	Med	2 full reviews plus one update visit	No	2004	2008
25	LSVT	Med	1 full review plus four update visits –	No	2003	2008
11	LSVT	Med	2 full review plus four further update visits, the latter as a professional	Yes	2003	2007
26	Trad	Med	2 full review visits plus 3 further update visits the recent ones as a professional	No	2004	2008
23	LSVT	Small	2 full review visits 2002/2004 plus two further update visits 2005	Yes	2002	2005
17	Trad.	Med+	1 partial review in 2002 plus two full reviews in 2004 and 2007 and contact in between	Yes	2003	2007
5	LSVT	Med	3 full review visits as a professional	Yes	2004	2008
27	BME	Small	2 full review visits	No	2002	2006
22	LSVT	Med	2 full review visits 2003 and 2007 as a professional	Yes	2003	2008
28	LSVT	Large	Partial case study with 1 full review as a professional	No	2004	2005
32	LSVT	Med	Partial case study with 1 full review and one update all in 2005 as a professional	No	2004	2005
30	LSVT	Med+	Partial case study, HC inspection though with follow up after one year as a professional	No	2004	2005
31	LSVT	Med+	Partial case study with one 1 full review as a professional 2006-7 and follow up review 2007	No	2005	2007
4	LSVT	Small	Partial case study with 1 review 2001 with staff and tenants – halted due to staff changes	Yes	2002	2002
33	Trad.	Large	Partial case study initially 2002 , HC inspection plus 2 reviews and stories and coached staff there for one year in 2007 as a professional	No	2002	2007

As a result, it was possible to divide the case studies methodologically into two groups, according to the degree of penetration. The first group of eleven case studies involved:

- a desk top review

- the involved tenant questionnaire (for seven out of the eleven panels in this group);

- interviews with staff, managers and tenants;

- observation of meetings;

- follow-up meetings and further interviews with involved tenants and staff.

The second group of six case studies was restricted to a lower level of formal access, but included:

- initial participation in the formal inspection of services, with access to the inspection report, followed by some consultancy work after the 12 month 'no go' period had elapsed,

  or

- interviews with staff, possibly a desk top review, and observations of meetings over a short period, sometimes as part of consultancy work (but no involvement in their formal inspection);

- one panel in this group had also participated in the questionnaire.

Each case study involved a series of snap shot studies over a period of time, which for those in the first group provided a longitudinal view. Of the 17 associations, 12 were LSVTs, four were traditional associations and one was a BME association of 1 000 units. Two had over 19 000 tenancies, four had between 7 500 and 10 000 units and 10 had between 2 900 and 7 000 units.

5.7.5.1 <u>Management of case study material</u>

During the early part of the research much of the case study documentation was in hard copy. The material was filed chronologically, with a file for each association. Notes of meetings, along with my own comments, were included in the files. I also kept

electronic files assigned to each association, with some of my thoughts, and information sent to me in electronic format. Where I had access to minutes or reports these were kept in both types of file. Appendix J contains a sample list of the second level summary documents from one of the case files. Files were kept in a locked cabinet and details from them are referred to by code rather than name.

The information gained from the case studies was then entered onto a spreadsheet, which enabled me to see what had changed and how barriers were either addressed or allowed to persist. It was easy to follow the chronological journey of each organisation, and in the process of reading through these journeys I began to see recurring patterns in nearly all the case studies.

5.7.5.2 <u>Involvement at a national level</u>

It is easy enough to see the sense in looking at a distinct group of social landlords, and specifically, at their organisational involvement activities. At first glance, however, the reason for including national level tenant involvement initiatives is less obvious.

As a member of the Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel, however, I quickly realised that my experience was almost identical to that of a panel in a housing association, the only difference being the content of the business. I felt therefore that I had an excellent opportunity to explore whether the same barriers emerged in other tenant involvement arenas, and to test my thoughts about the way knowledge and power affect outcomes when the tenant group involved has higher status and more personal resources. Interestingly, at the start of this research the Housing Corporation was just becoming aware of the importance of tenant involvement, and the practical support and regulatory input that housing associations would need in order to develop their involvement structures. I decided to keep a record of my experiences with the Tenant Consumer Panel, and to discuss these with other members of the group, who had all been involved for rather longer than I. This led me to collate the information and present the issues elicited to the Housing Corporation, with a view to improving their involvement practices.

I then turned my attention to the new Housing Corporation inspectorate, which was involving tenants in inspection work, to see if it was operating in a similar way. Were

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they also creating barriers to involvement? Did their practices empower or disempower the newly recruited tenant inspectors? Recording the events and talking to those involved revealed some interesting similarities, which continued when the inspectorate transferred to the Audit Commission in 2004. I followed the journey of some of the tenant inspectors, and charted my own. I also talked to some of the professional staff at the inspectorate about their work with tenant inspectors, as I was particularly interested to see how their practices facilitated or disempowered the tenant inspector role. The extent of my recorded study of these groups is contained in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: National level tenant involvement case studies

Further case studies with regulator-led tenant involvement projects				
Housing Corporation Consumer Panel	Regulator	**Participant** observation of group dynamics and barriers and one review of barriers undertaken with the whole group and staff.	2000	2003
Housing Corporation and Audit Commission	Inspectorate	**Participant** observation of other tenant inspectors, discussions with full-time inspectors, and observation of how the organisations facilitated tenants to play their role. I continued to work with the inspectorate as a tenant inspector until its demise in 2010.	2002	2010

Was this a case of diluting my energy? I felt not, as although my study was of housing associations, if the very bodies that regulated their practices were replicating the same problems, this had to be relevant. Moreover, if the same patterns could be seen to emerge in a wider arena, my findings would be more obviously transferable to other settings.

5.7.6 Using inspection reports to triangulate my findings

By 2002, housing associations were expected to have a tenant involvement policy and related structures in place, and this was regulated through a new Regulatory Code and regulation process (Housing Corporation 2002). The context of tenant involvement was also changing as a result of the introduction of consumerist approaches to consultation, whilst the creation of the new stock transfer associations, with their requirement for more tenants on boards, perpetuated and enhanced the more traditional 'citizenship' approach reflected in the widespread use of panels and other tenants' groups. Thus my research environment was changing in response to the stock transfer agenda and this new inspection regime. In particular, the introduction of the inspection regime meant that the hitherto hidden part of involvement that I was investigating was becoming increasingly open to scrutiny, as inspection reports were placed firmly in the public domain, and I wanted to make best use of this opportunity.

As a result, I read and recorded all references to tenant involvement in 112 Housing Corporation and Audit Commission inspection reports (58 from 2002/3 and 54 from 2008). This enabled me to plot the changing face of tenant involvement as perceived by the inspectorate (using an Excel spreadsheet), and to compare their findings with my own (Appendix 5). I knew from my insider position as a tenant inspector that many of the more interesting aspects of the inspection findings were not getting into the published reports. I had direct experience of the negotiations that occurred in determining what would be included within an inspection report and what would not, and the types of judgements made by those responsible for carrying out the inspection. I also witnessed, in those early days of inspection, the level of negotiation that occurred between the inspectorate and the inspected association over what would be included in the final report.

The lack of a coherent style in report writing across the different parts of the Housing Corporation and Audit Commission inspectorates made extraction of the data very difficult. Indeed, different inspectorates across the country adopted different approaches and priorities, and I had to search the whole report across all service areas to pick up the issues relevant to tenant involvement. Nonetheless it was possible to identify some key themes (which were identified after the data was collected), and these

included in the 'what the inspectors said' sections in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. It was not until 2004 that specific guidance was developed for inspecting tenant involvement. This guidance, known as a Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE), became a driver in determining the shape of involvement in associations, and is an interesting area of study in its own right. However, in relation to my own work, I hoped that by analysing inspection reports in 2003 and 2008, it would become clear whether real changes had occurred in tenant involvement processes and outcomes and with what barriers to involvement other organisations and their tenants were wrestling. The majority of organisations were only inspected once every five years and thus I could only look at general themes across different associations over the period.

5.7.7 New challenges and opportunities

By early 2003, the majority of the questionnaires had been returned, and some of the problems relating to the survey were becoming evident. In addition there were questions that I wished I had thought of and others that were not answered. For example, I knew from my interviews that many involved tenants had a trade union background, but I had not thought to ask the question. I also wished I had not approached the question on economic status in such a complex way. I used up valuable question space where a more open-ended approach might have produced the same result far more economically. Nonetheless, at this point the information I had gathered overall was showing me the following:

- the profile of involved tenants from 80 questionnaires

- how the housing associations planned and delivered tenant involvement opportunities in 2003/4

- what the inspectors' expectations were for tenant involvement services at 2002/3

- information about the tenant experience of working with staff in organisational settings (from the questionnaire)

- my observation of tenants and staff during involvement activities

The initial returns from the questionnaire, and the information from the inspection reports, were not giving me sufficient data to answer all my questions. Typically,

housing associations had only a few tenants who were fully engaged[12] in the formal structure - perhaps six - including maybe three on the board, out of a total, generally, of eight to ten members. Of these, maybe three or four would complete the questionnaire. Of the 80 early responses, 30 were from the one large housing association (though from seven distinct regions and subsidiaries). I continued to look for new housing associations to take part. I also started to develop contacts with BME housing associations to see if I could talk to some of their tenants. Using existing contacts, and through my participation in key conferences, I was finally able to raise the number of completed surveys to 128.

Towards the end of 2003 I gained access to the draft research findings of the Audit Commission's (2004) work on assessing the costs and benefits of tenant involvement. These indicated that boards of, in particular, stock transfer associations, were unhappy about the calibre of tenant representatives, especially those on boards, and particularly where these people were elected rather than selected. I was on the steering group that guided this research, and I realised that there were distinct difficulties surrounding the role of these tenants. Were they lobbyists or strategists? Were they experts and/or representatives? Whose expectations were driving these roles? Did they fully understand what was expected of them and was that expectation appropriate? Interestingly, very little was said about the capacity of staff to facilitate that involvement, the quality of training and support, or what the tenant agenda might be.

In addition, from the case studies, and in particular my observation of meetings, it became apparent that the differences in self-presentation and the use of language between tenants and staff were influencing the way in which professionals perceived the performance and roles of tenant participants. Staff were often dismissive of tenants who did not dress well or who were not always clean; who spoke in the vernacular rather than the language of the organisation; who butted in or went off at a tangent; did not understand what people were asking of them; told jokes; talked about history and the personal details of others; were emotional or had learning difficulties. Staff were

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[12] By 'fully engaged' I mean those who attended the meetings regularly and actively participated in the business of the meetings

clearly far more comfortable with people who could 'fit' with the organisation's way of doing things.

I also found that tenants, in particular, had a great deal to say about their experience of tenant involvement, and although I had not considered the use of narratives in my initial research plan, it looked like a potentially rich source of material. Moreover, there had recently been renewed interest in this method within the social sciences generally, and I could see that such narratives would be useful in organising information over time and space. For example, it could involve tenants and/or staff writing about a meeting or a series of meetings, providing information that would be hard for me to capture in any other way. Importantly, it could create a picture of a series of events where the significance of each event could be best understood through its relationship to the whole, thereby helping me to understand the meaning attributed to those events by the parties involved. Lewis (2008), quoting Bron and West (2000), pointed out that 'the stories people tell, from such a perspective, are not isolated, individual affairs but reflect and constitute the dialectics of power relations and competing truths within the wider society' (Bron and West, 2000: 159). Lewis goes on to outline the positive elements that such stories bring to social policy research - the high level of historical depth and ethnographic detail - which can re-write certain histories that may have been subsumed under the narratives of the more powerful actors or organisations. It also brings an event to life through bringing what Gertz (1988) refers to as a 'being there' quality, and therefore works to counterbalance any potential for over-generalisation. Moreover, it helps researchers to avoid an over-reliance on concepts and models that seek to explain social reality in simplistic non-grounded ways that do not reflect lived experiences. Finally, Lewis points out that the life history approach can help to reinforce the humanistic tradition in social science, and the method places a primary emphasis on trying to understand experience and meanings from the point of view of those involved (Lewis, 2008).

As a result I decided to use this method in relation to an interesting event that I encountered across three of the study sites. It was an issue in which I was myself involved, in my role as a panel member. In consequence I asked a number of individual tenants, and an ex-member of staff, to write their story for me in their own words. Only five people agreed out of the twenty that I asked, and it took many months for them to

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fulfil their promises, but the information they provided proved to be a rich source of material. The information gained was added to the case study material, see (Appendix K). Meanwhile, I was becoming increasingly aware of the hierarchy within tenant panels and forums and, in more subtle ways, on housing association boards. I also noticed that experienced involved tenants, and the office-holders on panels and forums, appeared to be more comfortable in an organisational setting and were happy to talk to me at the housing association offices, whereas many of the others I interviewed preferred to meet in their own homes or in a public place e.g. a public house. I made a point, therefore, of ensuring that I met with people in locations where they would feel at ease.

The longitudinal nature of my study (as long as seven years in some instances) enabled me to explore the fragility of tenant involvement structures in the face of external reorganisation. This was particularly noticeable in larger organisations with group structures that had a variety of subsidiaries. It was also apparent in medium-sized housing associations that were trying to grow. I was able to plot the events and the actors that led to an almost complete collapse of tenant involvement in one of the case study associations over a period of three years. This is one of the instances where I particularly wanted the personal stories, both from staff and involved tenants, so that I could examine and analyse this process in detail from all points of view. Changes in staffing and structures also created real difficulties for this aspect of my research, and in some instances I found that I no longer had access to an association.

When I carried out the literature review at the beginning of the study there were significant gaps in the understanding of this type of tenant involvement. Towards the middle of the research period, a body of research emerged that focused on organisational rather than community level involvement, and was housing association based (Beckford et al, 2003; Audit Commission, 2004). This was exciting for me, as they offered insight into some of the housing associations that I was not investigating, and indicated findings that were similar my own.

These research projects were descriptive in style, elucidating general themes and issues. However, they highlighted significant issues that were emerging from tenant involvement in governance, a previously unexplored area. This had not been a

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particular issue in the past because tenants did not have any statutory or regulatory right to be involved in the governance of traditional housing associations, although a number of housing associations did have one or two tenant board members. Stock transfer associations, however, had brought with them embedded rights and expectations for tenant involvement in a range of activities, and notably, rights to a substantial level of representation on the board. This was significant in changing the landscape and culture of housing association governance during the research period. The findings from these studies showed me that I was not operating in a vacuum, and indicated that there were issues to be addressed if tenants were to become successfully involved in governance and other organisational activities.

5.7.8 The opportunities presented by my changing role during the research period

My initial research plan included a survey and a number of case studies, where I was openly the researcher. However, as my role and identity changed from involved tenant to 'an involved tenant who was also a consultant', the scope of my research was also able to expand. I was now being paid to intervene in the undertakings of organisations with a view to changing or improving things, especially in the areas of tenant involvement and governance. This enabled me to get closer to areas in organisations that had hitherto been hidden: for example, I was able to talk to board members and more senior managers.

Specifically – and although I had not planned at the outset to become a consultant - this work was putting me in a position where I was exposed to a range of data which had not been generated by formal research methods, but rather by my own activities as a consultant. I took on professional work that required immersion in organisations, taking on the role of fixer or facilitator in tenant involvement and other key service areas. In this situation, I had to find a way of encouraging my clients to assist with my research, as the material gained would clearly be greatly beneficial. Given the delicacy of the situation, I did not ask organisations for their agreement until I had established a firm rapport, as this was essential to ensuring a continuing relationship. Moreover, I never approached tenants in these associations without the organisation's permission. That said, most organisations were keen to give me reasonable access. Conversely, when

contacting tenants I made it clear *from the outset* that I was undertaking research and that their experiences were of interest to me, and for the most part they were supportive. In some cases they were surprised that I was a tenant and thrilled that a tenant was doing this kind of research.

A more challenging situation occurred when I started inspecting organisations in the area of tenant involvement, initially as part of the Pathfinder pilot inspections in 2001, when I was invited to become involved by the Housing Corporation, and subsequently as a tenant inspector in the new inspection regime introduced in 2002. This role was designed to provide an avenue for tenants to be involved in the work of the regulator, and I felt that this opportunity would give me more insight into the shape of tenant involvement as a whole across the sector. This it did, and the more I became involved, the more I became acutely aware of all the aspects of housing management and service delivery in which tenants were not involved at all. These inspections revealed to me considerable variation in the level and scope of involvement across the sector, despite the similarity of formal involvement structures across associations. Housing associations had their full reports published and were compelled to respond to the recommendations made, and for many, compelled also to improve their involvement opportunities and practice.

This work generated rich data, none of which I could use as evidence because of the confidentiality agreement I had signed. Despite that, the experience continually informed my view that tenants and organisations across the social housing sector were struggling to develop involvement. Over the research period I inspected many more organisations than I was able to do case studies, including the inspection of local authorities and other agencies, all of which were trying to develop and embed involvement with their service users. I became increasingly certain that some barriers were persistent and that, even if addressed, they were likely to return as organisations and staff changed over time. Paradoxically, although I was not permitted to use material from inspections directly, I was able to include the inspection report in my case file, as these were public documents. Moreover it was not uncommon, after the

required 12 months had elapsed[13], for associations to invite me back as a consultant to help them improve services. At this point there was the opportunity to include the association in my case study portfolio. However, I only did so twice, as by this time I already had a sufficient number of case studies.

It is my belief that my changing identity (and indeed the multiple identities which others perceived me to have) enabled my research to become more balanced. My professional work as a consultant (working in a variety of housing organisations) gave me an opportunity to get closer to the psyche of the corporate culture of housing organisations, and to start to look at the roles and attitudes of staff as individuals. I started to listen fully to what people were saying to me, without filtering their comments through my early held beliefs, which I had developed in my role as an involved tenant in one organisation. I was also able to understand more comprehensively the external pressures and expectations placed on housing associations by regulatory bodies such as the Housing Corporation, and how the changing orientation of the Housing Corporation had affected the associations' culture(s). Gradually I was perceived as a sort of insider, both within the associations through my consultancy role, and within the tenant involvement community through my participation in tenant involvement bodies, and indeed in the Housing Corporation itself, over the three years that I worked with them in an advisory capacity on the Consumer Panel (2000-2003). I became less 'political' and more practical about achieving my ends. My consulting and my research work started to inform each other - I was completely immersed in the housing association sector. However, it was important for me, whatever my role at the time or however I was perceived, to remain focused on the factors that blocked or supported the empowerment and successful involvement of tenants. My various roles are summarised in Table 5.4 below.

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[13] This was (at that time) the time limit set by the Corporation after which inspectors could take consultancy work with associations that they had inspected. This practice changed after 2005, when the Audit Commission took over the inspection of housing associations, and new 'conflict of interest' rules were established.

Table 5.4   My changing role over the research period

Role	Dates
Involved tenant (housing association board and panel)	2000-2008
Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel member	2000-2003
Tenant inspector with the Housing Corporation and Audit Commission inspectorates	2001- 2004 2004-2010
Member of editorial board for Audit Commission/Housing Corporation commissioned good practice guide 'Housing: improving services through resident involvement' (2004)	2003-2004
Member of editorial board for Housing Corporation funded publication 'Board effectiveness for transfer organisations' published by the NHF	2002
Housing consultant	2003- present

5.8   Organising the data and writing the research narrative

My next task was to organise the data and identify general themes, in order to make sense of what was a very large quantity of data. It was possible that the data would reveal further areas that I would like to investigate, but I was also aware that I had to stop collecting data at some point. Although I had themed the barriers to participation following the literature review, I was not sure how, or indeed whether, the data would fit within this structure. I was aware that I needed to resist the pull to tie things up neatly to produce a coherent text, as that would be likely to distort what had really happened. I had, however, answered one of my main questions: the characteristics of involved tenants.

At the same time I was thinking about how to write the research narrative, and more specifically, how I was positioned as the writer and interpreter of the data. Foley (1998) describes an approach that is a

> useful solution for reducing the sense of 'abstractedness', bringing out the voice of the writer - using the first person, balancing out the theory and reference to literature with personal experience, revealing personal 'interpretive perspective' in 'an autobiographical style' and reporting specific events and actual personal encounters rather than composite typifications. (Foley 1998:112)

This resonated with me. I knew that I would write in general themes, and I wanted to use my respondents' words, and my observations and experience in the setting, to expand my narrative and bring it to life. I did not, however, want my voice to be too dominant. Much of the research that I had been involved with as a tenant representative, in a steering group or editorial capacity, was done by government agencies, where much of the rich data and the 'hot' issues were, in my opinion, edited out in favour of snappy, accessible information that was generally positive about, and supportive of, professional practice. My database of the qualitative information from the questionnaires had been created in the language of the respondents, and this meant that I could now print a report of the responses to each question using the words of the tenants. This was important to me, as the voice of the involved tenant had not been heard in other research in this field, although the voice of the staff, and especially that of the regulator as sponsoring body, was very clearly presented.

The Audit Commission's study of the costs and benefits of tenant involvement (2004) was the first to go out and talk to groups of people involved in tenant participation (including tenants themselves), to use tenants to monitor and discuss the incoming data, and to explore some of the issues more deeply. In addition, researchers had the explicit aim of getting data from a range of sources over a wide range of associations (not just survey information) - a positive step in methodological terms within the sector. However, although there were involved tenants on the editorial group (of which I was one), it was heavily dominated by professionals and academics, and the Housing Corporation, as sponsor, controlled the way in which the findings were organised, essentially determining what should go into the report.

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Above all I wanted my research to contain a balance between all the actors within the tenant involvement arena, to strive for objectivity whilst remaining aware of the agendas that might influence my findings, and to be distinctive in my use of organisational theory to elucidate what was going on and how relationships and outcomes could be enhanced. Through the case studies and the questionnaire I was able to capture the views of those involved and observe many of the issues of concern being played out in organisations over time. All comments and activities were coded by organisation to facilitate the tracking of information.

5.9   Concluding comments

Looking back at the key research questions, and the objectives that I derived from them, I feel that my chosen methodology gave me sufficient data across a number and diversity of organisations to demonstrate the barriers to successful involvement, and importantly, to give me information about why these barriers persisted. This data then proved highly suitable for use with my chosen theoretical model to elucidate and explain the issues that I had encountered. An unintended but beneficial development was the extended length of time that I was able to maintain contact with some of my case study associations (resulting from periods of ill-health during the research process), which meant that I was able to appreciate more fully the way group dynamics and the involvement structures of housing associations developed over the longer timescale, and how issues recurred over time. Observing these processes over an extended period greatly enhanced my understanding of the culture of associations.

It is now time to look at the findings generated from this work. The following three chapters explore these across a range of emerging themes

CHAPTER SIX: DIVERSITY AND CAPACITY

6.1   Introduction

The next three chapters present the findings from the four main research sources: the
questionnaire, the case studies, the national comparator case studies (of three specific
national bodies with which I was involved), and an analysis of Housing Corporation and
Audit Commission inspection reports. This chapter outlines the characteristics of
involved tenants, their capacity (by which I mean their skills, competencies and/or
abilities), and the barriers to them getting and/or staying involved. The data in this
chapter, where appropriate, have been set against the Housing Corporation's (2006)
report on housing association tenants (based on data gathered in 2004), and the Hills
report (2007) on the profile of social housing tenants in general (based on data gathered
in 2006). Chapter seven will look at the structure of involvement, the policy
framework, the capacity of staff, and the support in place for involved tenants. The
following chapter will explore what happens in practice, in terms of the outcomes and
the dynamics.

6.2   The characteristics of involved tenants

6.2.1   Where the involved tenants came from: type of accommodation and size of estate

From the questionnaire it was apparent that the majority of tenants (74%) were living in
general needs housing, 25 per cent in sheltered housing and 1 per cent in supported
housing for people of working age with specific housing-related support needs (Table
E6.1, Appendix E). Of these the majority lived on small estates, with 60 per cent living
on estates of 50 units of accommodation or less and 74 per cent on estates of 100 units
or less (Table E6.2, Appendix E).

6.2.2 Gender, age and economic activity

Analysis of both the questionnaire and case studies showed that there were more women than men involved at panel or forum level. In the case of the questionnaire (128 tenants from 22 associations), 57 per cent of panel and forum members were women (Table E6.3, Appendix E). In the case studies (187 tenants across 17 associations) there was a similar split, with 58 per cent of panel and forum members being women (Table E6.4, Appendix E). This compares with a 50:50 gender split for 'household reference persons[14]' in social housing in 2001-2 (Labour Force Survey 2001-2).

From the questionnaire, an analysis of participation by age indicated that the distribution was heavily skewed towards older people, with the median age being 56-65, and only 17 per cent being under 46. People under 35 were particularly poorly represented. An analysis of gender by age revealed that the men involved were particularly likely to be between the ages of 56 and 75, whereas women tended to more evenly spread across the age groups, with the exception of the under 36s (Fig. 6.1). However, amongst the younger age groups there appeared to be consistently more women getting involved than men, as was the case also for the over 75s. (See also Table E6.5, Appendix E).

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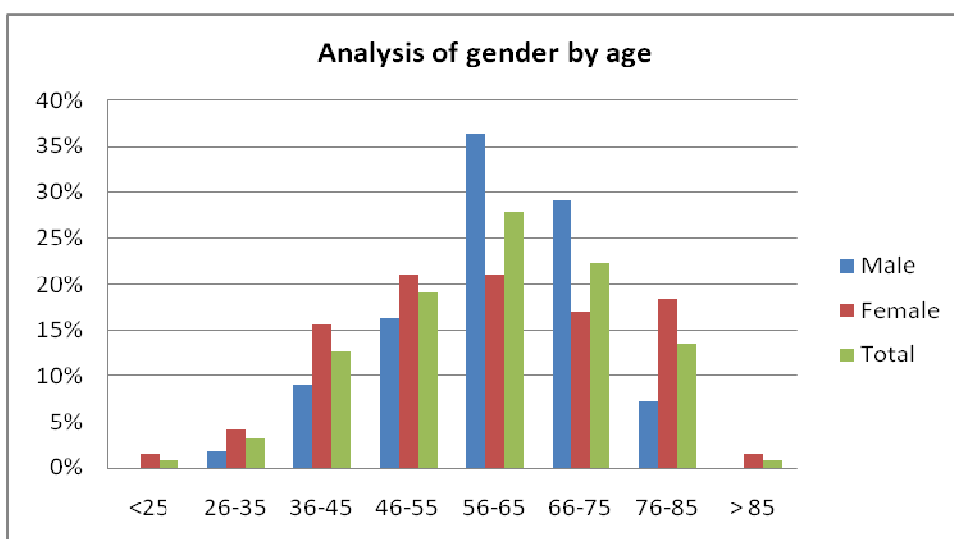
[14] The household reference person must be a tenant. Where there is more than one tenant, the reference person will be the one with the higher income. If incomes are equal, the older person will qualify.

Figure 6.1 Analysis of questionnaire respondents by gender and age

Information from the case studies further supported the age imbalance of panels and forums. Of the 17 groups, eight were all over 55, and eight had one or two members under 55. Only one panel had managed to buck this trend, with six out of nine members under 55.

Interestingly, this overall age distribution is not representative of the housing association population as a whole. As can be seen from Figure 6.2, residents of housing associations in 2004 were relatively evenly spread across the age groups (Housing Corporation 2006), as were social housing residents in 2006, though with relatively small numbers under 21 and over 87 (Labour Force Survey cited in Hills 2007). In contrast the questionnaire respondents were heavily weighted towards the over 40s[15] (see summary data in Table E6.6, Appendix E). The age profile of involved tenants in the case study organisations was broadly similar to that of the questionnaire respondents.
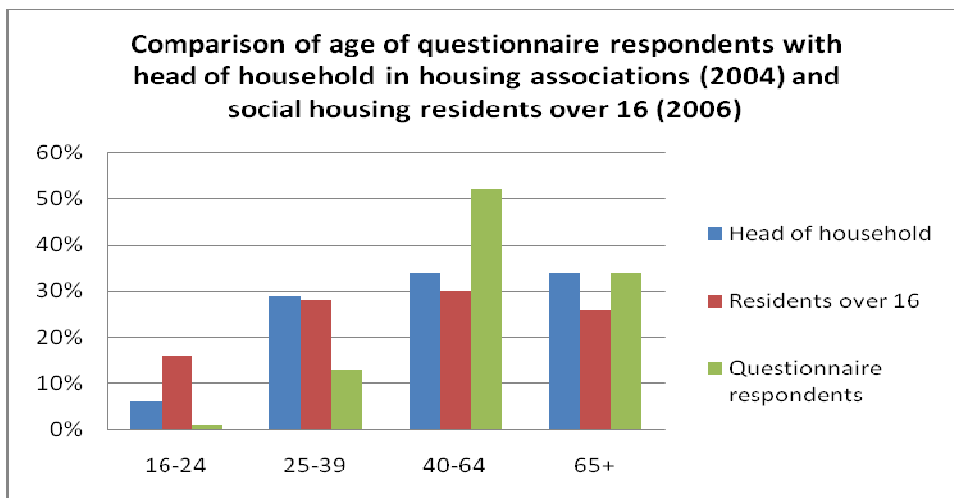
Figure 6.2: Comparison of age of questionnaire respondents withi head of household in housing associations (2004) and social housing residents over 16 (2006) [16]

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[15] From what is known more specifically about the age distribution of the questionnaire respondents, this is likely to be more weighted towards the over 50s

[16] Source of comparative data: Housing Corporation (2006); Hills (2007)

Only 17 per cent of questionnaire respondents were in paid work of any type (full- or part-time), and all of these had dependents and considered themselves to be the main provider for their household. The type of work they were involved in was varied, ranging from accounts manager to van driver - a complete list is given in Table E6.7, Appendix E.

Tenants not in paid work were asked to tick all the boxes that applied within a range of possible circumstances. As shown in Table 6.1, the vast majority were either retired or were unable to work due to ill health or disability. Of the remainder, nearly all had caring responsibilities.

Table 6.1: Analysis of the status of respondents not in paid work

Tenants at home	No.	%
Parent with working partner	2	2%
Single parent	7	5%
Partnered couple caring for children	7	5%
Foster carer	1	1%
Caring for adult family member	8	6%
Job seeker	4	3%
Student	3	2%
Retired	69	54%
Unable to work due to ill health or disability	27	21%

From Figure 6.3 it can be seen that the questionnaire respondents were disproportionately retired, and to a lesser extent, more likely to be of working age with a disability, whilst the economically active tended to be substantially under-represented, as were lone parents (Table E6.8, Appendix E). It is worth noting that Hills commented on the growing numbers of lone parents in social housing (18 per cent in 2006), and the increasing number of women over 60. From the case study material I found that the younger members (under 40) generally had young families, or were caring for family members with a disability (1.1, 1.2, 7), or had disabilities themselves (1.1).
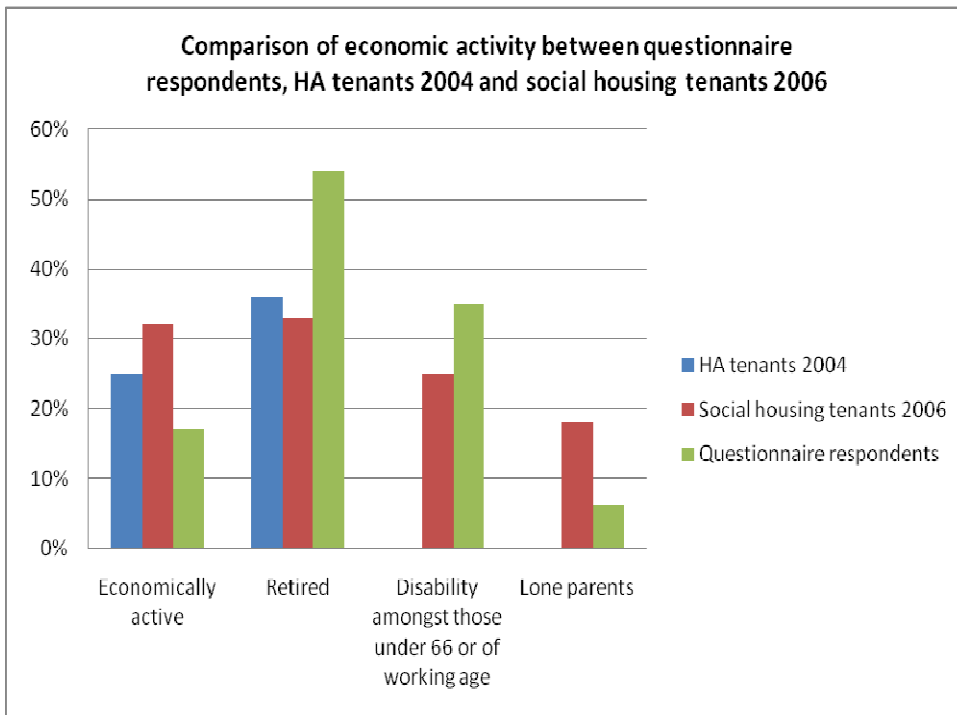
Figure 6.3: Comparison of economic activity between housing association tenants in 2004, social housing tenants in 2006, and questionnaire respondents

6.2.2.1 The chairs of panels and forums: gender and age

The case studies yielded 18 chairs of panels/forums. From Figure 6.4 it can be seen that the overwhelming majority of these were older (55+) men. In fact 14 of the 18 (78 per cent) were men, of whom only one was under 55. Of the four female chairs again only one was under 55.
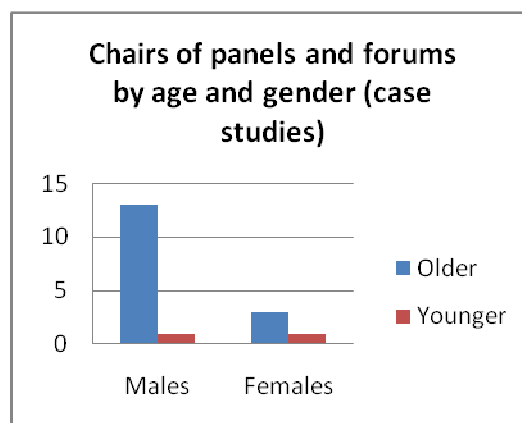
Figure 6.4: Chairs of panels and forums (from the case studies) analysed by age and gender

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6.2.3 Ethnicity

Ninety-four per cent of the questionnaire respondents classified themselves as white British. Only seven identified themselves as being from a minority ethnic group: four Irish, one Indian, one white/Asian mixed heritage and one White/Black Caribbean mixed heritage. Although many of the associations in this study were located in rural areas, which might be expected to have a relatively low presence of tenants from minority ethnic groups, this was not the case for all the organisations. Two associations had substantial stock located, coincidentally, in both London and Leeds, and four others had significant stock in urban areas close to London.

It was a similar story in the case study groups, where there was only one person from a minority ethnic group across all the associations at the start of the research, and that was a board member from a BME association[17]. By 2004 the total number had increased to two. There was still only one association with a tenant from a BME background on a board (and that was again a BME association), and only one other that had BME tenants on the panel. While, again, many of the associations that participated in the case studies operated in predominantly rural areas, this was by no means true of all of them. Two had extensive stock within metropolitan areas (1, 28), while a further four had some stock within cities (33, 4, 17, 26). Yet even these had a preponderance of elderly white tenants on their panels, forums, and boards. By 2008, the number of BME tenants involved in panels and forums within the case study associations had increased to eight, none of which were board members, and this was made up as follows: three Asian or Asian mixed race; two South African; one American; one West African; and one white mixed race.

Yet people from black and minority ethnic groups are over-represented in social housing compared with white households. Hills reported that 27 per cent of black or minority ethnic householders were social tenants, compared to 17 per cent of white households, and this level rose to 51 per cent for Bangladeshi and 43 per cent for black Caribbean and black African households (Hills 2007). I do not know the precise ethnic

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[17] 'BME housing associations' were originally set up in local communities to meet the housing needs of specific communities.   To qualify as a BME association they must have at least 80 per cent of their board members derived from BME communities. (ODPM, 2004)

make-up of the social housing tenants in the case study associations, but where I had indicative information from the association (collected from Census data), the ethnic mix of panels and forums did not reflect the local tenant population.

Information about ethnicity was primarily collected through CORE data[18], but this had given the organisation information on new tenants only, whereas the majority of the tenant community had been in situ for many years. The only method used to find out *their* ethnicity had been through a three-yearly written survey, known as STATUS (the Standardised Tenant Satisfaction Survey), which is sent to a sample of tenants, and is then used to calculate, amongst other things, the makeup of the stock and its tenants. However, the survey was only conducted in a written format, and the information obtained was generally skewed towards older white tenants. Until 2010 it was a statutory requirement to carry out this survey. That said, many organisations have continued to undertake this regular survey, and whilst a few have moved away from a written format, the majority continue to send it out as they have always done, in written format alone.

6.2.4 Disability and unfitness for work

Forty-seven per cent of questionnaire respondents considered themselves to have a disability, and 25 per cent were unable to work through disability or long term sickness. (Table E6.9, Appendix E)

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[18] **CORE (COntinuous REcording)** is a national information source funded jointly by the Tenant Services Authority (formerly the Housing Corporation) and the Department for Communities and Local Government, that records information on the characteristics of both housing association and local authority new social housing tenants and the homes they rent and buy.
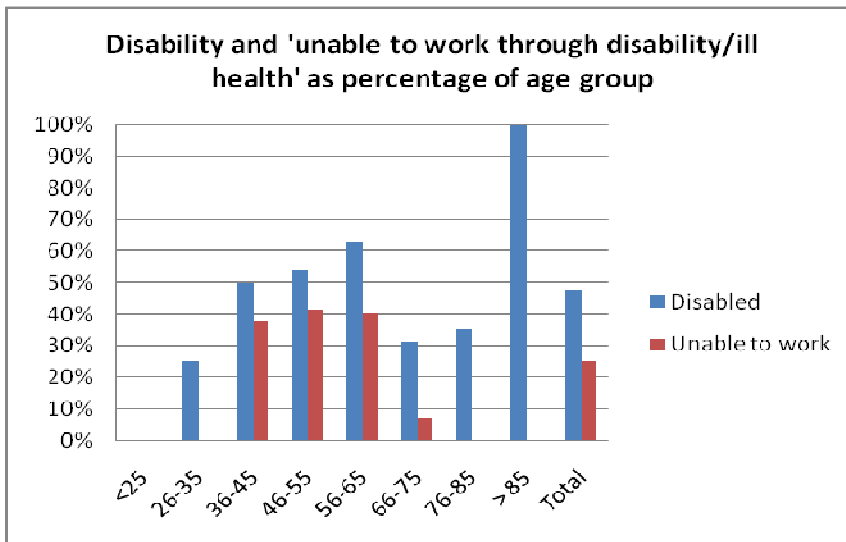
Figure 6.5: Percentages of questionnaire respondents defining themselves as disabled and/or unable to work through disability or ill health

Figure 6.5 shows the breakdown of these figures by age group, indicating a very high level of disability and sickness in the 36 – 65 age group (the numbers in the under 35 group and the over 85 group are too small to draw any useful conclusion). Amongst the case study groups the level of disability overall was 54 per cent, with a range from 33 per cent to 67 per cent between different associations (Table E6.10, Appendix E). This is again high compared with social housing tenants as a whole, using the data cited in the Hills report for comparison (see Figure 6.3 above page 183). It should be noted that I do not know the types of disability within these groups, but it would seem likely that some types of disability will be seriously under-represented - for instance those with major sensory disabilities, who use wheelchairs, or who have learning disabilities: for example, there was only one wheelchair user across all the case study associations. It is important, therefore, not to assume that a high level of disability amongst involved members means that there are not barriers for people with certain types of disabilities.

This high level of representation of disabled people is reflected in a correspondingly high awareness of disability issues in relation to housing, meaning that I observed a strong stance being taken over disabled adaptation issues in many panels and forums . It should be borne in mind, however, that whilst awareness of physical disabilities appeared high, the needs of those with mental health issues or learning disabilities may be less commonly understood.

6.2.5 Length of tenancy and involvement with the association

From the case studies I found that 75 per cent of the involved tenants had been a tenant of their association for more than five years. Moreover, from the questionnaire data it was apparent that many had been actively involved with their landlord at an organisational level for some considerable time: over 80 per cent had been involved for two or more years, 38 per cent for more than five years and 14 per cent for more than ten. (Table E6.11, Appendix E)

6.2.6 Level of education and training

The questionnaire respondents were presented with a list of types of education and training and were asked to tick the descriptors that applied. The outcome of this is shown in Figure 6.6 (see also Table E6.12, Appendix E).
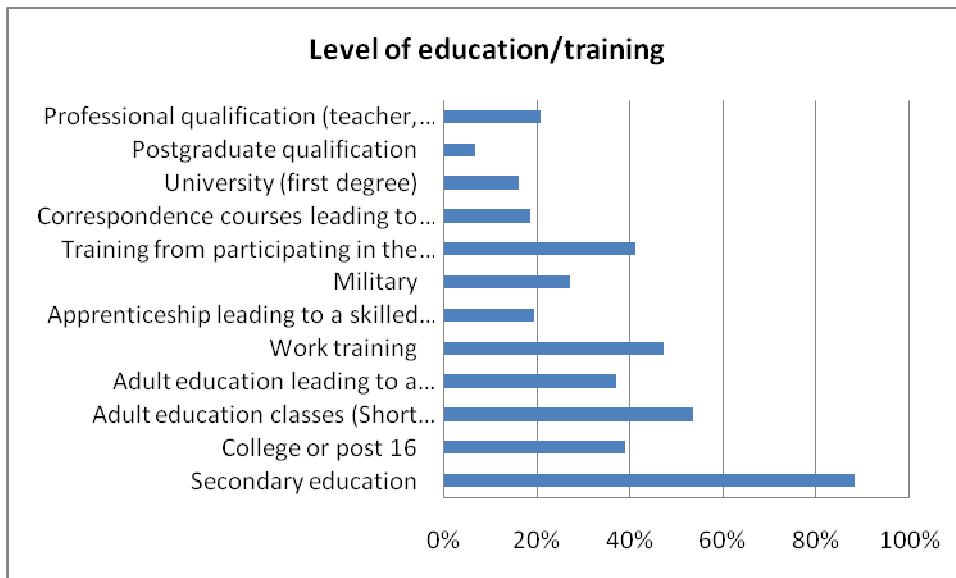
Figure 6.6: Analysis of types of education and/or training undertaken

These figures show a high level of involvement in post-16 education and training activity through adult education, correspondence courses, work and housing association activity, and also a relatively high level of respondents with degrees, postgraduate education and professional qualifications, demonstrating both an active interest in

learning new skills and information, and a significant capacity amongst tenants, which may be unrecognised and therefore untapped.

6.2.6.1 Higher level qualifications

Further analysis showed that 34 respondents (28 per cent) had a 'higher level qualification' (i.e. a first degree, postgraduate qualification or professional qualification), 26 per cent had a military background and 19 per cent had undertaken an apprenticeship (bearing in mind that there will be some overlap between these groups). I wanted to know how this manifested across gender and age, and whether graduates were concentrated in one or two associations or were fairly randomly spread.

Looking first at those with 'higher level qualifications', the data showed that whilst the spread was fairly even across age groups for men (from age 36 to 85), women with higher level qualifications were particularly highly represented amongst younger women (in the 36-45 age group), where 70 per cent of the women fell into this 'higher level qualification' group, although they were also quite well represented in older age groups. This is illustrated in Figures 6.7-8. (See also Appendix E Table E6.13).
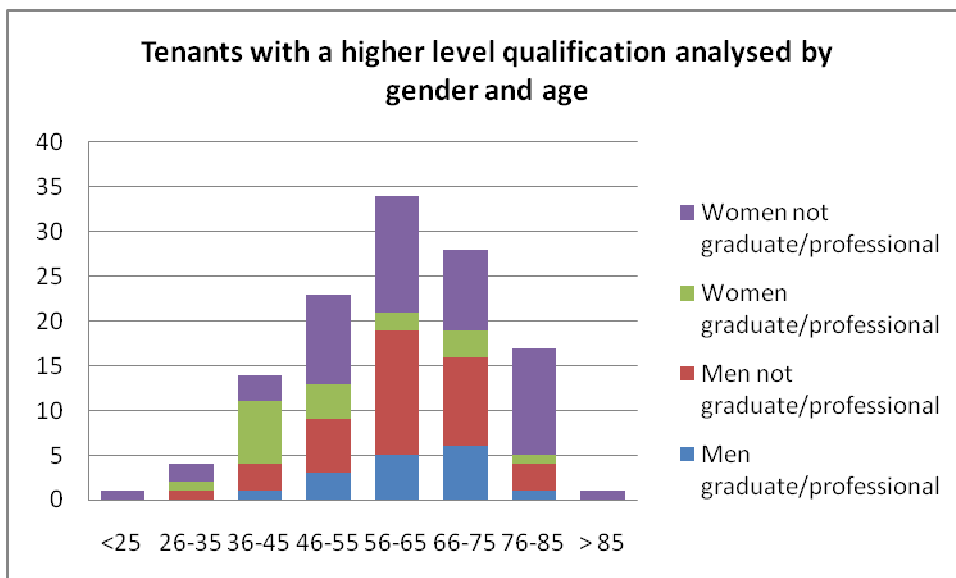
Figure 6.7: Tenants with a higher level qualification analysed by gender and age
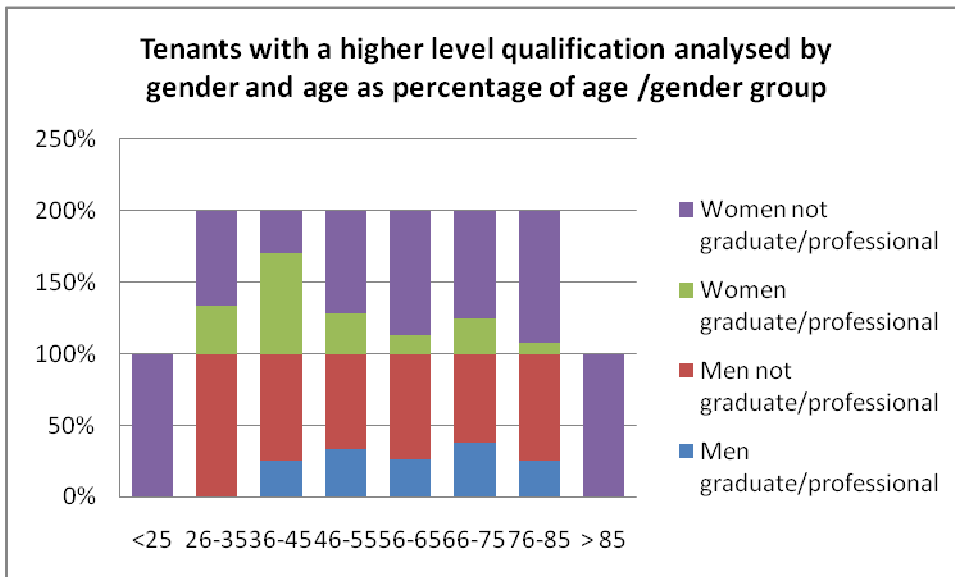
Figure 6.8: Tenants with a higher level qualification analysed by gender and age as percentage of age/gender group

In general the 'higher level qualification' group seemed to be well scattered across the associations, and across the regions of the large traditional association HA1. There were three instances where there appeared to be a particular concentration of graduates, but it was impossible to know whether those who responded were typical of the panel or forum as a whole, or indeed what the overall size of the panel or forum was.

6.2.6.2 Military background

Half of the men had a military background, and there was a significant overlap between these and other educational groups, with half of the male graduates having a military background and 60 per cent of those that had served apprenticeships (33 per cent of all men). In contrast, only 6 per cent of women had a military background and 10 per cent had served apprenticeships. Only one woman had both.

The high level of military background amongst men was hardly surprising given the age distribution of male involved tenants, many of whom would have experienced conscription, and this was confirmed by an analysis of military background by age (Table E6.14, Appendix E).

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6.2.6.3 <u>Findings from the housing association case studies</u>

In the case study associations I also found a much higher number of people with degrees and professional qualifications than I had expected. This was clearly a potential resource for associations, yet when, in 2007, I discussed this with managers and staff in two of the associations (1, 11), it became evident that it had never crossed their minds to think about skills and resources in this way. Indeed, several members of staff said that they felt they had inadvertently stereotyped both tenants and older people, and that this had affected the way in which they worked with the panels and forums. However, some of the more 'militant activists' (self-described, 1) were convinced that staff would feel threatened if they were challenged by informed, professional/educated tenants.

Undoubtedly the mix of highly educated tenants alongside tenants who struggled with basic skills created a difficult situation for the panels, the staff and any external consultants or trainers with responsibility for managing, training and/or facilitating, if the experience was to be an empowering one for everybody. Yet when I looked at the training undertaken by staff, I found that there had been nothing in the facilitation of groups, and nothing in working with people with a diversity of needs and/or gifts, although 'corporate' diversity training was widespread.

6.2.7   Voluntary activities

I wanted to see what voluntary activities involved tenants undertook in addition to their engagement in the organisational structure of their housing association. I looked therefore at their involvement in their local estate, street or community; in other agencies; and in committee work in organisations other than their housing association. I was also interested to know how extensively these tenants were involved with their landlords. Overall I was trying to develop a picture of involved tenants: were they just involved in their association and in one particular capacity, or were they the sorts of people who get involved in a wide range of activities across a range of organisations or contexts?

6.2.7.1 <u>Active involvement in local estate, street or community</u>

The majority of involved tenants (94, 73 per cent) were also actively involved in their local estate, street or community (examples given on the questionnaire returns were youth activities, community development, local multi-agency partnerships, social activities and tenants' groups).

Thirty people (23 per cent) were involved in a 'non-housing' activity, across a wide range of interests. Examples include: school governors, youth activities, neighbourhood watch, parish or other councillors, helping older people, social committees and activities, disability groups, Credit Unions, Primary Care Trusts, CAB volunteers, charity fundraising, Women's Institutes, LETS schemes, Gingerbread, Crime Concern, fete committee, and typing the parish magazine.

Amongst these there was a small group who clearly had a wide range of interests and involvements: for example, one person wrote that they were involved in 'community development, disability forums/access, community newsletter, festivals, community mentoring, public relations/speeches, media (TV and radio), youth groups'; another wrote 'I am on Sure Start board, Healthy Living Initiative, Home Start Volunteer, friends of the local library, Healthy Eating Project and vice-chair of the residents' association'.

6.2.7.2 <u>Involvement in committees of groups other than their housing association</u>

Thirty-one respondents (24 per cent) reported being involved in committee work in organisations or groups that were not part of their housing association. These exhibited a wide range of involvements from community and regeneration partnerships (8) to local Councillors, a school governor, involvement with the fire authority, an NHS Trust, Gingerbread, Help the Aged, Youth Court Referral Board, SSAFA, disability groups etc.

6.2.8 Assessing the difference between LSVTs and traditional housing associations in terms of the age and gender of involved tenants

Finally, I wanted to understand whether there was a difference in the age and gender breakdown between tenants involved in LSVT associations and those involved in

traditional associations. A comparison is shown in Figure 6.9 (Table E6.15, Appendix E) .
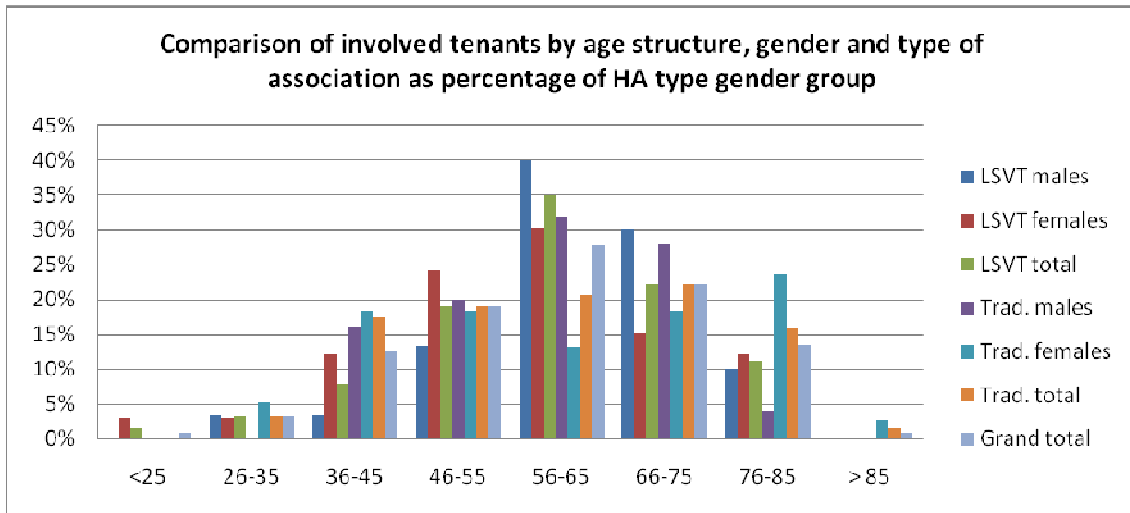
Figure 6.9: Comparison of age and gender structure of involved tenants between LSVTs and traditional associations, by percentage of gender group within association type

This tends to suggest that traditional associations have been more successful at recruiting people in the 36-45 age group, although LSVTs have had some success in recruiting women in this age group. The preponderance of involved tenants, and in particular men, in the 56-65 age bracket is particularly pronounced in the LSVT associations, but is present in both types, and there is a noticeably high number of older women (76-85) in the traditional associations.

6.3   Characteristics of board members

I needed to know more about who the tenant board members were, and how they compared with involved tenants as a whole, to get a sense of which tenants were breaking into board membership, how that demographic might impact the board itself, and what the barriers might be to attaining board membership. The following analyses are by gender, age, ethnicity, disability, educational background, and length of involvement with their landlord.

6.3.1 Board members by age and gender

Whilst the ratio of men to women on panels and forums was 40:60 amongst questionnaire respondents, when it came to board membership, when it came to board membership, the ratio switched to 55:35. However the age distribution of board members was somewhat different between the genders, as can be seen from Figures 6.10-12; Table E6.16, Appendix E. Amongst male board members there was a disproportionate number who were in the 56-75 age range as compared with the non-board member group. For women the distribution was more evenly spread, with a higher proportion of younger people, and older women being rather less represented, noting that the numbers here are too small to draw any firm conclusions.
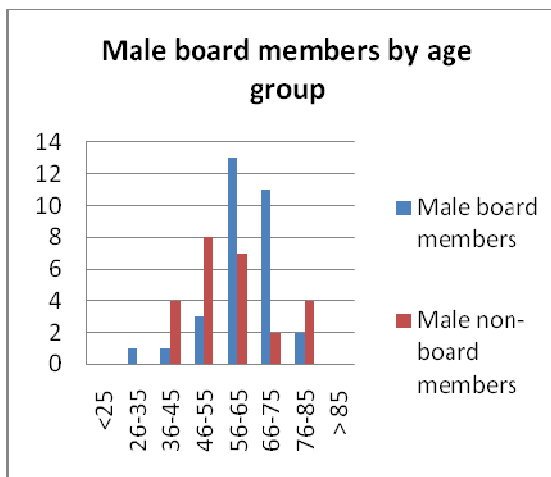
Figure 6.10: Male board members by age group
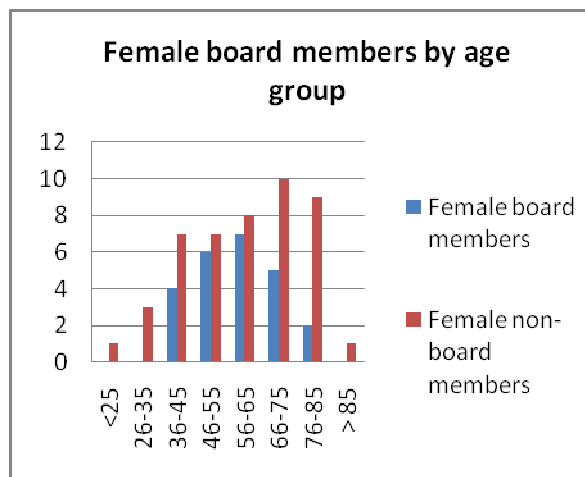
Figure 6.11: Female board members by age group
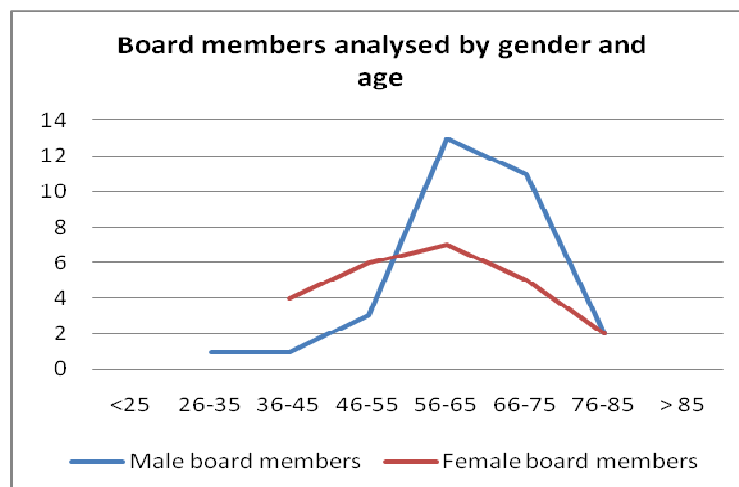
Figure 6.12: Board members analysed by gender and age

These findings were also reflected in the case study groups. Figure 6.13 shows the gender and age distribution of board members in the case study associations, where older people were taken to be aged 55 and over. Fifty-nine per cent of the board members here were men, 41 per cent women, and of the men only 3 per cent were under 55, compared with 33 per cent of the women (Table E6.17, Appendix E).
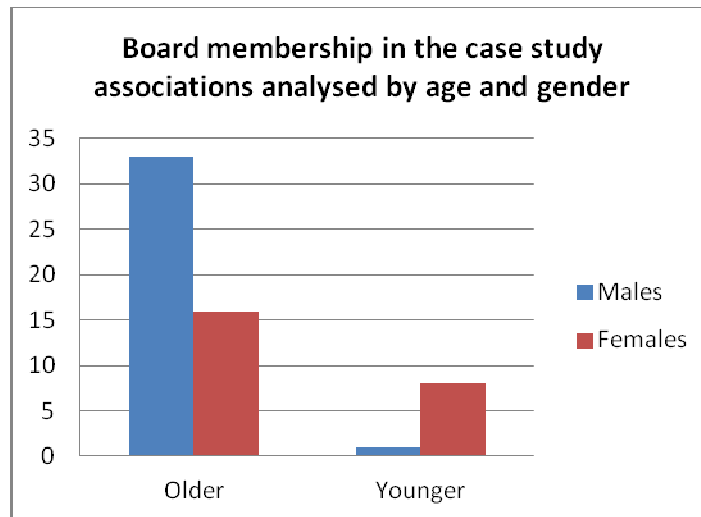
Figure 6.13: Analysis of board members from the case studies by age and gender, where 'older' is 55+

Quite apart from the distribution, there is a distinct feel, reflected in the case study groups, that the high proportion of older male board members is tending to block younger men from gaining places on the board, as associations try to fill any vacancies that arise with younger women, thus ticking two boxes in the diversity stakes! Indeed, some younger women in the case study groups were very aware of their 'commodity' status (also see 6.5.4). This is supported by the fact that during the period of the research many associations had not set up a maximum term of office for board members, and some of the tenants of LSVTs had been board members since the stock transfer (in some cases for as long as 14 years), which clearly reduced the chances of younger or newer tenants getting onto the board. Where limits had been set for the term of office these ranged from 6-9 years.

6.3.2 Board membership and ethnicity

As already mentioned, of the seven people with a BME heritage identified in the questionnaires, there were three Irish, one black Caribbean, one Asian, one mixed race Caribbean and one mixed race Asian. The BME board members included two Irish, and one mixed race Caribbean (who commented that she had been involved with her association for many years). From the case study associations there was one BME board member in 2004 and none in 2008.

6.3.3 Board membership, disability and unfitness for work

The questionnaire respondents indicated a high level of disability amongst board members (39%), although there were proportionately fewer people with disabilities amongst board members than amongst non-board members (53%). A further analysis according to fitness for work found no difference between board members and non-board members, with approximately 23 per cent unfit for work for both groups. Once again, as the type of disability was not recorded, there is no way of knowing which types of disability were under- or over-represented.

6.3.4 Length of involvement

From the questionnaire returns it was evident that tenants were considerably more likely to have been board members if they had been involved with their association for more than 6 years (Figure 6.14, Table E6.18, Appendix E). However, because there are many more people overall who have been involved for a shorter time, there are more board members who have been involved for less than 6 years (55%) than have been involved for more than 6 years (45%).
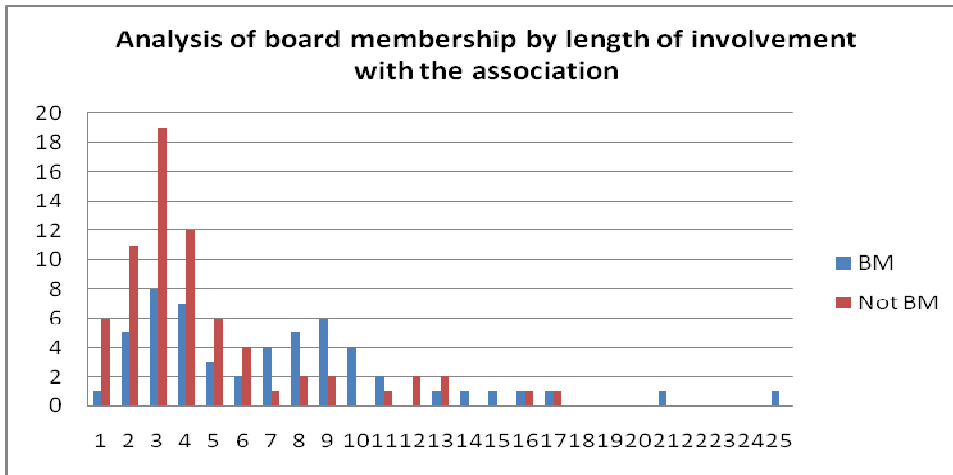
Figure 6.14: Analysis of board membership by length of involvement with the association (Please note: figures on the horizontal axis relate to length of involvement, where '1' = up to one year, '2' = between one and two years etc.)

6.3.5 The educational and training background of board members

As can be seen from Figures 6.15 – 6.16, a particularly high number of board members are men with a military or apprenticeship background, bearing in mind the substantial overlap between these two categories (eight out of 11). (Table E6.19, Appendix E).
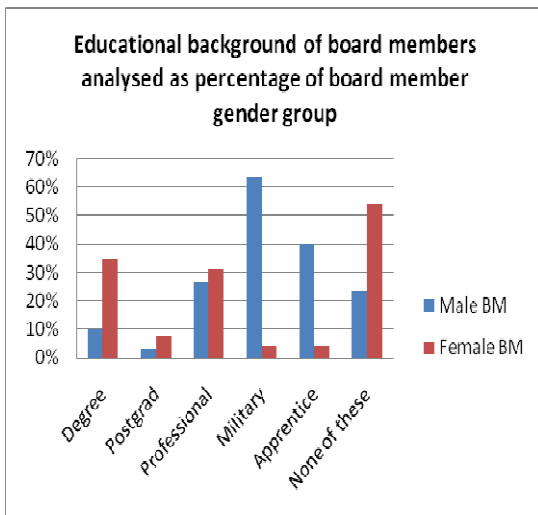
Figure 6.15: Educational background of board members analysed as a percentage of the board member gender group
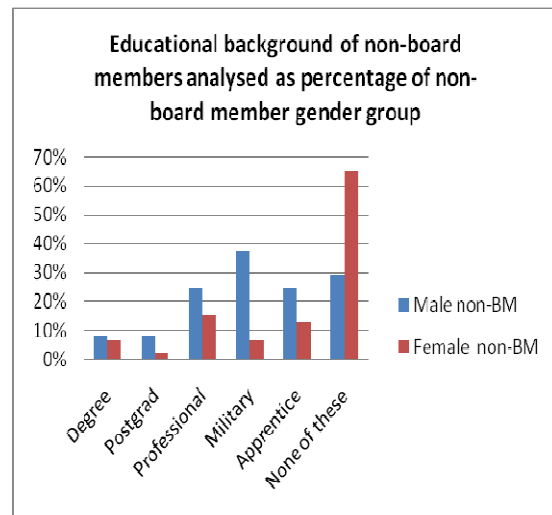
Figure 6.16: Educational background of non-board members analysed as a percentage of the non-board member gender group

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This high incidence of military background is likely to be a consequence of the age profile of male board members. Looking at the breakdown by gender (Figure 6.17-8, Appendix E Table 19), there is conversely a tendency for more female than male board members to have a degree, and for female graduates to have a particularly high likelihood of finding their way onto boards. In comparison, the chance of a female tenant finding her way onto a board without this educational background is substantially reduced, although this appeared to be more a function of the high number of older women without the defined educational background than of educational background per se. (Figure 6.19, Table E6.20, Appendix E). Indeed, it emerged from the case studies that many of the older women were happy to see themselves in a supporting role, and were not interested in attaining board membership or participating in external training sessions (32, 28, 17, 11)
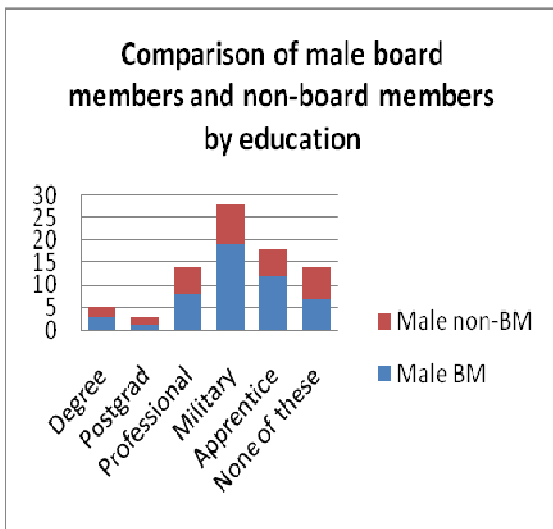
Figure 6.17: Comparison of male board members and non-board members by education
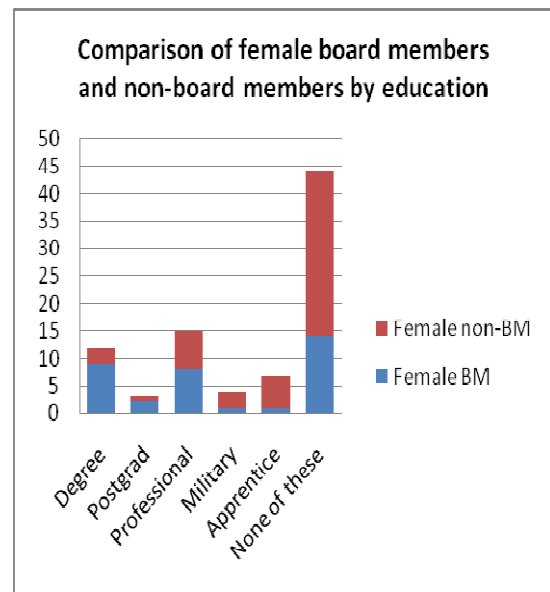
Figure 6.18: Comparison of female board members and non-board members by education
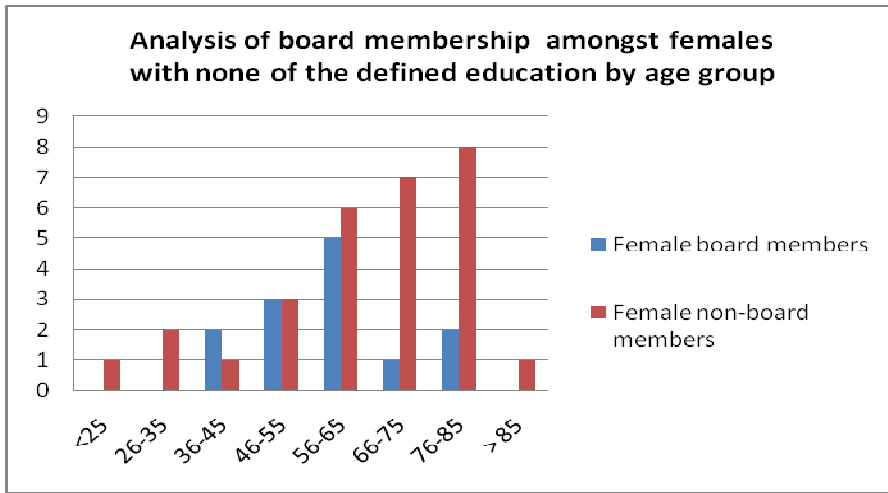
Figure 6.19: Analysis of board membership amongst females with none of the defined education by age group.

6.3.6 Assessing the difference between LSVTs and traditional housing associations in terms of the age and gender of board members

From Figures 6.20 and 6.21 (Table E6.21, Appendix E) it can be seen that within this small sample, in general LSVT male board members tend to be almost exclusively over 56 (13 out of 14), whereas the women tend to be between the ages of 46 and 65. In contrast the traditional associations tended to have a wider spread of ages and had attracted more younger women into board membership.
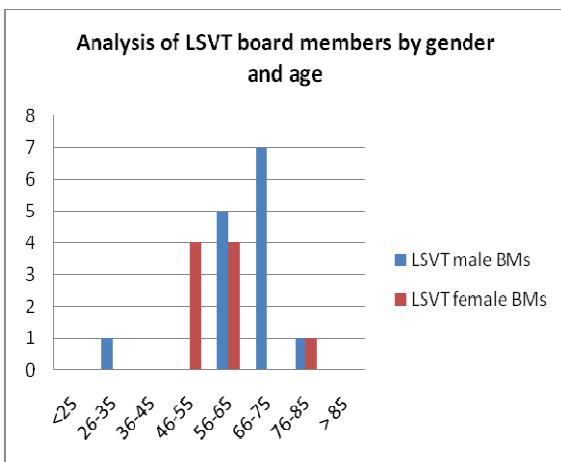
Figure 6.20: Analysis of LSVT board members by gender and age
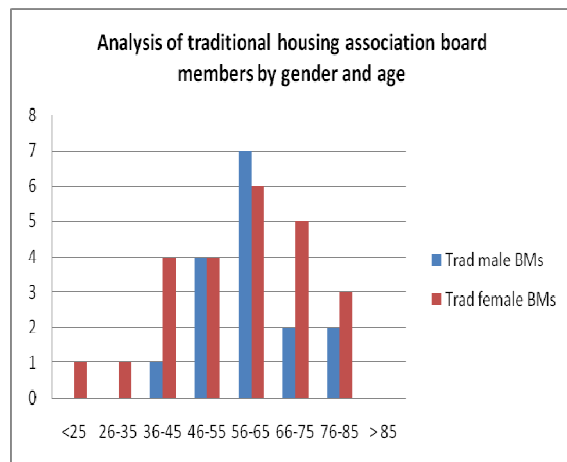
Figure 6.21: Analysis of traditional HA board members by gender and age

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6.4 The characteristics of members of the Housing Corporation's tenant consumer panel

The makeup of the Housing Corporation's tenant consumer panel was not dissimilar, in particular, to the makeup of tenant board membership in housing associations. When I first joined the group in 2001, I was the only woman present at meetings, although there was another, older, woman whom I never met, and who finally left through illness. I was also considerably younger than other members of the group – I was 35, while all but one of the others were over 55, with some well into their 70s. There was a high level of disability and sickness in the group, with only two members who did not have a significant health problem: myself and the youngest male (who was in his early 50s). There had previously been a younger black woman on the panel, but she went on to be a tenant representative on the board. During the four years that I was on the panel there was only one member from a minority ethnic group: an Indian man in his 70s, who did not attend the later sessions due to illness. Towards the end of the life of the group two new members were recruited, one female in her late 50s and a male in his early 50s, and six months before the group was disbanded a younger woman in her 40s was recruited.

The core members of the group were older white men with a strong working class identity and a trades union and/or political background. The group included the founding members of the by then defunct national tenants group, the Housing Association Residents and Tenants Organisation for England (HARTOE). All the people in the group had been very active in their communities and housing associations over many years, and were highly aware politically. All were, or had been, board members of their association at some point, and one had even joined the board of another association. However, at least two members had fallen out with their landlords and had left their boards. Most were very knowledgeable on housing matters and statistics, having gained long experience in a wide variety of settings. Their backgrounds had mostly been in the trades, although there was also an ex-publican and an ex-care worker. None had degree level qualifications or a professional background. Most of the original recruits were people who had retired early on grounds of ill health. The later recruits were slightly younger: the two women worked part-time, one running a Tenant Management Organisation and one as a care worker; the third was a retired

male. I joined after a year, when the original group was fully functioning and fully bonded. Coming into the group at this point was challenging, and I felt very much the outsider, being considerably younger, female and from a non-metropolitan area (all the others were from metropolitan areas). The subsequent recruits did not join until two years later. The group was disbanded, after five years, in 2005.

6.5   Barriers to getting involved and staying involved

From the case studies and the questionnaires it was possible to identify a number of barriers to tenant involvement. These include poor marketing, through the failure to target and meet the needs of harder to reach groups, to a failure to ensure that meetings are held at suitable times and that tenants' out of pocket expenses are met.

6.5.1   Marketing

From the case study associations it was apparent that the poor use of available media to market involvement opportunities was common to many organisations. By failing to publicise the routes into involvement, and also its outcomes, through a variety of media, it is inevitable that some constituencies will be missed, and others will not see the point of getting involved if there is no evidence of a tangible outcome. At the most fundamental level, many of the case study associations did not use their reception areas either to publicise opportunities to get involved, or to publicise the outcomes of the various involvement activities, and how they had benefited the organisation and its tenants. All associations used newsletters to promote tenant involvement, but an analysis of the content of these newsletters showed that they did not cover all the areas in which tenant involvement had made an impact on services. From 2004 it was a Housing Corporation requirement (through its Involvement Policy, and Regulatory Circular 01/04) for associations to assess the impact of involvement over the previous year and feed this back to both regulators and tenants. However, in the study associations, only two had attempted to do this, and although the publications were bright and interesting, they tended to concentrate on process (listing activities), rather than outcomes.

In addition there was an over-reliance on the written word to publicise opportunities. According to the triennial STATUS reports, around 80-90 per cent of tenants use the

telephone for their primary contact with the association. Yet in the study associations, the telephone had not been used to encourage tenants to get more involved, or to canvass their views on different services, or to get them to join an activity such as a focus group.

It was clear from the case studies that the use of telephone surveys to assess satisfaction, or to feed views into service reviews, had not been popular with staff, even though telephone contact is a method used widely in the private sector. In my experience of working as a consultant with resident auditor teams and tenant inspector teams, telephone surveys have not only been useful to elicit the views of a wide range of tenants, they have, as a by-product, been excellent recruiting grounds for getting tenants involved. Many of the tenants that I spoke to had got involved through their own networks or through a staff member that they knew well. All the case study associations had intended to develop their use of the telephone for tenant contact, but felt that staffing levels had not permitted this.

The internet, and e-communication, had also been underexplored as a medium for encouraging involvement. When asked about the possibility of forming an 'E group', the associations in the study had said that they did not know which tenants had access to a computer, and had assumed that access would be limited because of the poverty of the tenant population.

At the beginning of this study (2000), I was able to interrogate the STATUS reports for five of the case study associations (5,7,11,17,23) . From these I discovered that between 14 and 20 per cent of tenants had access to the internet in the year 2000. By 2007, looking at the same organisations, I found that the percentage had increased to between 40 and 50 per cent in four of the associations, with the fifth association (one of the traditionals) showing 70 per cent of tenants with access to a computer. (This discrepancy between associations is likely to have resulted from the relatively high proportion of leaseholders and shared ownership households in the latter association, where the internet access within these groups was approaching 100 per cent). However, by 2007 none of the study associations had developed their websites sufficiently to be used as a consultation tool, and associations were not using the internet to recruit, post minutes of meetings or encourage online discussions. In all these associations

satisfaction with opportunities to be involved has remained static despite increased staff, budgets and in some, the formation of new 'inspector' groups (5,7,11,). The panel membership also remained static over the period (5,7,11,17,23)

6.5.2   Over-reliance on the written word and on a limited range of activities

Both the Housing Corporation and the Audit Commission expected associations to make literature available in a range of formats, to enable tenants to take full advantage of the services available to them (which would include 'tenant involvement'). Yet none of the organisations were looking at how to involve tenants for whom the written word was itself a barrier.

This runs in tandem with the limited range of activities available. Involvement within the organisational structure of associations was generally restricted to working on panels and forums using a traditional meeting structure, and often using formal papers which participants were expected to have read in advance, or even to read on the day. Working within a diversity agenda requires the organisation to work with people experiencing a wide range of barriers, including sensory and learning disabilities.

6.5.3   The quality of paperwork

The quality of paperwork presented for meetings created a significant barrier in itself. I found many examples of papers that were poorly written, and long-winded.. A number of key reports that I examined as part of this research, and which were tabled for tenants to approve on the day, were so unclear that it was difficult to establish what it was that the association was asking the tenants to decide.

6.5.4   Lack of tenant profiling and targeting, including in relation to tenant involvement

This lack of awareness of the barrier presented by the prevalent use of written material is exacerbated by the failure of most associations to carry out the tenant profiling that is required by the Regulator. A significant number of housing associations have yet to complete a profile of tenant attributes and needs, including communication needs.   The Audit Commission has, since 2005, been expressing concern (through their inspection reports) at the failure of associations to make progress with tenant profiling, as

evidenced by the inspection report findings published from 2005 onwards (see Figure 6.22, page 212). Some housing associations are now addressing this, but in 2008 this was still work in progress, and the associations in the study were either not collecting, or not making use of, profiling information to address the barriers to involvement. They all had information from their STATUS surveys, and access to information in Census reports, but they had not used it to target under-represented groups or to shape services. Moreover, when the estate-based staff, who had a good knowledge of the 'patches' that they managed, were asked why they had not canvassed tenants from 'harder to reach' groups to get involved, they said that involvement was not a priority for them generally, let alone identifying individuals from harder to reach groups.

Although from 2004 associations have given greater recognition on paper to the diversity agenda for involvement, implementation has been hindered by the capacity of staff, poor resourcing, and the low level of priority it is accorded. In the case study associations I found both a limited understanding of diversity issues amongst involvement staff, and little knowledge of the methods of involving 'harder to reach' groups. 'Good Practice Note 4', issued by the Housing Corporation in 2002, expected housing associations to monitor the profile both of tenants' groups in the community, and the main panels and forums in the organisation. The case study associations had either failed to do this completely, or had only just started to look at the forum or panel. In most cases there was no information regarding the profile of the tenants that made up the membership of the various groups, and associations were slow to address the issue with the group chairs. In 2009, neither of the two case study associations that had completed their tenant profiling had compared this data with the profile of involved tenants, although anecdotally they were aware that BME tenants were under-represented in tenant involvement structures, as were families and younger people. Moreover, some early attempts at establishing a profile had only considered the tenant rather than the wider household, and some later attempts, from 2008 onwards, excluded at least some of the diversity strands: in particular, sexuality.

This, however, did not mean that associations were unaware of pressures to be seen as inclusive; nor was this point lost on the tenants. The younger female tenant board members that I interviewed were well aware that they were 'needed' by their organisations, and used this to their advantage to gain access to training, conferences

and other benefits. In tandem, the associations knew that it was good for their image to have a young female board member out and about in national forums. As one such board member put it: 'my presence ticks many diversity boxes and will not threaten the status quo; a perfect solution' (tenant board member, 27), and another said: 'I know I am the token young female tenant. I tick all the boxes. If I had a disability and was black it would be even better for them, as all their criteria would be fulfilled by one person. Therefore if they are going to use me in this way, I am going to use them and get everything I can from it' (tenant board member, 33).

All that said, not everyone allowed the lack of profiling to prevent positive action. Staff within one of the case study associations (7) were aware that parents and younger people were underrepresented in their involvement structure, despite the fact that they were not up to date with their tenant profiling. They addressed the issue by working in partnership with a further education college to take educational opportunities onto the streets, thus bringing educationalists into the participation and community development process. Tenants in these communities (who were not involved in formal involvement structures) were offered a personal interview to find out what they wanted for the future, and were offered various training opportunities to help them achieve their goals, including mobile computer courses. Over time, this brought in some younger mothers who, in consequence, chose to get further involved with the association. The training was funded through the Learning and Skills Council, and thus the only cost to the association was the staff time involved in organising it. Sadly, this initiative was not sustained in the longer term, and the involvement of younger people in the association diminished. This was due to a change in focus from the lead staff member. The educational body involved would have continued to provide such training without charge, but was not able to without the co-operation of the association in partnership. It remains, however, an example of how one association attempted to deal with the 'harder to reach' question in a successful way, albeit unsustained. It does, nonetheless, illustrate the importance of individual members of staff in pursuing effective involvement, and how a change of personnel or focus can have a significant impact on tenant involvement.

6.5.5 Barriers to the involvement of people from black and minority ethnic groups (BME)

One of the challenges for associations has been to involve people from black and minority ethnic groups (BME groups). The following example, from one of the case study associations, is illustrative of the type of thinking and practice that has inhibited the inclusion of black and minority ethnic groups in such involvement. In this instance a city-based LSVT in the Midlands, with large numbers of minority ethnic and refugee tenants, were asked about the involvement of BME tenants in their organisation. They responded by saying that they had commissioned consultants to carry out a survey of BME tenants to find out their preferred mode of communication and whether they wanted to get involved. They reported back that tenants had said that they did not want to come to meetings, and in consequence the association had not pursued the question (28). I was unhappy with this explanation, and convinced the organisation that they should try running a focus group to find out what minority ethnic tenants thought about the service they had received. This was a great success. Tenants attended with their children and other relatives, and the housing association put on a range of Indian and Chinese food. The group got quite excited, brought up many issues for the housing association to explore, and said that they would like to meet again. Bringing people together in this way had created a situation where people felt able to participate in a way that was meaningful for them and useful to the association. This same housing association also employed a member of staff to liaise with 30 or more groups representing minority ethnic communities within their area of operation. This worker encouraged these groups to involve their members, both tenants and non-tenants, in a mystery shopping exercise to test the services provided by the association's local offices. The report setting out the findings of this audit was quite critical, but it alerted the organisation to the fact that staff were not working well with tenants from minority backgrounds. It is in these ways that such tenants can get further drawn into involvement activity. During the study two other associations (22, 26) commissioned consultants to visit known tenants from BME backgrounds to ask if they wanted to be involved, with the same negative outcome as the other association had originally had.

6.5.6 Timing of meetings

Another barrier to diversity of involvement was the timing of meetings, which were usually held during the working day, thus excluding tenants who were working standard working hours. One of the associations had meetings between 2pm and 4pm, which also debarred parents with dependent children, as it cut across the school run. These problems were known about and ignored, both by involved tenants and by staff. According to the tenants interviewed as part of the case studies, the best time for catching the greatest number of people is between 11am and 2.30 pm, with lunch provided: neither too late, nor too early for older and disabled tenants, and between the school runs. They felt that the provision of lunch was important for two reasons: it indicated respect for, and the valuing of, participants and it provided time for networking and socialising.

Some tenants in the case study groups said that they would prefer to meet in the evening or on Saturdays. These tended to be younger people who were either in education or paid work, and who were therefore unable to attend daytime meetings. Their views were at odds with the majority of tenants who belonged to panels or were board members. This is hardly surprising, since those already involved were evidently able to attend the meetings, and were from constituencies for which daytime meetings were likely to be more appropriate (older people, people with disabilities and parents of young children). In addition, staff and managers were not keen to work outside office hours - they were already required to attend board meetings out of office hours in 50 per cent of the case study associations. Worse still, in other associations, tenant board members had to use their annual leave to attend daytime board meetings.

6.5.7 Expenses

All the case study associations reimbursed out of pocket expenses to some extent. However, this payment was not always formalised, nor was it promoted in the tenants' newsletters or by staff. Often the reimbursement of caring costs was not mentioned, and this was one of the main barriers to tenants getting involved. Those with children, who represented a significant proportion of younger tenants (under 50), were often excluded through this failure to make explicit the financial support available. Moreover, the costs for those with responsibilities towards elderly or disabled partners

or relatives were not recognised at all, and thus there was no provision made within expenses policies or systems. Twenty-three per cent of the questionnaire respondents had experienced problems with claiming expenses, and 50 per cent had never seen their association's expenses policy.

The management of expenses was a major area of criticism by the tenants in the case study organisations. From the questionnaire responses it was apparent that not all tenants had experienced problems personally - but some would never have had cause to claim expenses.   From the case studies it became clear that all the groups had experienced problems for at least some of their members. These tenants highlighted a number of practices that caused problems and which created a disincentive to getting involved.

First there was the method and timeliness of payments. Good (and inclusive) practice would suggest that a range of payment methods should be available, including cash payments on the day. However, in most housing associations the only payment methods were by cheque or electronic payment. For those without a bank account this was clearly inappropriate, and for everyone it created delays in reimbursement because of the time taken in processing and clearing cheques where these were used. There was also a reluctance or refusal to pay cash when requested to do so, on the grounds that 'the finance department would not allow it'. In contrast, Councils had been managing to pay cash on the day for many years without apparent difficulty. In addition, where childcare costs were incurred, associations did not offer to make direct payments to nurseries or to signpost tenants to childcare providers and nurseries. It was not uncommon for significant amounts of money to remain outstanding for many weeks. In some cases tenants had waited six weeks for payment, and this would obviously create problems for people on benefits and low incomes.

A further problem was that some organisations were 'reimbursing' care costs at below the actual cost, and this was encapsulated in their policies. These organisations had not consulted with care providers on their rates, and had just assumed that payment should be at the minimum wage level. Another common practice was to set a maximum payment for a day's care which was well below the actual cost. This prevented tenants

from attending conferences or longer events. The prescribed rate also affected those who had larger families, where the child minding rate could be as high as £15 per hour.

Tenant groups within two of the case study organisations had had significant battles with their landlords over expenses issues, and a similar situation had occurred in the Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel. One of the case studies (1) was particularly illustrative of the issues that could arise. This association (one of the largest) had wanted to impose a nine pence mileage rate for tenants, having previously paid Inland Revenue rates to reflect the actual cost of car travel (in line with payments to staff and board members). The new policy stated that instead of using their own cars tenants should, wherever possible, either use the transport provided by the association, or use public transport. This caused a great deal of ill feeling for a number of reasons: public transport was scant, inconvenient or completely unavailable for many participants; there had been no consultation with tenants over the issue; a lot of the tenants were disabled or elderly, for whom public transport over long and difficult journeys was inappropriate; and the directive was applied retrospectively to reduce the expected payments for journeys already undertaken. To make matters worse, the policy was not applied consistently across the organisation in an equitable fashion: in one region where there was active participation, the regional director ignored the directive completely; in another, the policy was applied to everyone who was a resident, whether or not they were a board member. These measures were met with varying degrees of militancy from tenants. In one area, tenants that had regularly given lifts to others in order to save money refused to do so, and thus for meetings to take place, taxis had to be provided by the organisation, thus raising costs further. The result was that in that area meetings stopped for a year, because tenants and staff could not agree on the protocols. In consequence involved tenants in general lost trust in the organisation. The tenants on the board went on strike on the grounds that the association was discriminating against the poorest sector of the community (and the board), who were being expected to subsidise the work of the association. The organisation responded by agreeing that tenants on committees that were part of the formal governance structure (i.e. excluding panels) could claim the original rate, but not the others. This would effectively have driven a wedge between the two categories of participating tenants. Meanwhile, some of the (non-tenant) board members did not fully understand the

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issues. After a year, some of the senior staff realised that if the issue was not resolved they would not get any tenant involvement at all, and would therefore fail to comply with the requirements of the regulator. However, in those areas where the senior management were not in favour of tenant involvement, the policy effectively destroyed tenant involvement altogether.

Interestingly this experience was substantially mirrored by events in the Housing Corporation's own Tenant Consumer Panel. There was a singular event in the life of the panel when the Housing Corporation decided to reduce the mileage rate from 35 pence to 10 pence per mile and apply this retrospectively without consultation with the group. This particular group was very aware of its status within the sector and its importance to the aims of the Corporation: the group contained many of the 'senior' involved tenants across the country. Informal representation was made to no effect. The aim of the staff concerned was to encourage members to take public transport, despite the fact that, for some of the panel, there were limited options for public transport because of their location. Members of the panel felt that staff were London-centric rather than service-user focused in their thinking. Representations were made to the chair (Baroness Dean) and the chief executive, with a full explanation of how this decision would be viewed. As with the housing association mentioned above, the point was made that the Corporation was discriminating against the poorest people in the organisation, as no other groups, nor the board, had had their expenses cut. Members of the panel made it clear that they would go to the press. Eventually the proposal was dropped and, in addition, a payment of £100 per meeting was made to panel attendees in cash, although the Housing Corporation, when questioned by housing associations, denied that they did so.

6.5.8 Hidden costs

In the association-based case studies, tenants reported that their involvement had created a number of hidden costs. Although it was never discussed in formal meetings, a number of tenants spoke about this issue in individual interviews, and in particular, the need to dress appropriately for formal meetings. In addition, there were costs attached to attending conferences in five star hotels, as coffees, teas, and social drinks outside the main meetings were expensive. Some associations had developed a system whereby a

£20 cash payment was given to each tenant attending a weekend conference, as long as receipts were produced after the event.

One of the case study associations had introduced a £15 per week payment to encourage a group of tenants to attend and stay on a training course. The Housing Corporation had set the trend by paying this amount to attendees of focus groups as part of the inspection process. This amount was selected because it did not affect the benefits of single parents or people on disability benefits, who were the two main groups in receipt of benefits. In later years most of the case study associations paid either £10.00 or £15.00, or gave the equivalent in shopping vouchers, to tenants who were involved as mystery shoppers or tenant auditors, or who took part in one-off consultation events. However, there was a lack of clarity in organisations about the differential effects of payments across the range of benefits. For example, such a payment to someone on partial housing benefit, if declared, could cause major upheaval of their finances while their benefit was recalculated, and then recalculated back again, while someone on disability benefits would be able to keep the payment in full without disruption.

6.5.9   Board membership and money

Money became a real issue for some board members. Over the period of the research some of the younger tenant board members had become employed. Of these, one was working in the housing sector, one was self employed and the other was working for a council as a care assistant. To be able to attend board meetings, these women had to take time off work either as annual or unpaid leave. The boards in question did not move meetings into the evenings. Two were large national associations that required travel to attend meetings, and the other was a local LSVT. These boards had all considered the payment of board members in recent years. The LSVT offered £5,000 per year, and the nationals offered nothing. One of the women board members decided that she had to leave at the end of her term because she could not afford to continue as a board member. She was particularly unhappy when one of her fellow board members spoke against the payment of board members on the grounds that the small amount of money involved 'was just a pain' because of the work involved in filling in the tax return. I also left my board at a point when I could have stood for another three years, as it was costing me too many working days. At the time I was spending up to thirty six

days a year on board meetings and board related activities, with no remuneration for loss of earnings.

Interestingly, not only did the Housing Corporation pay, latterly, Tenant Consumer Panel members a £100 'attendance and out of pocket expenses' fee for each meeting; the Tenants' Sounding Board, linked to the ODPM, paid a £200 meeting fee, as did the Ombudsman, to tenants and others who joined their board.

In 2003, the Corporation changed the ruling on payment of board members to allow housing associations to pay their board members a fee ranging from a few hundred pounds, to £20 000 for chairs of the largest associations. It was intended that this would both compensate for loss, and attract members with the skills that were increasingly needed for the more complex tasks that boards undertook in a changing regulatory and financial climate. One or two of the largest housing associations, and some of the small LSVTs, started to pay their boards, despite an outcry from many of their tenant board members, for whom it affected entitlement to benefits. Two groups were particularly affected: those on disability benefits, who feared losing their disabled status and hence their income, and those on partial housing benefit, for whom any change in income created major administrative difficulties. Moreover, when asked the question 'what are your views on the payment of board members?' at the large workshop of tenant board members, there was also a unanimous view that payment went against the philosophy of volunteering, which they felt underpinned the housing association sector. Tenants believed that payment would drive tenants away from boards, and that those with the wrong motives would be attracted to the role. It should be noted that the majority who attended this group were over the age of sixty, and where they were not they either had a disability or a caring role.

6.6   What the inspectors said

The new standards introduced in the KLOEs in 2004 have a well-developed section on equality and diversity issues, and this has become a major focus for inspections across all services. This is reflected in significant shifts of emphasis in the inspectorates' reports between 2003 and 2008, as illustrated in Figure 6.22 (Table E22, Appendix E).

This change in reporting is unlikely to have resulted from a deterioration in housing association performance in this area over this period, because associations were starting from such a low base, caused in part by the lack of profiling information on their existing tenants.
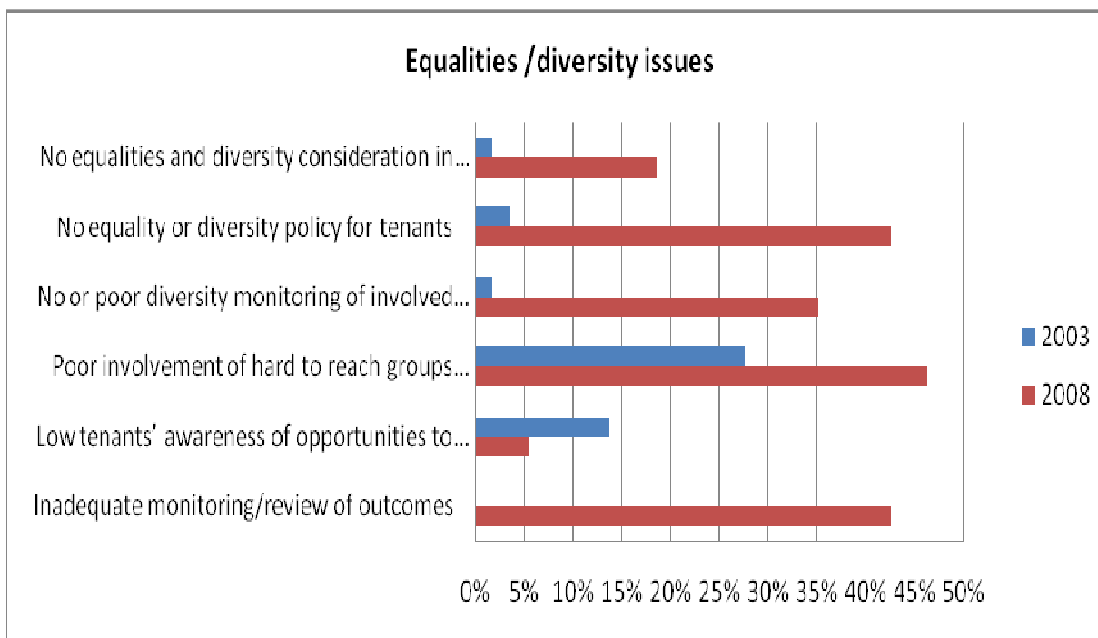
Figure 6.22: Equalities/diversity issues raised by the inspectorate, 2003 and 2008

This changing awareness is illustrated by the significant increase in expressed concerns by the inspectorate about the lack of an equality and diversity policy for tenants (up from 3 per cent in 2003, to 43 per cent of all inspection reports in 2008); the inadequate monitoring and/or review of outcomes (0 per cent to 43 per cent of reports); the poor involvement of hard to reach groups – already a concern in 2003 (28 per cent of reports), but even more prominently represented in reports by 2008 (46%); the lack of, or poor, diversity monitoring of involved tenants (2% to 35%); and the lack of any equalities and diversity consideration in the involvement strategy (2% to 19%). However, despite this increasing focus and guidance from the inspectorate, and the Housing Corporation's Good Practice Notes 4 and 8[19], I found that the case study

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[19] This Good Practice Note is one in a series produced by the Housing Corporation. Each is linked to one or more of the fundamental obligations set out in their Regulatory Code and helps to clarify expectations of how associations will achieve compliance. Numbers 4 and 8 relate to expectations concerning race

associations across the board still did not have equality embedded in their policies, procedures and strategies in a meaningful way. Whilst in the later years associations tended to include the involvement of harder to reach groups in the action points of strategies and policies, there was never any indication of how this was to be achieved, and unsurprisingly, such intentions rarely came to fruition. In consequence, involvement practice did not reflect an understanding of how equality considerations would impact on the recruitment, training and facilitation of forums and panels. Moreover, I found that many strategies were out of date or no longer reflected the direction of the service.

6.7   Conclusion

This chapter shows that there was a wide variation in the capacity and skills of tenants in forums and panels within housing associations, and a very high level of skills amongst the Housing Corporation tenant panel members (though not always through formal qualifications). Many involved tenants were, and/or had been, active in many areas of life, including the work place, often taking on representative roles. More negatively, the membership of these panels and forums (including the Housing Corporation's tenant panel) did not match the rather more diverse profile of tenant communities as a whole, as the majority of members were older white men and women who were either retired or were not working through illness or disability. In particular there was a predominance of older white men in key roles, such as on boards and on the Housing Corporation's Tenant Consumer Panel; the chairs of panels and forums were almost exclusively from this demographic. Concerns had been expressed in inspection reports, official guidance and regulatory requirements about the makeup of these groups, over the period of the research, but housing associations had done very little to address these, apart from attracting a small number of younger women onto panels and forums. Many of these younger women moved quickly into board membership, though they generally did not take on key officer roles in panels and forums. Overall it was evident that for some groups, such as younger tenants, parents and tenants from

equality and the targets which associations must set and meet in relation to these, within the specified timetable. It also covers all other aspects of equality.

minority ethnic backgrounds, there were still many barriers to getting involved in the first place, as well as taking on key involvement roles.

Notably, the management of expenses appeared to be a major issue for active tenants in many associations, and represented a key moment of crisis for one association and the Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel. This will be explored more fully in Chapter Nine, using my theoretical framework. Chapter Seven will continue to explore the research findings, this time looking at the structure of involvement, and the support available to staff and tenants.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE STRUCTURE OF INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

7.1   Introduction

This chapter sets out how organisations undertake involvement, and what structures and support are in place to make involvement work. It will first look at the structure of involvement in terms of the panel or forum, and board membership structure and recruitment. This will be followed by a consideration of the development of policy and practice, covering strategic documentation and action plans, and also the issue of monitoring. The next section explores the capacity of staff from the perspective of both staff and tenants, followed by a section on the support in place for tenants, covering training, access to information, access to computers and e-communication, and the resourcing of tenant involvement.

7.2   The structure of involvement

7.2.1   The panel/forum

Most housing associations have a structure for tenant involvement that involves a range of estate based tenants' groups, both formal and informal, from which members are selected to belong to a panel or forum. Some of the early large scale voluntary transfer landlords set up their panel or forum as part of their (constituted) governance structure (24, 7). For most associations the panel or forum was part of the resident involvement structure and therefore had no formal right to exist, and although all associations have, since 1985, had a formal duty to consult their tenants on an individual basis on specific matters relating to the management of their homes (Housing Act 1985), the form that this takes is up to the landlord and tenants to agree.

All the case study associations had such a body, ranging from ten to 30 members, with a median of nine (of which six or seven were generally the most active). This was used as the main consultation vehicle for issues of strategy, policy and procedure, and 'Best Value' reviews. These panels and forums were all chaired by a tenant, and were either

serviced by a tenant involvement officer or attended by relatively senior staff, who would update tenants on developments within the association and solicit the tenants' views. As previously stated, the chairs and vice-chairs of these groups were predominantly male. These panels or forums often had sub-committees, or linked groups, that included members of the panel/forum, and which were used for more specific projects like 'Best Value' reviews or partnering exercises. In these more specific groups tenants would get more involved in the detail of strategy development and the monitoring of performance.

From the case studies it was apparent that there were also differences between associations, both in terms of the service areas in which they would involve tenants, and in the depth of involvement that they would allow. For instance, in one association tenants were involved in developing the tenant involvement strategy from the beginning of the process, and a future monitoring role had been planned at an early stage (23). In contrast, most of the other associations had presented a strategy to the panel or forum in draft, and had no clear idea of how tenants would be involved in the monitoring of its delivery.

7.2.1.1 <u>What inspectors said about the scope of involvement</u>

Over the period in which I conducted an appraisal of inspection reports (2003 to 2008) there appeared to be mounting criticism by the inspectorate of the scope and depth of tenant involvement within the organisational structures of associations. From Figure 7.1 below (Table E7.1, Appendix E) it can be seen that there was a growing awareness of the inadequacy of these traditional structures for tenant involvement. A number of specific areas of weakness were identified by inspectors, which included the development of the strategy for involvement, which increased in 'mentions' as an issue in from 14 per cent to 43 per cent of inspection reports; and also 'planning and review', which rose from 10 per cent to 54 per cent. This latter point may indicate why deficiencies were also found in certain key documents, such as involvement agreements, which had fallen out of date or did not reflect what the organisation was doing. This could, in part, be due to the lack of a review cycle for policies and other documents, but may also have resulted from changes in staffing and staffing structures. The staff I spoke to were mostly aware that their documentation was out of date or was no longer

fit for purpose. Access to information about opportunities for involvement was also an issue, and especially the quality of association websites, which featured as an issue in 33 per cent of the later inspection reports. 'Tenant involvement not being embedded in strategic decision making' was a new finding in the more recent inspections, and was an issue in 50 per cent of inspected organisations. This is likely to reflect a higher level of expectation for involvement at this level, as organisations improved.

Areas where tenant involvement is lacking or inadequate

- Developing/monitoring strategy
- The budget
- Service planning, monitoring and review (incl BV)
- Newsletter/literature/publications
- Tenants not involved in some service areas
- TI not embedded in strategic decision making
- Website underdeveloped/not customer focussed

Legend: 2003, 2008

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%
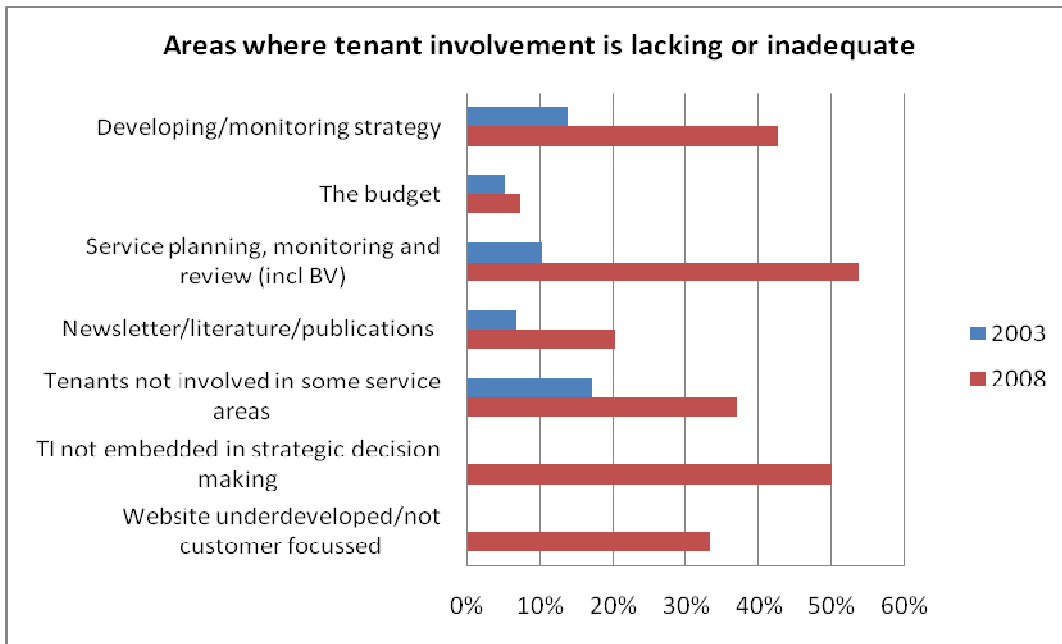
Figure 7.1: Inspection reports - areas where tenant involvement is lacking or inadequate

7.2.1.2   Managing change in involvement structures 2005-9

From 2005 to 2008 there began a change in the approach to tenant involvement, as existing practices were increasingly questioned. In response to the Audit Commission report on tenant involvement (2004), the outcomes from inspections, and the new Housing Corporation Involvement Policy and Regulatory Circular 01/04, organisations started to look more critically at their involvement structures, with a view to making sure that they were making a difference, were accountable to other tenants, and were value for money. Several workshops and panel days that I attended in the later part of the study period (2006 onwards) were set up to look at precisely this. Staff and tenants appeared nervous before the meeting and, it would seem, with good reason. As the meetings unfolded, it was apparent that these particular organisations (5,24,11,26)

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wanted to make the involved tenants more accountable, and to deliver clear outcomes. Such changes were often driven by an adverse inspection report or a new member joining the management team. In practical terms, this was to be achieved either by disbanding the group, or by changing it into a scrutiny or performance management group. This would work alongside a number of other groups that would be developed to look at particular business streams or service categories - for example, a group solely focusing on customer care and access issues.

The panels and forums in the study associations had generally been stable groups of long-standing members. Careful change management would therefore be critical if the organisation was to broaden involvement at a corporate level. Staff, however, were nervous and untrained, and in some cases unsupported through this period of structural change. The tenants were fearful and aggressive, as they thought that their long-held (and often hard-won) powerbase was being eroded. Their behaviour in the meetings I attended was interesting. Whilst the tenants agreed that there was a need for greater accountability, and that the organisation was not fully involving them in a way that could make a difference, they also made it clear that they did not want things to change. They were wedded to their long-standing committee processes, and a number of the groups I observed behaved in similar ways.

Pressures for change also came through a growing awareness of the need for accountability and cost effectiveness. At the beginning of the study, none of the panels had an understanding of the costs of running their panel, and by 2008 only three had this information, and none were monitoring their own budgets. The associations did not share this information with panel members, and there was no attempt to analyse the costs and benefits of the groups. In all the case study associations, the panel or forum was seen by staff, senior management and the board as unchallengeable, and as an essential tenant involvement activity. If involvement staff tried to change things, it was not uncommon for more senior staff to intervene to block the changes, following telephone calls from panel members complaining about the bullying approach of the tenant involvement staff. Thus resistance to change was widespread.

This, however, does not mean that tenants were satisfied with the status quo. In the questionnaire I asked 'Is there anything about the structure of the organisation itself that

makes participation problematic?' A number of respondents commented that they had difficulty in understanding this question and approximately a quarter did not respond. However, 58 (45%) identified aspects of organisational structure that were problematic.

One of the larger national associations was undergoing a structural reorganisation at the time, and there was concern expressed by respondents that the organisation was too large and too remote from the tenants. In this organisation there were also difficulties created by staff through their blocking of direct communication between customer panels in different areas and regions. Inaccessibility through centralisation or geographical spread was also mentioned by tenants of other associations.

Other concerns mentioned related to a lack of clarity about areas of responsibility, the difficulty of large organisations in being responsive, difficulties relating to tenant involvement officers (line management problems; staff blocking channels of communication), and equalities issues (difficulties in claiming expenses, and the problems of attending daytime meetings).

The inspectors, too, were increasingly critical of what was going on.

7.2.1.3 What the inspectors said about tenant involvement structures

Figure 7.2 (Table E7.2, Appendix E) shows the extent to which the inspectors picked up on various issues relating to tenant involvement structures.
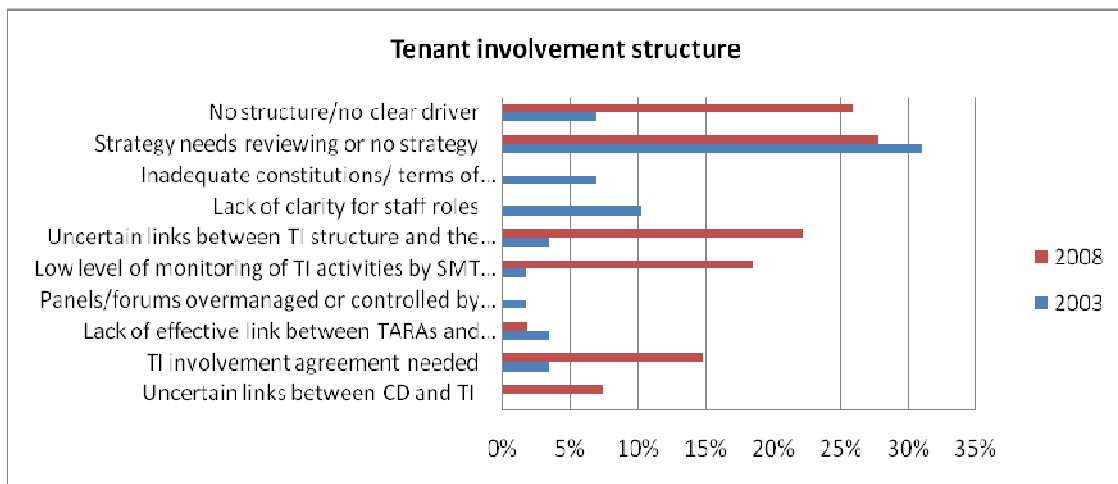
Figure 7.2: Inspection reports - tenant involvement structures

Between 2003 and 2008 it is clear that there was a considerable increase in the number of associations that were criticised for having no structure or clear driver for tenant involvement. There were a similar number of associations that had either no strategy at all, or had a strategy that needed updating or reviewing. In 2003 there were a relatively small number of landlords who were criticised for having inadequate constitutions and/or terms of reference, and for having a lack of clarity about staff roles. By 2008 the number had diminished to zero, which may indicate that these issues had by then been addressed in the inspected organisations. There was, however, a significant increase in the number of landlords criticised for having uncertain links between the tenant involvement structure and the board, and for having low levels of monitoring of tenant involvement activities by the senior management team and the board. This indicates that although the structures were in place, they were not well connected, and that panels and forums were operating in isolation from other parts of the organisation, from tenant groups and from community development activities within the community. This increase is likely to reflect a shift in the priorities of the inspecting authority, and a greater awareness of what would constitute good practice. The 2008 reports showed an increase in the number of landlords reported as needing a tenant involvement agreement. This would suggest that for many organisations there was a lack of shared vision and agreed protocols about the way involvement activities should be carried out. This, together with the observed lack of monitoring of involvement activities, inevitably affected the level of accountability to the tenant community.

I also looked for issues of what I termed democratic deficit, but as Table 7.1 shows, the numbers here are too small to be able to draw any conclusions.

Table 7.1: Democratic deficit

Areas where TI is lacking or inadequate	2003	2003	2008	2008
Tenant and Residents Associations not meeting recognition criteria/are unrepresentative/unaccountable	1	2%	0	0%
Route onto Panel/Forum undemocratic and unaccountable	3	5%	1	2%
Access to board membership too restricted / unaccountable / undemocratic	2	3%	3	6%
Inclusion of owner occupiers in Tenant and Residents Associations gave tenants	1	2%	0	0%

inadequate forum for tenant issues				
Formal structure restricts access to participation	1	2%	1	2%
Lack of feedback from tenant reps	1	2%	1	2%
Tenants unclear about representative role and nomination and election procedures	1	2%	1	2%
Lack of clarity about who can be involved in main tenant involvement structure (e.g. Care and Support tenants)	1	2%	1	2%

7.2.2 Board membership structure and recruitment – the case study associations

The panel or forum was generally the route for tenants to get onto the board of the association. The Large Scale Voluntary Transfer Associations (LSVTs) all had virtually identical structures for this type of involvement, with large forums or panels, and with tenants or leaseholders forming a third of the board members. This meant that there could be as many as four or five tenant members on the board of an LSVT association. In many cases, the main forum/panel nominated the tenant board members. In one LSVT association, however, the tenants had nominated a number of members and the board had selected from these.

Three of the traditional associations took a different approach. The largest association (1) had one tenant on the parent board and a target for tenants to form a third of the membership of regional committees. Over the study period, however, there were never more than three tenant members on any regional committee (when the target would have meant four or five), as there was no succession planning in place and no active attempt to recruit tenants. Another traditional housing association (17) had 50 per cent tenant membership on their regional committees and a third on the board, which they managed to recruit through a full election process. This was so successful that it won an award, but attendance was found to be poor. The third traditional association (33) used an open recruiting system, whereby interested tenants applied and were recruited through a formal recruitment process.

7.2.2.1 <u>Conflicts of interest and clarity of role and purpose</u>

A major issue for tenants was the shift that occurred in their identity and remit when they went onto the board. From having been 'the tenants' champion' they were entering an arena where their primary loyalty had to be to the board and the association, and this inevitably created conflicts of interest. A lack of clarity about these issues was revealed through the housing association case studies, as was a lack of training for board members in general. Tenant board members generally wanted training but could not get it, and they struggled to identify what it was that they needed. (Non-tenant board members also received little training, but did not see a need for it). At the TPAS conference in 2004 I conducted a seminar specifically to explore conflicts of interest in relation to tenant board membership. This was attended by 60 tenant board members. In this seminar I presented some specific scenarios of the issues that were likely to arise in a board meeting (see Appendix F) and asked a series of questions relating to them, asking participants to think about how they should vote in each situation. It transpired that over 70 per cent of the workshop participants did not fully understand their role. Working through a variety of examples relating to each scenario, with explanations which highlighted potential areas of conflict, tenants were soon able to grasp these issues and identify the priority of the various roles that they had, ranging from their tenants' group, through the panel, to the board. This piece of work was interesting because it showed that, once tenants had the facts and the training in an accessible way, they could easily understand their position and role. One attendee said that she wished she had had access to the information years previously, when she had first become a board member.

Many tenants who sit on boards believe they sit in a representative role similar to that of a union representative. The concepts of 'being representative' and of 'representation' were confusing to many tenant board members. Staff would talk to tenants about 'not being representative', which tenants thought was a criticism of their role as a representative, rather than the fact that the makeup of the group was not representative of the tenant population. The tenants I spoke to considered themselves to have a mandate to represent the views of their electorate if they had been elected by tenants. During the period from late 1999 to 2003, all the new transfer associations were using elections to choose tenant board members rather than the selection methods often

employed by traditional housing associations. In contrast, my route into board membership of a traditional housing association was through personal invitation by a member of staff, who came down from head office and simply asked me if I would consider joining the main board. Interestingly, in my association, over a twenty year period, all tenant members of the Group board (three in all during the period - of which only one served at any one time), were drawn from the same panel. It should be borne in mind that this association was a national organisation which operated in 135 local authority areas. This one panel was the first and most militant of the ten panels from which they could have chosen board members.

7.2.2.2 <u>What the inspectors said about board membership</u>

From the inspection reports it could be seen that there was a substantial increase in concerns about inadequate tenant representation and the representativeness of tenants on boards, with mentions up from 3 per cent to 43 per cent between 2003 and 2008. This may have resulted from an increased awareness of the issue, but also from the increasing size and complexity of associations arising from acquisitions and mergers, and the lack of clarity about tenant roles on group boards. In contrast, there was relatively little criticism suggesting that access to board membership was too restricted, unaccountable or undemocratic (up from two to three mentions) – perhaps because these issues were yet to rise up the inspectorate's agenda. I also looked for any concerns expressed about a lack of role clarity amongst tenant board members (up from two to three mentions), and inadequate training and support (up from three to six mentions). It is not possible to tell whether the relatively low figures here represent a lesser concern, or are issues that will rise up the agenda over the next few years. From the outcomes of my research it would seem unlikely that support for board members was robust and that tenants who were board members were clear of their role in the inspected associations.

7.3   Development of policy and practice

7.3.1   Development of strategic documentation and action plans

As part of my approach to the case studies I looked at the policies and strategies that underpinned the tenant involvement work of the case study associations. All the case study associations had a tenant involvement policy, although some of these were out of

date and had not been reviewed. These policy statements were generally a statement of intent and a commitment to the values of tenant involvement, and set out the approaches to be used by the association, along with the structure for organisational participation and governance. All policies had a commitment to equality and diversity, but this was not always fully developed. One would expect there to be procedures and guidance for staff linked to the policies, along with terms of reference and constitutions for the various groups, and an expenses policy. However, this was not always the case. In 2003-4, none of the case study organisations had a tenant involvement toolkit for staff, although all had model constitutions and basic information for tenants on how to run a local group. By 2008, three associations had a toolkit for staff (5,24,11) and three had provided some training on tenant involvement for all staff (24,26,11). A further two were developing an approach to producing a toolkit, and one was exploring an 'off the shelf' toolkit.

Since 1999 all councils that have retained their housing stock have had to produce a tenant involvement 'compact', worked up with tenants. This should operate as an agreement, or contract, that outlines the support and resources that involved tenants can expect from the council (DETR, 1999). These were often very large documents that also contained action plans and a range of promises. Housing associations were also encouraged to develop compacts, but they were slow to do so. Housing associations preferred to produce tenant involvement agreements, which outlined the same types of support, but were shorter and less bureaucratic documents. As one staff member put it, they 'did what it says on the packet', rather than being tied up with strategy and action plans. Of the case study group, only four had agreements of this type, and a further two were, by the end of 2004, exploring the possibility of developing compacts. All had developed tenant involvement strategies, and although some called them policies. Most of the associations encapsulated the contents of the strategy into an action plan which could be monitored, as a means of ensuring that the strategy would be delivered. Others embedded their aspirations in the strategy, but did not identify when these developments were to take place or how they would be resourced, either financially or in terms of staffing. I was able to explore the delivery of the strategies in nine of the case study associations (1,7,24,11,26,23,22,28,32), and found that most of them had problems with ownership of the strategy and the accompanying action plan. Thus strategies and action

plans were produced, but were frequently never fully implemented, and this, coupled with an evident lack of corporate commitment from the management and the wider staff group, meant that actions and projects were not followed through despite an apparent willingness. There was often a period of time when the old strategy was out of date and a new one had not been developed, or situations where what the organisations did was not evident in the policy, agreement or strategy (7, 36, 32) In four cases, (1,11,22,24) both the senior and the operational staff changed over the period of the case study, which resulted in the plans being shelved. In all cases, the aspirations were not fully resourced, leading to a limited delivery of the aims, and a number of projects that were started were not completed. These included:

- a mystery shopping panel (a panel of tenants who carry out 'mystery shopping' of their landlord's services, either by using a pre-determined scenario or script, or by recording their experience of a genuine enquiry)
- e-groups
- a reading panel
- work on involving hard to reach groups
- reviewing of the agreement or development of a compact
- community development activities
- developing involvement in other key service areas
- accessing more appropriate training
- training and resourcing to enable tenant involvement to become a mainstream (embedded) activity across all service departments

As one forum member put it:

> 'They just never got around to finishing anything. We would come to the first two meetings and everyone would be excited. Then we would hear nothing for months. Then another bright idea would surface and we would all trundle in to see what that was about. They never told us why the other things were never completed, and when they did get to the end of something, they never fed this back to us' (Forum member, 11).

In the questionnaire I had asked people if the Tenant Participation Policy had been agreed between tenants and management. Although 26 per cent of respondents reported that it had not, at least one person from each association said that it had, apart from one of the regions in the large national association (Table E7.3, Appendix E). Rather more (35%), said that tenants had not had any involvement in reviewing or monitoring tenant involvement policy, yet in all but two of the associations where tenants said they had not, other tenants said that they had (although three regions of the large national association were consistent in their responses. (Table E7.4, Appendix E). This aspect of the questionnaire is further complicated by the fact that it is not possible to know whether a negative response would mean that tenants had been excluded from involvement, or that the policy had never been reviewed. In addition, 41 (34 per cent of respondents) said that their association did not involve tenants in the 'Best Value' review process, but again in the vast majority of cases other tenants from the same associations reported that they had (Table E7.5, Appendix E). The inconsistency of response in these questions within individual housing associations could indicate a lack of communication about what is going on and has gone on in the past, particularly for new recruits to panels. It may also indicate that in some organisations there is an inner sanctum of involved tenants who get involved in many things, while others are relatively unaware of what is going on.

7.3.1.1 <u>Reasons for the failure of staff to implement policies and decisions</u>

In conversations with tenant involvement staff in the case study associations, it became apparent that it was not so much that staff did not want to pursue the actions set out in the strategic documents, but that there were a number of barriers to this, which included:

- a lack of financial resources (translated into person hours)
- resistance from 'senior' involved tenants, managers, or front line staff and managers in specific key service areas
- a lack of their own personal skills and resources
- a lack of time.

7.3.1.2 <u>What the inspectors said about the monitoring of policy and practice</u>

Between 2003 and 2008 there was a significant increase in concerns amongst inspectors about the lack of monitoring, targets and action plans (from 17 per cent to 72 per cent) (Figure 7.3; Table E7.6, Appendix E).
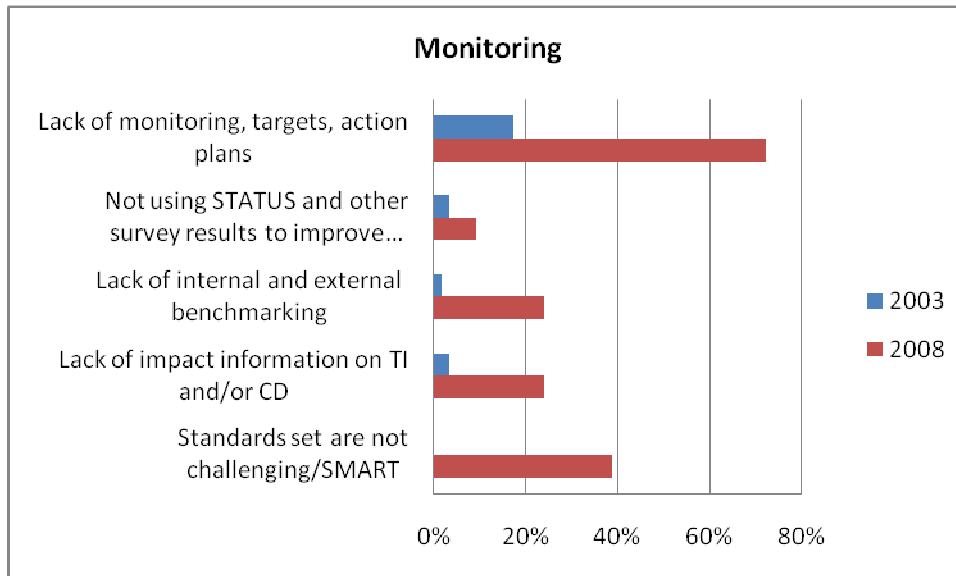
Figure 7.3: Inspection reports - monitoring

This is likely to reflect a growing awareness of this issue by the inspectorate. Indeed these issues represent one of the key areas of focus within the 'prospects for improvement' KLOE. There was also a significant increase in concerns about the lack of internal and external benchmarking, the lack of impact information for tenant involvement and/or community development, and a concern that the standards being set were neither challenging nor SMART[20]. This more robust approach to inspection reflects a growing concern about the outcomes and accountability of involvement, as outlined in the Audit Commission Report (2004).

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[20] Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound

7.4   The capacities of staff

7.4.1   The staff experience

In all the case study associations, the tenant involvement staff had had some training, although they mostly had to rely on sessions that were organised by their voluntary professional networks, and the sharing of good practice between organisations. Two of the study associations (17,5) had funded the Certificate in Tenant Participation for their tenant involvement staff but these has not yet completed. Of those housing associations that had dedicated involvement staff, in all but three the staff had been transferred from other departments, like rent recovery or housing management. Two staff (27,5) had been promoted from tenant involvement administrators, and one (23) had come from a community development post within a local authority. None of the staff had, at the start of the research, any qualifications relating to involvement, and none had a professional housing qualification or a degree. There seemed to be very little evidence of professional development for those in tenant involvement roles during the period of the research, although some had started to study for a housing qualification. In seven of the case studies (24,11,5,28,32,31,4) staff had remained in post for more than five years, working primarily with the panel or forum, which had also remained fairly static in its membership. In the associations more generally, frontline staff and managers were expected to consider consultation on a range of issues, whether changes to service delivery methods, service standards, estate issues or on more strategic areas such as improvement priorities. However, in all the case studies the wider staff group had not had training in consultation or facilitation of groups and individuals, or even in how to structure and deliver basic surveys, and certainly nobody had had any training in the facilitation of diverse groups before 2008. In two of the traditional associations there were no tenant involvement staff at all and in these, no staff had had any training in tenant involvement and consultation (1,17).

Discussions with tenant involvement staff revealed that they felt undervalued, and that they felt their line managers did not really appreciate the kind of work that they did. In all the case study associations that had involvement staff bar one (5), the tenant involvement staff were graded at officer level, yet had duties to ensure that consultation happened across the organisation, which they clearly did not have the authority to

achieve. Their roles included developing policies, strategies and tenant involvement agreements/compacts, for which they had had little concrete guidance or support. The quality of the written material reviewed in the study was mixed, and there was evidence that documentation had been borrowed from other organisations, with the title and key information amended to make it relevant to the organisation. These staff clearly felt stretched, frequently felt under-resourced, and were often without administrative support. At the time of writing in 2010, four (33,24,26,17) of the case study associations had developed manager posts to address this particular issue and to recognise the strategic element of the role.

Line managers were traditionally the head of housing management, who also undertook a range of activities with the main forum, as did their managers, the operations directors. In all departments these two levels of management were generally responsible for making sure that tenants' views were fed into and influenced the planning and monitoring of the services they managed. They would attend meetings, present papers and talk to tenants. Their primary experience with tenants would be through these meetings, and through dealing with personal complaints via the complaints system. Beyond these contacts, their views about tenants would stem from their previous experience as frontline staff, in either a council or housing associations setting. Many had worked in housing since leaving education, and much of this experience would have been gained between the 1960s and the 1990s: a thirty year period in which housing organisations underwent significant change, as did attitudes to social housing tenants and welfare services. Moreover, at this fairly senior level, there had been no training and support in managing and consulting with formalised groups of tenants, although these managers had little experience of this type of task.

By 2006, none of the tenant involvement staff had been trained to evaluate the impact of tenant involvement, to manage budgets, or to undertake reviews using the Best Value review methodology. Some staff commented that they struggled to write strategies and the plethora of documentation necessary to support an effective involvement system. Staff did, however, use their voluntary networks to access documentation from other associations.

7.4.2   The tenant perspective on positive and negative qualities of staff

In the questionnaire I asked two questions about the relationship with staff: 'What do you think are the qualities that make a member of staff good at supporting and working with tenants in your housing association?' and 'What behaviours in staff, in your experience, make working together difficult?' The aim here was to establish what the barriers might be in relation to the personalities and other qualities of staff.

In their response to the first of these questions, the most commonly mentioned quality (47 i.e. 36 per cent of those that responded) was the ability to listen, followed by a cluster of comments surrounding people skills: 'good personality', rapport, patience and understanding, ability to empathise; and a cluster around communication, including both the willingness and ability to communicate, keeping people informed, getting back to people, not talking over people's heads, and answering people's questions 'properly'. Interestingly, 'taking action and keeping promises' was lower down the list, being mentioned by only 18 per cent of people responding to this question. Other qualities were also mentioned, such as friendliness, being approachable, being able to talk about themselves, integrity, honesty, open mindedness and, importantly, being able to work with tenants, having appropriate knowledge, and being able to share that knowledge. Within the knowledge aspect good IT skills, literacy and an understanding of the rights of tenants were all mentioned. Other capabilities mentioned were good time management and being able to solve problems. One person suggested that more staff should have had experience, current or past, of being a tenant.   See Table E7.7, Appendix E for more information about the 'other qualities' mentioned by respondents.

The need for these qualities can be illustrated by the following sample quotes:

> Being a good listener, an ability to get on with people, a good communicator, good problem solver, being able to take tenants/customers seriously and to respect their views, as well as using tenants' feedback ideas in a positive way. Keeping promises.

> The confidence not to be defensive around tenants, a genuine enthusiasm for tenant involvement backed up by a good HA that is committed to tenants'

involvement, and the willingness to genuinely support tenants to enable an effective contribution. A genuine commitment to partnership - willingness to share information and proactively encourage tenants' development.

When it came to the behaviours of staff that make working together difficult, 12 (9%) said that they had no problems with staff and 101 (78%) responded that they had some difficulty, leaving 19 (15%) who did not respond. The most commonly expressed concerns related to staff having a superior attitude to tenants or a 'them and us' approach (34 i.e. 27 per cent of the total sample), and a further 10 per cent complained of attitude problems, rudeness, abruptness, unfriendliness etc. Words like 'supercilious', 'aloofness', 'high handed attitude', 'condescending attitude' were used, and comments made such as:

- 'The 'I-know-better-than-you-syndrome''.
- 'Those who talk down to you because you are tenants'.
- 'Some staff, mainly higher staff, think their word is the be all and end all, and that the customers are thick.'
- 'Talking down to tenants instead of talking with them'.

There was a cluster of comments relating to staff who were seen as not interested in tenants, who didn't want tenant involvement, resented it, felt it made work for them, and didn't accept the role of tenants as positive, or who saw tenants as a nuisance. This accounted for a further 20 comments (16 per cent of the total sample).

There was also a body of concern about staff not listening to tenants, including the inability to listen, the unwillingness to listen and the refusal to listen! This was mentioned 17 times (13%). The failure to listen is obviously partially related to the other two clusters mentioned above.

Issues around attitude and accountability were expressed quite graphically by some, and can be summarised as follows:

- Integrity: 'bullshitting', lying, dishonesty; 'underhand Machiavellian strategies'; too much secrecy; lack of privacy/confidentiality; passing the buck.

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- Equalities issues: poor attitudes in relation to equalities issues - 'the does he take sugar syndrome'; 'they equate old age with terminal stupidity'; having favourites and making close friends of tenants.

- General attitude: lack of respect for tenants; lack of empathy; defensiveness and lack of confidence; confrontational attitude; 'assumption that their values are tenants values'; 'staff watching the clock'; 'think of tenants as a commodity'.

- Behaviours arising from poor attitude: 'staff talking to each other and not to tenants'; 'treating tenants like employees, to be governed not consulted'.

- Inaction or refusal to act: failure to take action; individual staff refusing to work with tenants; refusal to get involved in estate matters; 'the lack of attitude and ability to carry out what they say they'll do'; 'not prepared to change agendas regardless of circumstances'.

One tenant wrote:

> Defensiveness, dishonesty, lack of feedback, lack of genuine desire for tenant input, leaving consultation too late, not being clear about the limits of consultation, taking ages to supply information and deal with things, not working on issues in between meetings and assuming that a response at the next meeting is soon enough, so that progress is made in 2 monthly steps, which inhibits any outcome being achieved. Alternatively, not taking any action at all between meetings, therefore ensuring a four month gap. Not proactively helping the groups develop or to ensure business gets dealt with efficiently e.g. by pointing out that the group has failed to take a decision, or by suggesting ways in which an issue could be progressed. Failing to consult on current issues and consulting with ridiculous timescales, no feedback, lack of clear information. (01)

Additional issues mentioned included three broad categories of communication, which included lack of communication between departments, and with tenants, and overuse of jargon. A number of knowledge and skills issues were also mentioned: the failure of

staff to understand tenant involvement because they lacked training or education in this area of work; poor facilitation skills; literacy issues; and poor IT skills. There was a mixed group of other issues raised that included fear of making mistakes, leaving consultation too late, lack of maturity and too much bureaucracy More information about these issues can be found in Table E7.8 Appendix E.

In short, tenants often had clear ideas about what makes staff good to work with, and what behaviours they find difficult. Tenants wanted staff who listen, who are personable, who don't think they are superior and who value and respect them through being responsive to telephone calls and letters. They also want staff to be tenant-centred, suitably knowledgeable and skilled, and to have had appropriate training. On the negative side staff were found often to take a superior attitude to tenants, talking down to them or being patronising, and were also criticised for failing to listen. Other complaints included poor communication with tenants and between departments, failures of accountability, lack of capacity generally, not consulting, not sharing good practice and leaving consultation too late. Poor facilitation skills, time management and problem solving capacity were all mentioned.

7.5   Support in place for tenants

7.5.1   Training

Of the 128 people who completed questionnaires 106 (85%) were aware that there were opportunities in their association for training, and 84 (69%) had undertaken some training during their period of involvement. They were asked what type of training they had undertaken: whether it was in-house training through an information session from a member of staff about their work, a specially designed course laid on by the training department of their association, or a staff training session that had been opened up to tenants. They were also asked if they had attended an outside training course provided by a consultant/trainer or an outside training agency such as TPAS or PEP, a conference workshop, or a college or university course, such as the Tenant Participation Certificate, including correspondence courses in tenant participation (college/university based).

All associations provided training opportunities for tenants, and of those tenants who had undertaken some training, 50 per cent had attended external training courses and 9 per cent had been sponsored on college or university based courses in tenant participation, which tend to be intensive and expensive. However, only 38% reported that their association provided in-house information-giving sessions from members of staff, which suggests that there may be a focus on 'offering training opportunities' rather than on the specific needs of involved tenants (Figure 7.4; Tables E7.9-10, Appendix E). It is also interesting to note that more than a quarter had participated in sessions designed for staff training, which may support that view, or indicate that there was a focus on the most able tenants.
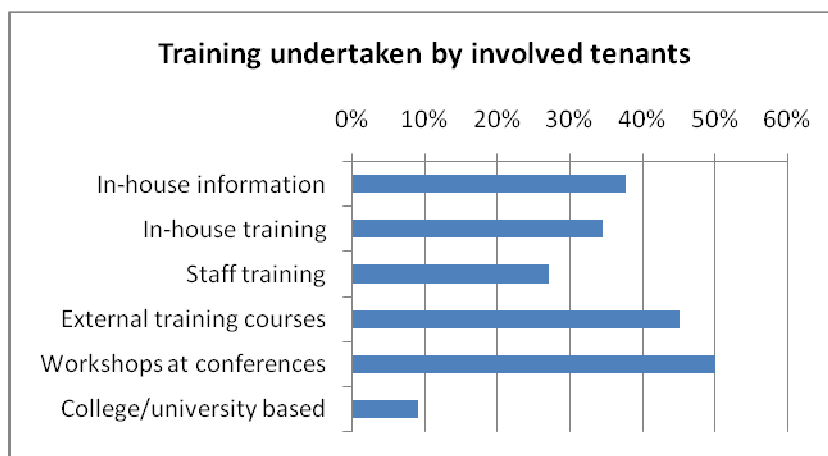
Figure 7.4: Types of training taken by questionnaire respondents

Participants were asked to name, off the top of their heads, some of the courses they could remember taking.

Of the 84 respondents who had attended some training, only 60 (71 %) were able to name a course they had attended. Between them they recalled a total of 167 training sessions.

The most commonly mentioned are shown in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Most commonly mentioned course types

Course type	No.
Committee skills, team building and how to run a local tenants' association	30
Governance-related issues	30
Service-specific issues	17
'Soft skills' such as assertiveness, negotiation skills, or stress management	16
Community development, including newsletter production	15
Equality and diversity issues	11
National Certificate in Tenant Participation	3

However, these figures were easily skewed by, for example, one landlord providing a specific training to a number of participants. One example of this was training on governance issues, where one landlord had provided 13 pieces of training spread between seven tenants. Thus, whilst superficially it looks as if governance was relatively high on the training agenda of the associations represented in the questionnaire, had that one association been removed from the sample the pattern might have looked very different. In addition, the results might have been different had a checklist of courses been provided, although by using an open-ended question it is likely that the best and the worst training will be remembered.

In general, tenants had found the training to be of significant benefit, although a large minority (30%) did not, which again suggests that training may not be being effectively targeted. Although tenants felt that they had gained in insight, knowledge and confidence from the training they had received, they also had criticisms in terms of it being too short and intensive, or too basic, or too patronising ('being talked down to'). The diversity of knowledge, capacity and educational background amongst involved tenants made it difficult to get training right. Problems with expenses and disability awareness had proved a barrier for some. Almost half the respondents had attended at least one conference, and these were generally found to be useful both for networking and for their specific content. A number of tenants felt that they would have benefited from training at an earlier stage (e.g. when first going onto a panel or board), and many of the board members felt that they had needed more training and support. There were

also concerns about the accessibility of information through the use of jargon and opaque language in training and information-giving sessions. More than half the tenants (58%) said that they had no control over the training agenda (Table E7.11, Appendix E).

Looking at the related information from the case study associations I found that, amongst the associations that had not been involved in the questionnaire, there had been a very low level of formalised training - only 50 per cent of panel/forum members had taken any training at all. Many tenants relied on annual attendance at the TPAS conference to gain information from, and about, the sector. However, it was mostly board members who attended this event, as it was considered too costly for all involved tenants to attend. All of the associations in the study had funded at least one or two people to go the conference annually. Places were rationed, creating a degree of tension both within panels and forums, and between the panels and forums and the boards. None of the housing associations had undertaken a 'training needs analysis' of the members on panels and forums, but some had started looking at the capacity of board members following a prompt from the regulators at the Housing Corporation.

Where training was provided internally, it was generally in the form of giving information, using PowerPoint presentations; in other words the training was of a corporate style. Most of the associations in my study had at some point given some tenants training in chairing and committee skills, the new anti-social behaviour law, fundraising and equal opportunities – but these were often provided only once over a period of several years, despite the addition of new group members. There did not appear to be any robust induction process for new panel and forum members.

Panel and board members in the case study associations indicated a number of areas in which they would like training if they had the opportunity:

- team and confidence building
- the history of housing and involvement
- technical training in relation to setting contracts and selecting goods and suppliers for large scale major works programmes
- embracing diversity, being inclusive and understanding different parts of the tenant and corporate community

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- the benefit of independent tenants' groups

- monitoring performance and what the graphs mean and how to ask questions

- what is going on in the rest of the sector

- the role of the Housing Corporation

- how the activities and issues at estate level can relate to broader governance and management issues

- the language and approach at meetings

- how to manage time

- dealing with burnout

- how to understand strategies, policies and procedures

- where to access more information

- 'understanding and 'learning from inspection'

- managing conflict and developing assertiveness

- other personal development approaches

The ongoing subsidised and non-subsidised training offered by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), the Priority Estates Project (PEP), and latterly Instep, cover about a third of the issues listed above, though they tend to focus on community activities and enabling independence. However, not all tenants had access to these training opportunities, even though the courses were substantially subsidised by the Housing Corporation. According to both tenants and staff this was for a variety of reasons: the inability of organisations to fund and organise the training; the tenants' own circumstances (which might prohibit travelling away from the local area to attend events); or the tenants' lack of awareness that they could ask to attend courses that the association would pay for.

A range of consultants and trainers provide bespoke training for housing association staff and their tenants, if asked. However, the fees for a day's training could range from £400 to £1 000 for an average-sized group of 15 people. Tenant involvement budgets, excluding staff costs, were usually quite small, ranging from £15 000 to £80 000 plus in 2004, and between £15 000 and £250 000 in some associations by 2008.

Consultants and trainers were generally used at key moments, when there were changes in national policy or regulatory requirements for involvement, or to support groups who had lost trust with the organisation or were suffering from infighting and conflict (5,11). Other than that they did not have much contact with panels and forums, apart from occasional focus groups convened for a one-off consultation or a new national policy directive and after 2005, the development of mystery shopping and tenant inspector/auditor groups which ran alongside panels and forums.

7.5.1.1 <u>The relationship between gender, age and take-up of training opportunities</u>

Returning to the questionnaires, an analysis of training was undertaken by gender and age, and the results tended to indicate that training opportunities were most readily offered to, and/or taken up by, younger and middle aged women (up to 65) and older men (56 - 75), although all age groups were involved in training (Figures 7.5 – 7.7; Table E7.12, Appendix E). These were the groups most likely either to be board members, or to be targeted as potential board members.
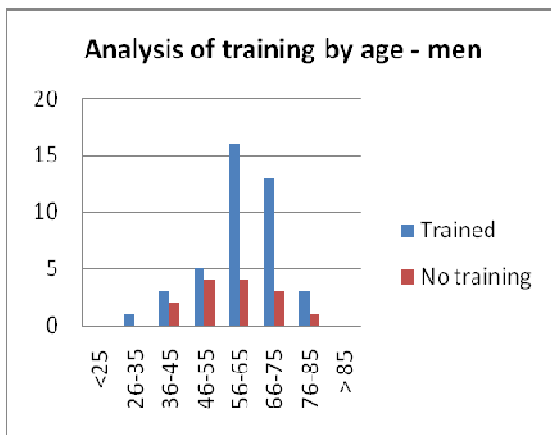
Figure 7.5: Analysis of training by age - men
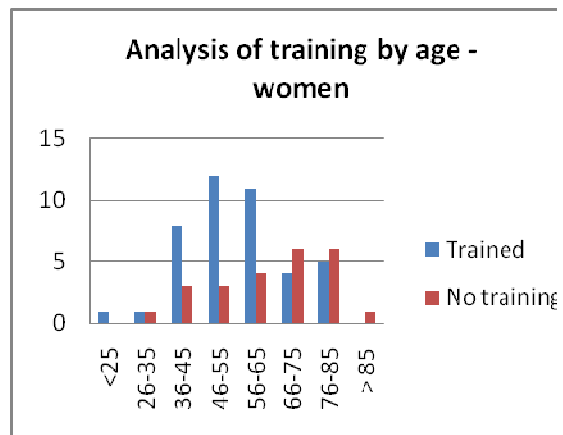
Figure 7.6: Analysis of training by age – women

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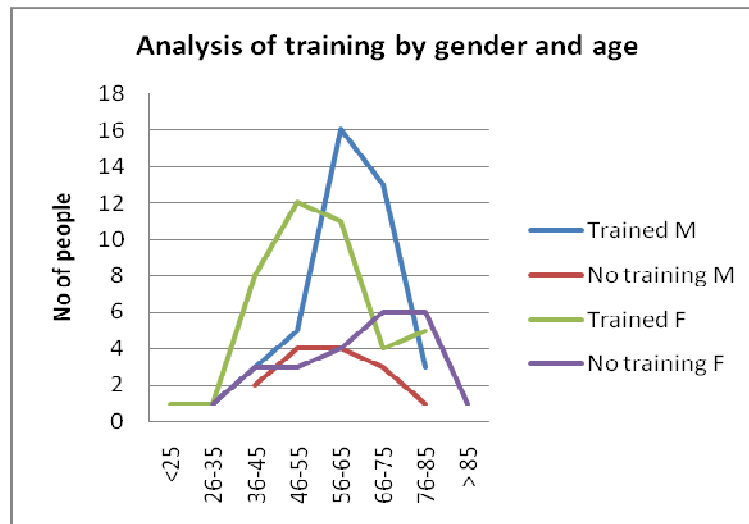
Figure 7.7: Analysis of training by gender and age

However, further light is shed on these results by the views expressed by some of the tenants in the case study associations. A number of the involved tenants I spoke to were not really interested in doing training that would mean travelling any distance and/or involve overnight stays, or that was over-rigorous, as they felt that they were 'not up to it' or were too old, frail or disabled. Some older involved tenants felt that as volunteers they did not really want to undertake training or team building activities.

Many of the older women felt that they had a role in representing the views of their older counterparts in the community, who they felt were less able. They said that they were there to help, but did not want to take on too much responsibility. They enjoyed the company and felt they could support the chair or others in the work they were doing. However, they did not want to spend their time doing training courses, and said that if they did not understand something they would ask one of the others after the meeting. Others said that they struggled with the documents and felt that they were not good enough, or clever enough, or strong enough to undertake training. Nine of the women had been bereaved in the previous two years, and were not confident about taking on responsibilities and learning new things. Their husbands had previously made all the decisions in their families, and they felt that training was not for them. In a similar vein, where husband and wife attended together (there were seven couples in the case

studies in 2003 and three in 2008), the women said that they left 'all that stuff' to their husband, who went on the training and explained things to them when they returned.

In contrast, younger involved tenants were keen to have as much training and support as possible, and complained that when they had been asked what they wanted, they had waited up to a year for something to happen, and sometimes nothing happened at all.

7.5.2 Access to information

For tenant involvement to be effective, tenants need access to information. Many tenants reported a poor response to information requests, although others fared much better. Amongst questionnaire respondents a third said that there most common experience was that 'information was not always provided' although 47 per cent reported that they most commonly got a response in writing with an explanation, and a further 20 per cent said that they generally received a response either in writing or verbally (Figure 7.8).
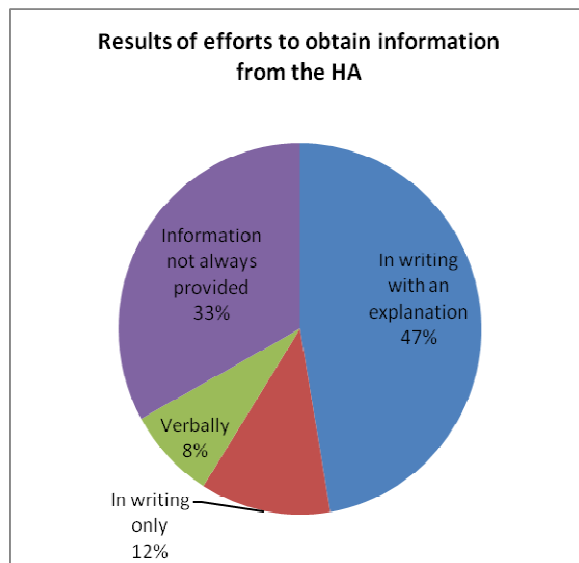
Figure 7.8: Results of efforts to obtain information from the housing association

When it came to being kept up to date with national policy developments, 40 tenants (34%) said that they were not provided with policy updates at all by their association, and yet, when analysed by association, in almost every case where some said they were not kept up to date with national policy developments, others said that they were. This was also true for the regions in the large national association (Table E7.13, Appendix

E). However, with the exception of the large national association, all but one of the board members reported that they were kept up to date with policy developments, and where non-board members reported that they were not kept up to date, other non-board members reported that they were (Table E7.14, Appendix E). The overall results here were skewed considerably by a large national association (HA1), from which there were a larger number of respondents, which tended to score poorly across many of its regions both for board members and non-board members. Of the remaining 75 who answered this question (i.e. not from HA1), only 14 (19%) said that they had not been kept up to date, and only one of these was a board member. Of course, of those that reported that they were kept up to date, there is no way of knowing the quality, quantity or medium of those updates.

Similar results occurred regarding whether tenants had seen their association's tenant participation policy. Whilst more than 40 per cent said that they had not, in virtually all of the associations where people said that they had not, other tenants said that they had, and the figures were again skewed by HA1, as shown in Figure 7.9 below (Table E7.15, Appendix E).
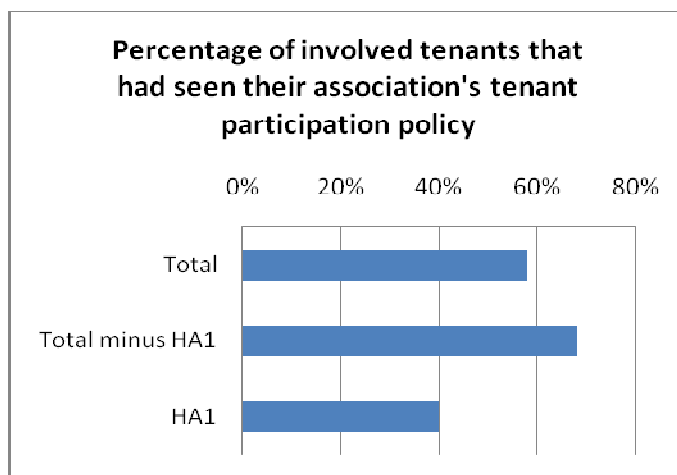
Figure 7.9: Percentage of involved tenants that had seen their association's tenant participation policy

I also asked people how much time they generally had to read and digest the papers for their advisory group before putting forward a view. Almost half (47%) said they had 2 weeks or more, a further 24 per cent said they generally had a week, 21 per cent a few days and 8 per cent said papers were normally tabled on the day. However, once again

there was huge variation within associations, with some associations eliciting responses across three or four categories (Table E7.16, Appendix E). This suggests that many associations are inconsistent in their management of papers for meetings. Tenant involvement staff and others were frequently reliant on managers to get the paperwork ready in time to be sent off to members in good time, while the managers did not necessarily see it as a priority within their overall workload.

Access to external sources of information is also important in empowering tenants. There is a weekly housing press, there are regular publications from Government or quasi-governmental organisations, such as the ODPM or the Housing Corporation, and there is the Tenant Participation Advisory Service's information service. In addition access to information about fundraising can be very important to enabling tenants to be more proactive. As can be seen from Figure 7.10 (Table E7.17-E7.22, Appendix E), access to these resources was relatively poor, taking the sample as a whole, even in the case of TPAS, where services to tenants incurred no additional cost to associations with corporate membership. Yet once again, I found that in almost all of the associations where some people were not aware of the TPAS information service, there were others who were aware of it (Table E7.20, Appendix E).

Summary of access to information

	Board member	Non-board member	Total
Housing press	59%		46%
Official publications	50%		38%
TPAS information	75%		63%
Funding advice	67%		62%
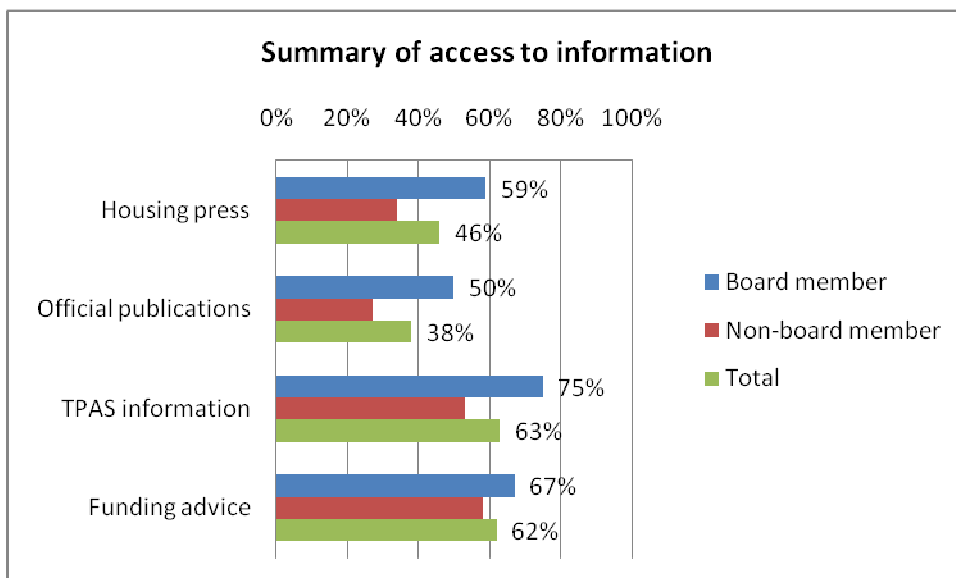
Figure 7.10: Summary of access to information

However, when I looked at the access to information data more closely a slightly
different picture emerged. First, the figures were skewed by the presence of the large
national association (HA1) as before. When I had looked at their general characteristics
there was little difference between the regions of this association, and between this
association and the other associations, but when it came to access to information there
was a substantial difference between this association and the others, as the two charts
below (Figures 7.11 – 7.12; Tables E7:17-E7.19, E7.21, Appendix E) illustrate:
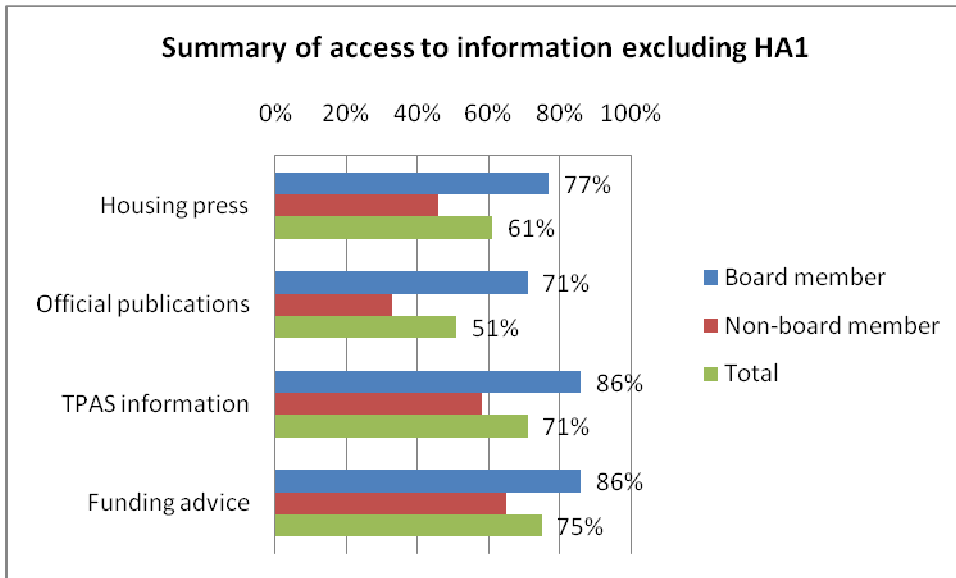
Figure 7.11 : Summary of access to information – excluding HA1
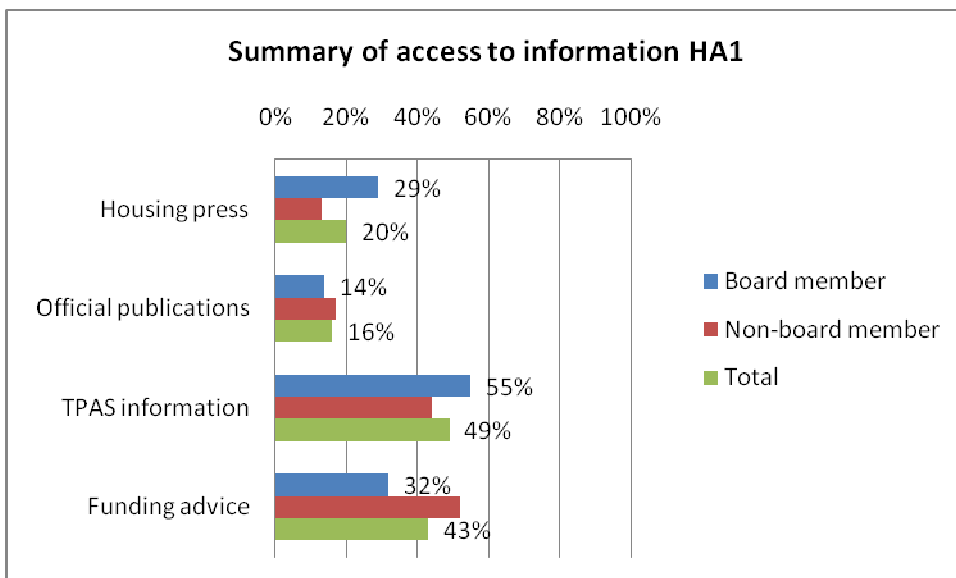
Figure 7.12: Summary of access to information - HA1

This suggests that even where the regions of an organisation operate relatively autonomously as in group structures, a corporate culture can permeate those regions in terms of organisational culture, and this will affect the way that some aspects of tenant participation operate within an organisation as a whole.

Equally noticeable was that in the vast majority of cases, where someone within an organisation said that they did not have access to a particular information strand, others said that they did. This was the case both within the board member group and the non-board member group. The only real exception was access to official publications - it was clear that a number of associations did not give anyone access to these. However, the overall finding that access to information is mixed within associations is suggestive of two possibilities. One is that when tenants do get access to information they don't necessarily think to share it - or they may deliberately keep it to themselves to enhance their power base. The other factor reflected in these results is that a proportion of panel members are, by their own admission, not really interested in studying or in being proactive – they are happy to turn up on the day, but are not prepared to put in a lot of additional work. This seemed to be particularly the case for older women, many of whom were well over retirement age.

The findings from the case studies supported this. All the tenants on the tenant panels or forums, other than those who were taking Chartered Institute of Housing courses[21], said that they did not have access to the weekly housing press, and this was also the case for tenant board members. One organisation gave old copies of journals to tenants to pass around, but this meant that they were often six months out of date by the time they reached people. This lack of access to the press did not markedly improve across the period of the study. In 2007, up to half the panel and forum members still did not have access to the press, and some new members were not even aware that there was a housing press. Nor were they aware of the Housing Corporation's 'Good Practice Guidance Notes ', or the standards set by the inspectorates.

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[21] Tenants on the Chartered Institute courses automatically became student members of the Institute and hence received the weekly paper 'Inside Housing', which is the principle weekly paper for housing professionals.

In addition, involved tenants were generally not informed of the websites or addresses where they could access information and the good practice reports that were made available to the associations by government bodies and regulators. These documents, although sent to all associations, were not routinely forwarded to involved tenants on panels, and in many cases never reached tenant involvement staff. When tenants managed to find out about useful information, they sometimes circulated it around the group themselves, or requested a hard copy from the association. However, in some cases, requested information could take months to be received.

7.5.3   Access to computers and e-communication

From the case studies I found that the internet and e-communication had been underexplored as a medium both for encouraging tenants to get involved, and in supporting effective involvement. Electronic communication and the web can make involved tenants and board members much more accessible to each other and the organisation, and are extremely useful as a means of obtaining information to support their work. Yet none of the case study associations had provided or loaned computers to involved tenants. Tenants had repeatedly asked for assistance and support with getting online, borrowing computers and becoming computer literate, but to no avail. One tenant board member, who had asked for over three years to have electronic access to papers, was denied (1). When asked about the possibility of forming an 'E group', the associations in the study said that they did not know which tenants had access to a computer, and they just assumed that access would be limited because of the relative poverty of the tenant population. Yet as already indicated there was a (perhaps surprisingly) high level of computer ownership generally amongst tenants in five of the case study associations, and from the questionnaire returns I found that 74 of the involved tenants (61%) had access to the internet – quite a high figure for that time, and contrasting markedly with the assumptions of staff (Table E7.23, Appendix E).

Interestingly, associations were also not taking advantage of the technology available to staff to enable them to access policies and procedures online.

7.5.4 Resourcing of tenants' involvement: what the inspectors said

As part of my analysis of inspection reports I collated information on the resourcing of tenant involvement activity, as illustrated in Figure 7.13 below (Table E7.24 Appendix E).
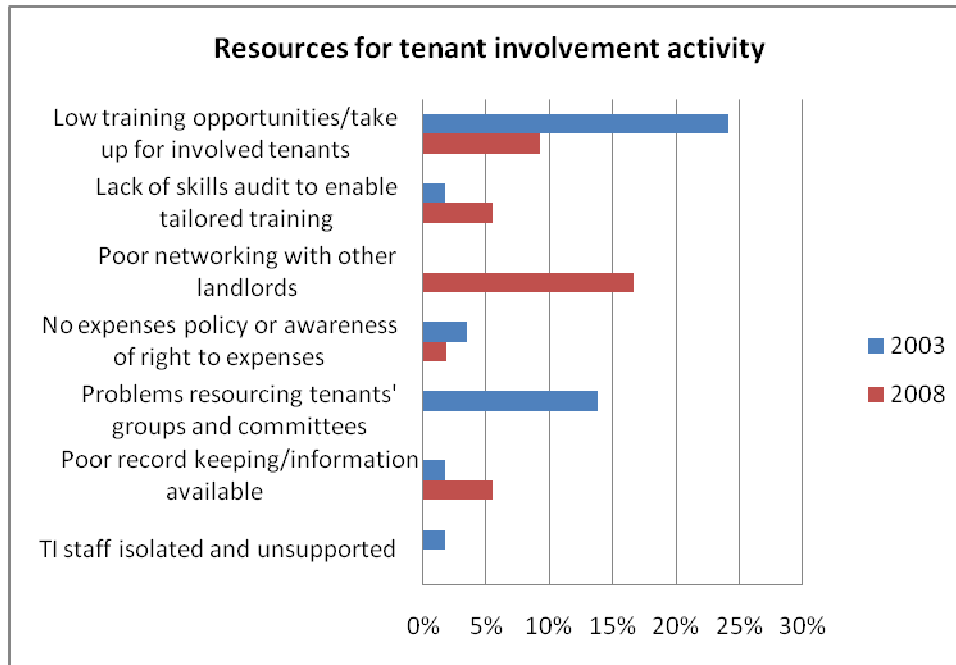
Figure 7.13: Resources for tenant involvement activity

This would suggest that, between 2003 and 2008, there had been an overall increase in the provision and/or take up of training opportunities, as the number of concerns raised went down from 24 per cent to 9 per cent. At the same time, there appeared to have been an improvement in the resourcing of tenants' groups and committees – resourcing of these groups had received a mention in 14 per cent of reports in 2003, but did not appear at all as an issue in 2008. By 2008 there were no reports from the inspectors about staff feeling unsupported in relation to tenant involvement, though it had only been a small issue previously. However, it is unlikely that staff would admit to feeling unsupported in an inspection context, as they would generally be trying to represent their organisation in the best possible light. The later inspections revealed that 17 per cent of associations struggled to network with other landlords to benchmark tenant involvement.

7.6 National level tenant involvement initiatives

7.6.1 The Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel

From my case study on the Tenant Consumer Panel I found very similar issues arising to those in the panels and forums in relation to support and training. Conversations with involved tenants revealed that problems had arisen with:

* access to information from sources other than the Housing Corporation
* papers being tabled at meetings
* lack of time for adequate discussion of issues
* lack of trust over confidential information
* lack of training and support

One good point was that all members were paid up as affiliate members of the Chartered Institute of Housing, which meant they had access to the weekly housing press.

7.6.2 The Housing Corporation Inspectorate and Audit Commission Inspectorate

The inspectorates were a different kind of vehicle for involvement. The work of the tenant inspectors changed markedly over the period of my research, and reflected the prevailing attitudes to involvement in the sector, and the capacity of organisations to facilitate it.

Corporation Tenant Inspectors (TIs) and the later Tenant Inspection Advisors (TIAs) at the Audit Commission were intended to operate as lay inspectors during inspections of housing associations. They were expected to 'mystery shop' services, undertake surveys, and write reports, read documentation and interview staff. In 2002, many of the new tenant inspectors were also board members of their associations.

There was a significant difference between the training and support given to TIs and that of the other inspectors and support staff at the Housing Corporation Inspectorate. Over the first three year period, tenant inspectors' only training was a two-day session in team work, which was compulsory for all TIs and was delivered at the selection stage and therefore focussed in recruitment.

In their appraisals, many tenant inspectors asked for training in cultural awareness and in aspects of key service areas, but none of this was actioned. Nor were they invited to the training events organised for the other inspectors. In the early days some were expected to write reports without any training. None of the proposed actions arising from appraisals were followed through, and indeed appraisals stopped altogether for more than two years. The tenant inspectors met together twice as a group over the first three year period.

Interviews with some of them revealed that they felt unsupported and treated differently from the other inspectors. The full-time inspectors displayed a wide range of views about the capacity and effectiveness of tenant inspectors. One tenant inspector commented that 'some of them treated us like imbeciles'.

Once the inspectorates (Housing Corporation and Audit Commission) merged, in 2003-4, new processes and practices emerged as the Audit Commission tried to streamline the work of their tenant inspectors, who were now to be called tenant inspection advisors (TIAs). New entrants did get two days training, and had an opportunity to shadow on their first inspection. The remit of the work changed from the original, more in-depth, approach in limited areas of the inspection, to a broader involvement, which was less in-depth and more suited to some TIAs.

Increasingly, opportunities became available (from 2007 onwards) for TIAs to get involved in Supporting People inspections. The latter, in particular, required specific training and access to literature on the subject, but that was not forthcoming, and tenants were catapulted into inspections of services that they were unlikely to have experienced themselves, e.g. housing related support for people with mental health or alcohol issues. Although comments from some full-time inspectors included admiration for tenants for getting involved, they were more often about the limitations of the activities that they could undertake, because of their lack of skills and/or knowledge.

There was no formalisation of the support for TIAs at this stage, only a tightening up of the rules on contracting and conflicts of interest. If a TIA was a board member, then they could not work in any local authority areas where their housing association had stock. This was fine for tenants from small LSVTs, but was devastating for those whose primary involvement was with large national associations, which might have

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stock in as many as 100 local authority areas. The Audit Commission also stopped paying childcare costs, pointing out that tenants working for the inspectorate were in essence contractors, and had to take care of these issues themselves. Many younger female TIAs left at this point especially in the London Area.

Although a different type of involvement activity altogether, the experience of the involved tenants was similar to that of tenant board and panel members in housing associations, and of those involved in the Housing Corporation Panel. They felt that they had been set up to fail by both the Housing Corporation and the Audit Commission, through the failure to provide adequate training and ongoing support, to exercise quality control, and to provide feedback to the TIAs on how their work had been received and used by the organisation. In addition, both inspectorates tended to treat all tenant inspectors in the same way, and separated them out from the other inspectors by not including them on team building and national training events. The TIA's never worked together they always worked with inspectors therefore these were the people they needed build rapport with. Many of the tenants said that this had reinforced their feeling of being treated as a second class citizen, and that they felt that the inspectorate did not trust them. They were also very aware that, over time, the inspectorate had reduced the areas that they could influence or be involved in during inspections.

One of the TIs from the early days of the Housing Corporation inspectorate said:

> I felt as if I was operating in a vacuum. I had years of experience of writing reports in a variety of settings, and had also had work published, but was expected to write inspection reports without any guidance as to format or content. When I submitted my work it was like posting it in a hole in a wall. It was only at my appraisal that it became apparent that my work was considered to be unsatisfactory, and I was really upset by this. Moreover, the tone of the appraisal had been quite unpleasant, almost to the point of bullying. After the appraisal I tried to contact my team leader to discuss the situation, but she failed to return my calls or respond to emails. I felt the situation was untenable so I left.

7.7 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter show that structures for involvement were broadly similar, although the scope and depth of involvement varied across the associations. Organisations struggled to provide adequate training and resourcing for involvement activities and lacked the capacity to deliver their strategic aims, which were not planned, benchmarked or monitored effectively. Tenants did have some training and support, but the organisations did not know anything about the characteristics and backgrounds of their involved tenants, nor their various skills and resources. This meant that training and support did not meet the needs and aspirations of many tenants; it also meant that a minority of tenants consumed the majority of the training, creating an imbalance in the capacity of the group as a whole. In addition there were significant barriers for tenants to overcome in terms of access to information and other resources. These were under the control of the organisation, and they were important if tenants were to work with the association on a more equal footing. Interestingly, these same issues occurred in the housing inspectorates, where tenants felt they were being set up to fail, and to a lesser extent at the Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel.

Tenants were able to identify the qualities and behaviours of staff that they felt would improve the potential for effective involvement. These centred on attitude, communication styles, and, most importantly, honesty. Trust is a very important element in the involvement dynamic, as was the feeling of being valued and of being able to make a difference.

CHAPTER EIGHT: TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN PRACTICE - OUTCOMES AND DYNAMICS

8.1   Introduction

This chapter explores the nature of tenant involvement as it plays out in practice, focusing both on outcomes and on the dynamics within groups and between the parties involved in the tenant involvement process. It will first look at the conduct of business, both within panels and forums and within boards. The next section will look at the dynamics that occur, both within boards and panels and between them, exploring the clarity of role and purpose, and the strategies that tenants employ. It tracks what happens when tenants attempt to become more proactive. The following section examines the outcomes of involvement, for example in the ease of problem resolution, on whether or not tenant involvement is making a difference, the ability of the organisation to respond to bottom-up pressure, value for money, and the areas of practice from which tenants are currently excluded in which they would like to be involved.

8.2   Conduct of business

8.2.1   Panels and forums

8.2.1.1 The conduct of business at meetings

In all the case study associations, the panel or forum was the only body of tenants that the housing association consulted on matters of policy and strategy. The most common procedure was for the staff member responsible for the development or review of a policy or strategy to get in touch with the staff member who managed the forum or panel, to ask them to put an item on the agenda. There were no instances where the staff member went directly to the chair of the panel or forum. In the main, the document in question would be a draft report that needed to be seen by tenants and discussed with them so that their views could be incorporated. However, by the time these reports were presented to the tenants, there was normally very little scope to make any substantial changes to the proposals, as all the decisions about resources and delivery had already been made.

Looking at the minutes of the groups, and attending the meetings, I observed that groups were presented with very heavily loaded agendas over which the chair had no control. There were generally huge quantities of paper reports for tenants to read, some of which were tabled at the meetings. Meetings could last for three hours or more, with the agenda items interspersed with long discussions about personal matters, and insufficient time was taken to develop a useful debate on the issues in question. In many cases, conversations with tenants after the meeting revealed that the matter had, in their words, 'gone over my head'. In some cases staff were unable to answer tenants' questions fully, particularly where tenants had some knowledge of the subject and were able to ask informed questions. If tenants asked for further information, it was not always forthcoming.

Tenants were often presented with a fully worked up draft policy or strategy and asked to comment on it. The policy would typically be couched in jargon, and tenants would have to rely on staff to explain the nature and content of the policy or strategy. Moreover, in the meetings that I observed, there was no real discussion about the performance of the previous policy or strategy, and there was no comparison with other approaches unless it had been developed using a 'Best Value' or other robust review methodology. This 'rubber stamping' approach was a common phenomenon in all the case study associations, where policies and strategies were routinely put through the panels and forums at draft stage. Associations often allowed the groups only ten minutes for discussion of an item, even where the reports had been tabled at the meeting. This approach was the same at the Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel, where debate was restricted by a strong non-tenant chair.

The quality of the minutes from these groups was variable. In some of the stronger groups, the tenants took responsibility for their own minutes, as they felt that staff were unable to produce minutes that accurately reflected the meeting. Often the minutes would be written up by the staff assistant and checked through by the member of staff servicing the group. With one exception the chair did not seem to have a role in this. Staff frequently failed to action the decisions taken at these meetings, and thus when 'matters arising' came up at the next meeting, the member of staff was unable to report on progress. If there were two or more months between meetings, then matters of interest and importance to tenants might not be attended to for 6 months or more, if at

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all. Tenants complained about this and seemed to think that there was a deliberate conspiracy to thwart their wishes. Others tried to get the information from staff in between meetings. However, during the period 2000-2003, there seemed to be a lack of clarity within the case study associations about what information tenants were, or were not, permitted to access. Latterly this has not been such a problem, as associations are, through regulation, required to make their information as accessible as possible. One panel (1) forced the association to abide strictly to the meeting rules and at each meeting brought up every point that was incorrectly recorded. This resulted in the staff handing over control of the minutes to the panel members.

8.2.2.2 Broadening the range of involvement activities

Inspections undertaken throughout the period criticised associations for only using one group (i.e. the panel or forum) for their involvement activities, and for failing to supplement this with surveys and focus groups with other sections of the tenant community. More positively, some of the case study associations started to develop working groups to enable tenants and other stakeholders to be more involved in the development of policy and strategy. Between 2002 and 2004 the number of these groups increased, particularly in relation to the partnering and contract setting process relating to repairs and maintenance (7,25,11). Tenants who participated in these groups demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with their involvement, and developed some expertise within the area of the group's remit. These groups covered issues like grounds maintenance, day-to-day repairs and maintenance, major works, and performance monitoring. They also tended to oversee any reviews of the service areas linked to the group's activities, and became involved in using 'Best Value' principles and 'Best Value' reviews. The titles of these groups included 'stakeholder groups', 'key service groups' and 'business improvement groups'. By 2006, tenant auditor/ inspection and mystery shopper groups were starting to be developed (7,11,25). These were practically based, and many were developed with good training and support for tenants, which enabled them to get involved in doing the review or audit themselves, and writing and presenting their reports to senior management. However, some of these groups were suffering from a lack of effective ongoing support (7,25), and those that had independent consultant support were expensive to run and struggled with succession planning. Some of the reports were uncomfortable for managers to receive, and in one

instance (11) the report was never published internally or given to senior management or the board. Instead it was held by the service improvement manager at the request of the repairs manager and was not acted upon until a later inspection of the service by consultants. In others, however, some or all of the recommendations of the tenant auditors were followed through, thus showing that tangible outcomes were possible.

8.2.2.3 <u>Getting caught up in complaints</u>

In many instances, the panel or forum, and indeed the board, was used by tenants as part of an informal complaints process. Tenants conducted themselves in a manner similar to that of trade union representatives – unsurprisingly given the previous experience of some tenants, especially the men. Individual problems were discussed at length and in detail during panel/forum meetings. In virtually all the case study housing associations, the complaints policy and procedures did not have the confidence of involved tenants, and there was little awareness of how to use the complaints procedure, and in particular, how to escalate complaints through the formal system. Tenants commented that the panel or forum was the only arena in which they could get issues resolved for people. Many involved tenants took a firm position about this: they saw their role as supporter and advocate, helping other tenants both to access services and to sort out complaints directly with staff. Over a period of six months I monitored the time spent on dealing with individual complaints in panel/forum meetings within three of the case studies associations (1,11,26), and found that approximately a third of the total meeting time was taken up in this way. Even so, staff constantly tried to shut down these discussions on the basis that the panel was not the correct forum for dealing with 'individual issues'. The 'individual issue' frequently masked more general issues of policy or practice, but staff rarely if ever helped tenants to identify and resolve those issues.

8.2.2.4 <u>What the inspectors said</u>

Figure 8.1 (Table E8.1, Appendix E) illustrates the comparative outcomes found in inspection reports between 2003 and 2008 in relation associations' awareness of and commitment to tenant involvement.
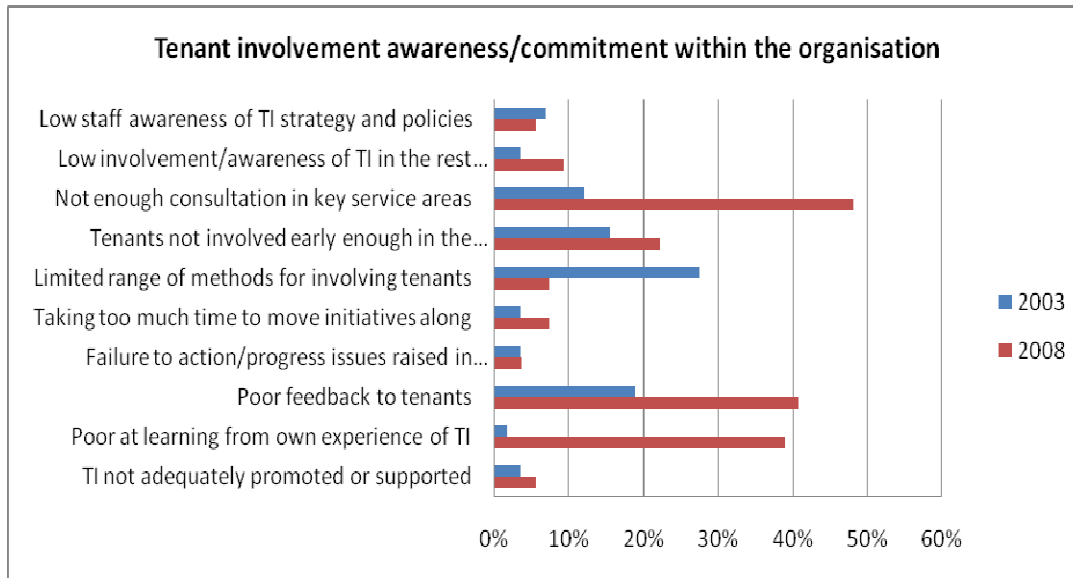
Figure 8.1: Tenant involvement awareness/commitment within the organisation

This shows that, between 2003 and 2008, there was a major increase (12 % to 48 %) in the number of landlords criticised for failing to carry out enough consultation in key service areas. This is likely to reflect a growing awareness of this issue amongst the inspectorate, and also that individual managers were interviewed specifically on tenant involvement in their departments (which had hitherto not been the case). There was also a continuing concern about the failure to involve tenants early enough in the process, which necessarily affected the level of influence that tenants could have in any given instance. In addition there was an increase in concerns expressed about poor feedback to tenants, (from 20% to 41%), and associations were found to be poor at learning from their own experience of tenant involvement (comments on this went up from 2 per cent to 39 per cent over the period), both of which are likely to reflect a growing awareness of these issues by the inspectorate rather than a deterioration in the service. Conversely there was a large reduction in the number criticised for using a limited range of methods of involving tenants (from 28% to 7%), which is likely to

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reflect a definite improvement in this area of practice, and potentially a move away from the practice of using just one panel or forum for consultation.

8.2.2 Tenants on boards

8.2.2.1 <u>Passivity of tenant board members and 'inappropriate conduct'</u>

The Audit Commission Study (2004) 'Improving services through tenant involvement' made much of the fact that tenants were not clear about their roles as board members, and stated that senior staff felt that tenants did not conduct themselves appropriately on boards and were prone to parochialism.

Over the period of the research I was able to observe five boards in operation. In addition, I conducted a workshop for a group of 60 tenant board members at a TPAS conference, and I participated in my own boards (three different ones). My colleagues on the boards on which I sat, some of whom had been sitting on the board for some years before I joined, confirmed that many of the tenants had either said very little, or had made contributions that were off the point and were too related to their own specific concerns.

The staff servicing the boards also said that there was a tendency for tenant board members to say very little from one meeting to the next, and that they were unable to comment on issues unless they related to their own estate. They also complained that tenants tended to use the board as an arena for raising concerns about failings in the service at an operational level, and were unable to convert these individual issues into general themes that could be addressed. It should be noted, however, that staff did not generally explain this to tenants and help them to see how individual issues could be converted into issues of principle. More often they used these instances to silence the tenants and prevent issues from being raised. Nonetheless, staff were often embarrassed and defensive, because they felt that these issues should be raised in 'the right place' and addressed at 'the right level'. However, further investigation revealed that, in most cases, tenants had attempted to sort the problems out through the accepted channels (i.e. reporting to frontline staff and through tenants' associations or at panel), but that their concerns had not been heard and/or responded to. Properly managed complaints protocols, and the confidence of tenants in the organisation's ability and willingness to

deal with complaints, were not apparent in the study associations until towards the end of the research, when the effects of the inspection regime were starting to be felt. However, despite these changes, the established patterns continued to some extent, because the same tenants were sitting on the board and had become used to using the board in this way.

In the questionnaire I asked if tenant board members had ever been excluded from a board meeting because they were a tenant, and seven board members said that they had.

8.2.2.2 Abuse of position amongst involved tenants

An issue raised by both staff and other involved tenants was the tendency of some tenant board members to get a better service than other tenants. Some were accused of using their position to influence the practices of staff for their own benefit, or for the benefit of other tenants as individuals, in contravention of policy. Staff talked of some tenants who went into the office, stating that they were a board member and indicating that staff were expected to act in accordance with their wishes. In other instances staff took it upon themselves to take a 'more generous' approach to tenants who were board members, in case they otherwise got into trouble. The following incidents and practices were picked up through the case studies:

- A tenant board member became aware that a tenant was giving up a garage, and although there was a waiting list, went to the list holder and asked to have the garage for her neighbour when it became available.

- Tenants had been trying to influence budget holders to spend money in their own area in preference to other areas.

- Tenants had been trying to influence allocation staff in order to be allocated a property in a more suitable area; also trying to get transfers sorted for friends, family and colleagues.

- In one case a tenant board member went around the estates handing out photocopies of an article berating the Chief Executive's annual pay rise, and agreed to talk to the press about the 'appalling' service the association provided.

- A tenant board member helped a tenant to fill out a formal complaint form and then sat on the complaints committee.

- In one instance, a tenant who had been involved with the association for many years was the only tenant to have had panel fencing fitted all around her garden, where the policy only allowed for a specified number of panels.

- Tenant board members talking with other tenants about confidential discussions that had taken place on the board.

8.3   Dynamics

8.3.1   Power relations within and between panels/forums and the board

The role and operation of forums and panels has come under increasing scrutiny both formally and informally. A number of issues arose regarding: their relationship with staff and senior management; internal power struggles; and their interface with the board, and tenant members of the board. These were seen to be blocking the effectiveness of tenant involvement.

In some organisations rifts appeared between the board members and the panel and forum members. This was more apparent where the tenant board members did not attend the forum or panel. Panel and forum members had an expectation that tenant board members would take the panel's concerns to the board and get things resolved, but in many instances this did not happen. A number of comments were made about tenant board members becoming 'one of them' (staff/management) and therefore estranged from the rest of the involved tenants. For the board members concerned it felt, as one person put it, as if:

> 'I was between a rock and a hard place. I felt I had the big picture. I could see that in some instances tenants' expectations about how services should be delivered were either unreasonable or impossible within the current funding climate. They thought I was siding with the board and the management' (Board member, 22).

Reflecting on her experience, one ex-board member said that it was such a big change for her:

> 'staying in hotels, having lovely dinners and making a small profit from the travelling allowance ... I was treated so well and felt grateful to be offered the chance to work with such a fine group of ex-professionals on the board. I think I got swept up in it all, and overwhelmed, becoming out of touch with my tenants' groups and the panel. I found it difficult to speak out at board meetings and tried hard to remain positive. However, my compatriots on the panel thought I was selling out or was a pushover or a pet'. (Tenant board member, 28)

Early on in my research, in one of the case study organisations (22), I found myself talking to someone that I had thought to be a member of staff, judging by her tone, the vocabulary she used, and the way she talked about 'we' when referring to the association. Instead it transpired that she was an involved tenant. When she left the room, the other tenants expressed their unhappiness about the way that she had conducted herself. They felt that she had sold out and was part of the 'them' in the 'them and us' debate. 'You would think she was a member of staff the way she goes on - she is nothing to do with us really and no one likes her'. (Panel member, 22)

8.3.2   Looking inward

Another issue was that of panels and forums becoming increasingly focused on their own processes to the detriment of any external focus. It appears that once the formal tenant involvement structure becomes fully constituted and functional, it spends a great deal of its resources on monitoring and running itself, and less time challenging and supporting the association. Some panels and forums seemed to get caught up in minutiae and in power struggles between individuals. There also appeared to be signs of 'gate keeping' behaviour, which was keeping newer involved tenants from joining these groups in the first place (because people rarely left the group to make space for newcomers), and if they did join, they did not always feel welcome. Staff complained that tenants were too parochial, and were unwilling to consider the bigger picture. As one staff member put it:

> 'For goodness sake, this is not rocket science. I just want them to read the stuff and tell me what they think, and for once not bang on about the gardens in

[name of street], which I can do nothing about. I have told them a hundred times that there is no budget for it' (staff member, 25).

However, staff seemed to lack the skills, or perhaps tried but failed, to facilitate tenants to enable them to become involved in more key service areas at a deeper level, with an outward rather than an inward focus.

The support staff confirmed in relation to both boards and panels that some individuals were aggressive and threatening and even racist, and that this behaviour was not challenged by senior staff or other involved tenants. Staff had also commented that in some instances this had gone on for years. Observation of panels at work also revealed that dominating individuals would dismiss comments made by some of the other members. The staff did not challenge this behaviour; in fact, in two of the panels (5,23), staff themselves were treated very poorly indeed. When asked about this, the staff said that they felt intimidated, or thought it politically unwise to challenge the tenants in question, as they would be likely to complain to senior staff, who in turn were likely to take the tenants' side. Aggressive, sexist and racist behaviour was not uncommon in a number of the meetings I observed. As one staff member commented: 'I get bullied and abused and there is nothing I can do about it, as they go creeping to the management, and then they come down heavy on me too. There is no way out, so I am looking to change jobs' (staff member, 23). Staff in four of the case study associations (5,11,25,23) suffered from stress and were absent due to sickness, or left their job, reportedly as a result of the constant infighting and aggression in the main tenant panel.

This type of behaviour was not confined to panels and forums. In one particular instance, the situation on a board became intolerable, where the chair and two other independent board members also behaved in this fashion, and this finally led to other board members leaving, including the only member who came from a minority ethnic group, and also one of the tenant board members.

8.3.2.1 Clarity of role and purpose – panels and forums

In all the case study groups it was apparent difference in understanding of the remit of the panel or forum between the organisation and the tenants. Members of panels in all

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the case studies felt their role was right to both work in partnership and challenge the organisation when they felt it was doing things wrong, and that it was their (i.e. the involved tenants) job to listen to other tenants and to make staff aware of complaints and individual problems. Staff and managers on the other hand wanted members to comment on the draft policies and strategies.   This lack of alignment in views about the group's purpose was further exacerbated by the way meetings were conducted. In some cases (5,11,23,26) the chairs of the panels and other individual members were aggressive. These chairs supported by one or two other members were all male and took a very forceful and confrontational approach to staff. The staff often dealt with this by accepting the directive from the chair on behalf of the group, then failing to implement the decisions made. In a number of cases the issue was not picked up at further meetings, especially if there was a packed agenda. It was common in most panels and forums that meeting etiquette was not strongly adhered to, and action points or decisions were buried in the minutes, and not available to members until a few days before the next meeting, which could be two or three months later.

8.3.3   Strategies of panel and forum members

Panel and forum members used a range of strategies to achieve their aims in meetings. Some did not speak much at a meeting, but talked afterwards to individual staff about a range of issues raised by community members. This worked well for them and from their point of view they were fulfilling their role to talk to the management and get things sorted. Quite apart from this, due to their diversity of backgrounds and skills, different tenants used different communication approaches and were interested in different parts of the service. Some would spend considerable time at meetings going into detail over maintenance and technical issues in an attempt to help managers improve services. However, these long conversations were not recorded, many issues were not dealt with, and staff and managers continued to sit patiently at meetings listening to tenants talking on their pet subjects and issues, apparently having no intention of taking these suggestions on board. Most panels and forums eventually established themselves into a settled arrangement, where everyone knew their place and communicated in their chosen style. One individual, or sometimes two, would control the flow of information to and from the staff or, in some instances, or for some periods of time, the staff would control the whole process.

8.3.4   When tenants become more proactive

In some cases the balance of power began to shift. This might be through conferred power resulting from a new strategy or policy, through power won by their own endeavours, or, for example, through a panel acquiring a more knowledgeable member. However, when these involved tenants started to assert their new-found power, and began asking to access documents, people and information, they came up against a series of blocks. These appeared to be put there deliberately by staff, who were unable to respond to 'bottom up' pressure. The following behaviours and practices were observed during the research period, were outlined by tenants during the interview process, and were highlighted in tenants' personal journals and 'stories':

- Saying information was confidential when it was not. 'Every time we asked to look at something to better understand why they did what they did they used the confidentiality excuse' (panel member, 1.1).

- Not allowing tenants to table papers concerning issues: for example, criticism of the harassment policies.

- Not allowing pertinent information to be brought up under 'any other business'. 'They are not interested in anything we are concerned about, they just want to get through the list they have. This is not involvement' (tenant board member, 1).

- Having sub-meetings with staff and board members which excluded tenants 'It was all cooked up before we got there, and we were expected to just nod it through. Well, we were having none of it.' (Tenant board member, 30).

- Failing to act on tasks agreed at meetings, and letting things fall off the agenda completely, or doing minimal work too close to the meeting to make a difference.

- Not allowing tenants to control the agenda or the use of budgets.

- Saying that tenants could not be involved in activities when there was no logical reason for this.

- Saying one thing to tenants and another in the meetings.

- Not being able to address the shortcomings of policies and procedures identified by tenants, because of the inadequate capacity of staff, and their lack of knowledge of good practice.

- Not respecting the knowledge of involved tenants who have attended external training and conferences. 'They pay for us to go on these things and then don't listen to us when we share what we have learned'; 'It's like they know everything and we know nothing, despite trying to keep up to date' (forum member, 5).
- Being unwilling to provide information on policy and practice, despite being asked to do so repeatedly.

These criticisms generally applied to both panel and board activities. Many of the tenants I spoke to felt that staff took such actions/inactions deliberately to make sure that the tenants did not get too powerful. 'I am sure they are just scared we could do their job better' (panel member, 1), or 'Can't let the inmates take over the asylum' (different panel member, 1). However, in some instances, further investigation revealed that staff were genuinely overloaded and did not have the capacity or resources to service the tenants' group adequately. Staff were also unsure about what information could legitimately be made available to tenants, and were, in many instances, unable to explain why they could not provide the information requested, thus further fuelling ideas of cover up and conspiracy. However, one member of staff said that:

> More often than not I don't have time to prepare the paperwork until the week before the panel meeting, and once I look at what needs doing I realise that other departments have to do some things, even though they promised me after the last meeting those things would get sorted. Getting them moving is impossible, unfortunately I have to table many papers, and it's a real scramble. (Resident Involvement Officer, 11)

In other associations there was a strong and protective bond between the panel/forum members and the staff that facilitated the group, especially if the group had been stable for some time and the staff had been in post for several years. In many instances the chair and the staff member became very close. Meetings were relaxed and unchallenging, papers dealt with quickly - even those tabled on the day - and all the boxes were ticked. There was, however, very little input to the drafts presented to the group and thus it was difficult to establish any outcomes or the impact of the work of the group. This settled position was the most common form of panel and forum of the 18 associations I looked at before 2005.

8.4   The outcomes of involvement

The questionnaire looked at tenants' experiences in relation to outcomes, and all the questions in this section were open-ended. The issues examined here included the ease of problem resolution; the activities, events and issues that tenants felt had made a difference to service quality over their years of involvement; issues of saving money and value for money; instances where tenants felt they had failed to be consulted or failed to make a difference; and the responses of the association to the 'bottom up' initiatives of tenants. Finally tenants were asked if there were areas of work in which they would like to be involved, but which were not available to them at that time. There was inevitably some overlap in the answers to these questions.

8.4.1   Ease of problem resolution

Of the 96 people who chose to answer this question, 42 (44%) found it to be on a spectrum from 'not that easy' to 'downright impossible'; 32 (33%) found it to be on a spectrum from 'fairly easy' to 'very easy'; and17 (18%) pointed out that it depended on the problem, the staff involved and the seniority of those staff.

Some felt that talking would resolve things (8 people, 6 per cent). Others pointed out that although problems eventually got resolved it could take a very long time. Many of the answers were unclear or ambiguous. 'Very easy at scheme manager level' leaves one wondering how difficult it is beyond scheme manager level, and 'very easy if both parties are willing to listen' tells little about what happens on the ground.

Other comments covered a range of issues and reflected a range of experiences. In relation to complaints, one respondent reported that they had often had to seek legal advice, while another that matters were generally resolved before the formal complaints procedure was invoked. In relation to getting a satisfactory outcome there was a feeling from a number of respondents that things only got resolved when they got hold of 'the right person' or senior management, and was often conditional on being 'on good terms' with 'the right people'. Again the issue of large organisations came up (and the time it takes to feed things up through such organisations), and the problems of changing structures. Six people commented on the length of time it took for issues to get resolved, which was often years. For example, one person wrote 'It's not easy - it

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takes a lot of time, work, effort and thought' and another 'Can take a long time (years)'. Ten people raised issues of culture or attitude: a 'them and us' feeling that results in an unwillingness of staff to try and resolve issues, and poor communication. Some sample comments were: 'Problems are never resolved, but swept under the carpet'; 'Difficult given the barriers listed and a lack of a genuine aim to resolve issues for tenants'; 'Requires culture change and strong leadership/support from the top of the organisation'.

8.4.2 Making a difference

Respondents were asked to list those activities or events/issues that respondents thought had made a difference to the quality of service that tenants receive, looking back on all the things they had been involved in. Forty-one people (32%) chose not to respond to this question, and two considered the question not to be applicable to their situation. Fifteen people (17%) stated unambiguously that they had not made a difference, or only a very minimal difference. However, the fact that so many chose not to answer this question may indicate that these respondents also did not feel that they had made a difference, making a total of 56 (43%) overall. Of this 56, 27 came from the association with the greatest number of respondents (47), making 57 per cent of this association's respondents. This leaves 35 per cent of the remaining respondents who could not think of anything that they had achieved.

The remaining responses could loosely be split between matters relating to personal qualities and actions; structural mechanisms such as customer panels, tenants associations, boards etc; activities in the community where they felt they had made a difference; areas where they had made a difference outside of housing association activity; and 'other'.

Personal qualities/actions (what individuals can do as involved tenants)

A number of tenants cited the personal qualities of tenants as having made a difference, such as: 'persistence and believing you can make a difference'; 'putting pressure on the association to listen, communicate and answer questions'; 'intervention in tenants' individual problems'; and 'building relationships with staff'.

Structural mechanisms that make a difference

Twenty-seven comments fell into this group, with Best Value, tenants' conferences and being a board member all having several mentions, along with the usual range of panels, forums, committees, consultations, service user/focus groups, design panels and tenants' associations.

In many cases it is difficult to know to what extent these mechanisms make a real difference, but in a few cases comments included specific issues: 'National panel - work on best values groups e.g. repairs and maintenance tenants' responsibility – housing association now repairs tap washers'; and 'Receiving reports with proposals and being able to change some of the proposals'.

Many more indicated a mechanism that may or may not result in making a true difference, for example: 'We have a vote on all day to day decisions in our regions i.e. rents, business plans, community, etc'; 'Standing up for tenants rights to consultation on some issues'; 'With the forum we have helped to bring up the level of participation and respect from the Company'; 'Always having our say and they listen at the tenant forum meetings'; and 'Regular meetings which help air our views and so bringing it to the attention of the housing association'

Activities in the community

Two people mentioned the value of visiting schemes. As one tenant put it '[We visited schemes] that most of us on the panel did not know existed. We learned of problems, saw and compared the different properties, and saw where money was needed to modernise those in poor repair'.

Other activities in the community that were mentioned as making a difference included 'the local group - keeping tenants fully informed of rights - helping tenants who are having difficulty with landlord or Council'; 'Play areas, clean ups, youth council'; and 'By monitoring the overall performance'.

Specific issues where tenants made a difference

Some respondents were quite specific in outlining where they felt they had made a difference, and these have been split into estate issues, policy issues, practice issues, resources, change management, monitoring and continuous improvement, and social,

followed by differences made outside of formal housing association activity and then a list of other things that tenants felt had changed as a result of their involvement:

The estate issues primarily related to tenants campaigning to achieve improvements to their neighbourhoods, parks, parking, hand rails, ground maintenance and caretaking: all areas of work that was not done well in these associations. These are bottom up issues that took some groups many years to resolve. by the council of the park on the estate where I lived (which had always been part of the development plans) took nearly ten years to achieve, and adoption issues were also a major problem for other groups. On the other hand some community development activities were well received, including some that had been initiated by the landlord as part of major refurbishment work.

Policy issues where tenants felt they had made a difference related to areas of equality and diversity, complaints, terms of reference and lettings plans. Closely linked to this were issues of practice, and some tenants felt that they had made a difference on the way their association delivered customer care; on service standards; complaints management; improved responsiveness; improved services from contractors; and getting staff to visit tenants at home. Tenants had also been involved in improving the tenants' handbook, and feedback forms. Harnessing complaints to inform service improvement was seen as an important issue.

Those that had been involved in the stock transfer process felt that they had made a real difference. As one tenant recounted, 'it was a big moment realising that we at last have the chance to have a say in our homes'.

There were a number of issues mentioned that were activities that tenants undertook to improve life in their communities. These included running social activities in sheltered schemes and keeping other tenants interested and involved. Details of the responses concerning how tenants felt that they had made a difference can be found in Table E8.2, Appendix E.

Observation of the panel and forum meetings showed that even when drafts of policies and plans were set before the group and discussed, some members of the group felt that they had made a difference, when in reality very little or nothing about the policy had

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changed to reflect the discussion. There were no mechanisms in any of the case study groups to capture outcomes in these kinds of instances. Reports on the work of the group just reiterated that they were involved in the development of this or that policy, when they clearly were not.

8.4.3   Failure to consult/make a difference

Respondents were asked: Can you list any instances where you think your input made no difference to the outcome or that you thought the organisation was not consulting you at a time where your input could make a difference anyway? ('Think in terms of the information you may give your landlord to help improve the service')

A total of 57 people did not respond to this question, 34 responded 'No', and 4 with 'Yes'. Hence 91 respondents (71%) did not indicate that there was a problem in this area, leaving 37 (29%) that felt there had been failures to consult or to make a difference.

Several people answered the question in the context of failing to get a result when specific requests had been made e.g. replacing the boilers on the estate or putting in extra external lighting.

Other issues raised were:

Tenant involvement structures – failure to consult or implement

Issues mentioned here were: changes in 'terms of reference' for customer panels, which were made without consulting panel members, and where staff expected their draft amendments to be accepted without question; and changes from county to regional tenant involvement structures, without consultation with the tenants involved in those structures.

In addition, one tenant pointed out that the company 'compact' had had a lot of good work put into it, but that the company was not sticking to the agreement, particularly on timescales. They felt that 'this has caused a lot of bad feeling, because a lot of tenants and staff had worked hard to put it together'.

Failure to consult on policy issues

Customer panel members complained about the tendency for policies to be pushed through quickly, allowing no time for consultation and/or without the necessary information to make an informed decision. An example of this was cited as staff and office regional restructuring.

Involvement in local and development issues

There were a number of comments on the failure of associations to involve tenants in development issues. There had been a problem on one estate concerning the lack of street lighting (as a result of a dispute with the local council over the adoption of the road). Requests for emergency lighting were rejected on the grounds of cost, despite the fact that there were two radio masts on the estate, which provided income. This income was used instead to keep service charges down. Another example given was where tenants had identified design faults in their new homes, such as doors opening onto cookers. The tenants were not listened to, and more homes were built with the same faults. There were also complaints that tenants had not been consulted in relation to estate refurbishments and the provision of new furniture, decorations, and colour schemes in sheltered housing.

Failure to follow through

There were complaints about the failure to follow through on agreements. One tenant said that over a period of several years he could only think of two instances where he had been able to make some input locally, but he felt that 'the management interest [had] petered out before there had been any real or lasting effect'. In another case, the respondent said that tenants had been complaining as a committee for three years, in order to try and get a decent service, but had stopped counting the meetings where promises had been given but never kept.

In addition, a number of respondents had commented generally on the failure to make a difference in the question where they had been asked about the occasions where they *had* been able to make a difference. These tenants were clearly disenchanted, and made the following comments:

- 'We've made no difference – the process takes too long. '

- 'Although I have found the officers at panel meetings to be receptive to tenants, this does not, in my experience, filter down to local management. It is difficult to get a reply to a perfectly reasonable letter of enquiry. '

- 'If the association showed more willingness to listen and work with us we could have improved by leaps and bounds. As it is it feels we have to work very hard in order to achieve very little and consequently it is not particularly good value for money and we are not particularly effective.'

- 'Haven't seen any real difference in attitude from certain members of staff so cannot put any instances. We are still being screwed!'

- 'It always feels like a real struggle, consideration always felt reluctant and grudging'.

- 'Response to any initiative or enquiries is very slow',

- 'Our association is very reluctant to respond to initiatives tenants bring to them as they will only be concerned with the price tag. I cannot say at present there are any instances where they have responded positively'.

- One even said that while most ideas were 'listened to, noted and not heard of anymore', some were 'sat on for a while and released as another bright idea from them and 'would you like to go along with this? Put your tick here'.

8.4.4   Responding to 'bottom up' pressure

Respondents were also asked: Does your Association respond to initiatives brought to their attention by tenants in their various boards and committees and can you recall any instances? This was designed to elicit how associations had responded to 'bottom up' initiatives as opposed to those on which tenants had been consulted by the organisation.

Out of all the respondents, 30 did not answer this question, 19 responded with 'No' alone, 6 said they didn't know, 11 felt tenants' initiatives were 'sometimes' responded to, and 16 responded 'yes' without giving any detail. These accounted for 82 of the responses (64%) leaving 46 (36%) who responded in more detail as indicated above.

Overall, 26 people made positive comments. Many related to changes made on estates: putting up signs about dumped cars, anti-vandal notice boards, grounds maintenance issues, putting pull cords at the bottom of the stairs in a sheltered scheme, adoptions issues (in relation to roads and play areas on new estates) and the introduction of a handyman. Some related specifically to tenant involvement issues: for example, terms

of reference for customer panels, mileage rates for the customer panel, updating policies on residents' and tenants' associations, including improved funding, an increase in the number of tenant board members and the introduction of forums for disability, BME and gay groups. Others related to development issues: identification of brown field sites, design amendments (through planning meetings), design input on kitchens for disabled people etc. Further comments related to a variety of issues at estate level. In one instance tenants had managed to avert a staff wage restructuring, which would have meant a 10 per cent reduction for some lower paid staff: 'Tenant officers took the initiative by writing to the board against the proposal. The board then did a U turn, Tenant power!' Another housing association had an annual budget of £100 000 for tenant led initiatives.

The remaining comments were more general – feeling that the work that that they had done on panels, forums and committees had generally made a difference and that they had at times been able to change a proposal by the association.

8.4.5 Value for money

Respondents were asked: 'Can you think of any instances where the effort of participating tenants has saved your association money?'

90 respondents (70%) either left this question blank or answered 'no'. Of the remaining 38, 11 (9%) mentioned things that they did themselves that they felt saved their landlord money, such as gardening, being good neighbours, looking after the property, not claiming their telephone calls, doing caretaker duties when there was no caretaker, sorting out tenants' problems, giving up tenant involvement allowances, and organising social events in sheltered housing.

This left 27 (22%) who felt that they had saved their association money through their input into policy and/or practice.

The following were all mentioned:

- Undertaking involvement activities - for instance running panels or other groups.
- Suggesting better contractors.
- Changing specifications to enable better use of resources.

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- Intervening to stop legal action by other tenants.

- Undertaking tenant involvement and community activities in the locality, thus reducing anti-social behaviour: in particular, vandalism.

- Abolished door-to-door rent collection.

8.4.6 New areas of work that tenants would like to be involved in

Respondents were asked to list any areas in their association that they would like to be involved with but where at present their association did not have tenant involvement.

In total 64 respondents (50%) did not respond to this question and 10 responded with 'none'. Of the remaining 54 (42%): 11 seemed satisfied with the level and scope of involvement available and five felt that they were too busy or too old for greater involvement than they had now.

Of the remaining 36 (28%), tenants wished to be involved in areas or work such as development and design, allocation and lettings, contracts for maintenance and cleaning, as well as the business plan, budgets and policy, estate management issues, complaints management and customer care, staff recruitment, major repairs and garden as conservation (see Table E8.3 Appendix E for a full list).

Thus 28 per cent of respondents indicated a substantial number of areas of the business in which they would like to be involved. It may well be that had all the questionnaire recipients been presented with such a list, there might have been more expressions of interest from the 50 per cent that did not answer this question at all.

This finding reflects the case studies, where there were still departments in the housing associations where involvement, and in particular the work of the panels and forums, was totally absent, such as income management, development, aspects of stock investment and asset management, and leaseholder services. Only one association formally involved tenants in determining business priorities (5) and one other attempted it for one year only (11).

8.5   Conclusions

This chapter shows that the capacity of involvement to make a difference and empower tenants depends, to a considerable extent, on the way that the involvement is planned, the way meetings are conducted and the timing and focus of consultation. My research shows that involvement, as currently practised, is essentially a top-down process, where the association maintains strong control over the areas in which tenants are permitted to participate, and the stage of the process at which they will be consulted. For more than ten years it has been the practice for tenants to see plans and initiatives only after the decisions have been made and documents prepared for the board. At this stage there is little opportunity for tenants to influence the organisation's focus or priorities. Nor are tenants able to exert influence over the service areas in which they are permitted to be involved. Associations continue to resist bottom-up pressure, despite the fact that this can often alert the association to important service delivery issues, and to what is important to tenants. That said, and despite the many barriers outlined in these three findings chapters, tenants still found ways to achieve their ends, but often at the expense of other tenants, and in many cases resulting in little or no change in the way services were delivered or prioritised.

The dynamics and power struggles within forums and panels serve to create a significant barrier to successful involvement, and become more challenging as time progresses. They create divisions between involvement staff and tenants, staff and managers, and managers and tenants, as well as between forums and boards. In some instances this has resulted in a significant breakdown in trust, and the isolation of tenants. Tenants can often find themselves having to protect hard won rights, and their attempts to push forward into new areas of influence are frequently unsuccessful through a lack of knowledge on their part, and the resistance of the organisation.

The next chapter will use my chosen theoretical models, in conjunction with my data, to explore the sources of the barriers to successful involvement, and importantly, why they have persisted over so many years and in a very wide range of settings.

CHAPTER NINE: BARRIERS TO INVOLVEMENT: THE DYNAMICS OF TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND THE CIRCUITS OF POWER

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I return to my key research questions, and consider how the theoretical models help me to understand my findings. One of my key questions was to establish which tenants were becoming involved in the corporate undertakings of their housing association landlord, whether working in panels and forums or on boards. Then by exploring a number of these panels and forums, in terms of their structure and practice, I aimed to establish the shape of involvement practice across the sector. From this information I intended to identify the barriers to effective and empowering involvement, by charting the experience of both tenants and staff, and by exploring the dynamics both within and between groups and their housing association landlord. The findings from the questionnaire, case studies and inspection reports are outlined in chapters 6, 7 and 8 and in themselves present useful information on the wide range of barriers that I identified. This does not, however, demonstrate how or why these barriers occur or whether they can be overcome. In this chapter, I move from considering issues that are largely static in nature to examining the dynamics of tenant involvement, and its potential to impact on outcomes, whether that be the empowerment of tenants, improvements to services, or indeed better accountability to tenants in general.

I do this by exploring the way in which power relationships play out through the interaction between tenants and housing associations, using Clegg's (1989) Circuits of Power framework outlined in Chapter 4. I also use examples from tenant involvement with the regulator to explore how the dynamics, and thus power relationships, between tenants and regulation staff, play out at a national level. For Clegg, 'power is best approached through a view of more or less complex organised agents engaged in more or less complex organised games' (Clegg, 1989:20). Central to this is the marshalling of agents' skills and resources, which work as a stabilising or fixing factor in the circuits of power, and thus determine the potential for the transformation of power. Forces become fixed and attached to what he terms key

nodal points of practice that become privileged in an unstable terrain. To understand this, it is necessary to explore the strategies of agents who act in such a way as to enrol others, along with their resources, into an agreement about what needs to happen in any given circumstance. In this sense power can be viewed as a process (as opposed to a concrete entity), which flows through three circuits that contain areas of resistance. Agency is central to Clegg's thinking about how power works, and is 'achieved by virtue of organisation' (Clegg, 1989:18). It is therefore the strategies that tenants and staff employ that are of interest in this chapter, along with the resources that those involved bring to bear in any given event or series of events.

If power does play out in this way, then there is potential for tenant involvement to make a difference and for those involved to become empowered. Power only appears to be fixed to the extent that it is perceived as such; thus it has become reified as a result of successful modes of discipline and control becoming embedded over time and space. In the context of my research, this is reflected in the belief of many tenants that they do not have the power to change things, or to become more empowered in terms of increasing their scope of action and influence when working with staff in organisational structures.

For power to transform, changes need to take place in the rules of practice that govern actions and outcomes between two (or more) agencies, whether they are groups or individuals. For tenant involvement, transformation can mean empowerment, in that there is more scope, and more rights or resources, available to tenants in the future, and thus more potential for their desired outcomes to be achieved. For Clegg, this reflects a change in the relationships of meaning and membership, and thus the standing conditions are also changed. For commentators such as Somerville (1998) this can mean that empowerment is achieved to a greater or lesser extent and accrues to individuals, groups or elites. By exploring who it is that benefits from the dynamics of tenant involvement, and what shape these benefits take, it is possible to establish the extent of transformation.

The remaining sections of this chapter are structured in accordance with my research questions. Specifically, Clegg's framework of power model is used to elucidate the issues, and Somerville's (1998) typology to establish the outcomes in respect of beneficiaries. Section 9.2 gives an outline of who the involved tenants are and their characteristics, and thus establishes the potential resources (standing conditions) that they can bring to the

involvement 'game', as well as identifying the missing voices, and the potential for diversity, as latent additional resources. Section 9.3 looks at the shape of involvement and the characteristics of staff, managers and the organisations that they work in, and using Clegg's framework, explores how well and to what extent national and local policy has worked to shape involvement practice. The section goes on to consider how training and support has the potential (or not) to transform the standing conditions and thus the potential for changing the shape and nature of involvement practice, thus empowering tenants. Section 9.4 focuses on the dynamics involved in panels and forums, and shows how power is used to fix and transform rules of practice and how this plays out in organisations. It also looks at how staff and tenants operate as key nodal points or 'obligatory passage points' for channelling power. Section 9.5 examines a number of situations in which the aspirations of the tenants were, or were not, achieved. It does this by comparing different case studies, using Clegg's framework to explore why transformation takes place and Somerville's typology to establish whether the transformation truly benefitted the tenants concerned. In all these sections, a range of barriers to tenant involvement, (one of the fundamental questions in this research), are revealed. Above all in this chapter, I focus on the dynamic nature of interaction, exploring how power is used consciously and unconsciously by the tenants and staff concerned in a way that brings about involvement outcomes for tenants.

9.2 Who are the involved tenants?

By exploring the characteristics of the tenants it is possible to establish whose voices are included in forums and panels, associated working groups and boards, and whose are not. From this and the desktop review of associations' documentation, it is possible to identify potential barriers, looking from the inside out rather than from the outside in. By exploring the characteristics of the individuals in these groups it is also possible to see the potential resources that the group can bring to the involvement game.

The majority of tenants identified by the questionnaire lived in general needs homes with only 25 per cent in sheltered accommodation. This was very different from what I had been led to believe by staff, who appeared to believe that the majority of forum and panel members were in sheltered accommodation. Most tenants (74 per cent) were living in small estates of

under 100 homes. Seventy-five per cent of questionnaire respondents had been tenants for over 5 years, and many had been involved for some time: 80 per cent for two years and 14 per cent over ten years. Seventy-four per cent were involved in activities in their community, and many were also engaged with other service providers to differing extents. This finding is consistent with research by Blakey et al (2006) and CLG (2009), which found that providers were more likely to engage with those who were already engaged elsewhere. It is clear that the tenants in this study were active in a range of settings over many years, and were used to engaging with service providers and working in groups.

One might reasonably expect that those already involved in the above types of activities would be more able to manage themselves in different settings, be aware of linkages between different aspects of their activities, and have developed a network of reciprocal support, all of which can, in theory, increase the potential for change. This assumes, however, that their experiences with these agencies have been positive and that they were actively engaging with them rather than merely attending a lot of meetings in a passive manner. My exploration of the dynamics of the involvement process later in this chapter will examine what appears to happen in practice, from which it will be possible to establish more accurately the potential benefits to a panel or forum of being involved with a range of agencies.

Both the questionnaire and the case studies revealed that 57-58 per cent of panel and forum members were women. Interestingly, when it comes to the gender balance in key roles, such as chairs and board members, the picture is quite different, with 74 per cent of chairs in the case studies being male. The case studies also revealed that 59 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women achieved board membership. Looking at gender alone the picture reveals considerable male dominance of key roles in panels and boards. This type of gender imbalance was also found amongst the non-tenant board membership, and particularly amongst board chairs, indicating that barriers for women are likely to be widespread at all levels of governance and related activities within housing associations.

A clue to the reasons for this gender imbalance may be found in the age structure of panel and forum membership. The average age of members was between 56 and 75, with men more likely to be between 56 and 75, and women more evenly spread across the age groups between 36 and 85. In the case study associations all the chairs except one were over 55, and it was the older male chairs that were most likely also to be board members (generally again

in the 56-75 age range). The pattern for women was somewhat different. Not only were the panel/forum members likely to be from a wider age range, but those on boards also reflected this wider age band (36-75 according to the questionnaire responses). Female board members were not only more likely to be younger, but were also more likely to have never been a chair of a panel or forum. This reflected the fact that many staff felt under pressure to achieve a more balanced gender mix on boards, and therefore pushed to appoint younger women, who typically were appointed to the board within two years. Such younger women would have the added virtue of ticking two diversity boxes, which may explain why more young women than young men were solicited, although it should be noted that young men were also under-represented on panels, forums and boards. In addition the preponderance of older men in the role of chair tended to block younger people coming through into key roles and board membership, as it was frequently a case of waiting to fill dead men's shoes.

In addition to gender and age barriers there is also a significant barrier for those from minority ethnic backgrounds. From both the case studies and the questionnaire it was clear that the membership of panels and forums did not reflect the profile of minority ethnic groups (as indicated by Hills, 2007) within social housing over the period of the research, despite some of the associations having considerable stock in metropolitan areas with a very diverse population. At least in part, this resulted from the inability of organisations to develop strategies and processes to understand and attract tenants from these backgrounds, despite the national and local targets that had been set. Interestingly, two of the case study associations had contracted out this task to consultants, who had carried out surveys of minority ethnic tenants to see if they would like to be involved. This survey approach was unsuccessful compared with other methods of outreach, which suggests that both the commissioners of the work and the consultants were poorly equipped to initiate a successful outreach initiative. Most housing associations established their tenant profile by undertaking a STATUS survey of a sample of tenants, which in my opinion is not a useful guide because the survey requires a certain level of literacy and a willingness to fill in a form, and is therefore more challenging for those for whom English is not their first language, have certain disabilities, or who are busy. The other measure commonly used was information from the census, but this information was not broken down by tenure, and was therefore unlikely to reflect the true profile of housing association tenants.

The performance of associations on diversity issues in general has been poor. None of the associations in the study had successfully complied with the Audit Commission directives (KLOES) requiring housing associations to establish up-to-date information on all tenants across all equality strands, along with information about their specific needs. Moreover, the equality and diversity policies and related equality schemes that had been put in place did not impact on tenant involvement at all. Associations were not even monitoring the diversity of involved tenants, as required by the regulator from as early as 2002. Thirty-five per cent of inspection reports in 2008 criticised associations for either failing to monitor or poorly monitoring the diversity of involved tenants (Table E22, Appendix E). Worse still, the case studies revealed that there were examples of racist behaviour on panels and on boards, in the latter case amongst both tenant and non-tenant board members. Similar attitudes can be inferred from a tacit acceptance amongst board members of the association's failure to comply with directives from the regulator regarding inclusivity. However, the regulators were also at fault in their failure to ensure compliance even with basic service requirements in relation to diversity, let alone with ensuring that there was a fair opportunity for all to join panels and forums at the policy table. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the boards of housing associations tend to be very 'white'.

In terms of disability the picture initially appears more promising, with disability seeming not to be a barrier per se. However, it is likely that the nature of the disability would affect the likelihood of a particular disabled person joining a panel or forum, as some disabilities are much easier to accommodate than others, and many disabilities require no accommodation at all. The case studies revealed an overall disability level of 54 per cent, although the level ranged from 38 to 67 per cent between groups. The questionnaire returns indicated a lower level at 47 per cent, with 25 per cent of all respondents being unfit for work due to disability or illness (there was, as one might expect, considerable overlap between these two groups, especially amongst younger tenants). Interestingly, there was a much lower level of disability amongst tenant board members (32%), meaning that disability may be a barrier to board membership. Disability is more likely to be prevalent amongst the older tenants, but both the questionnaire and the case studies revealed that some younger members either had disabilities or were carers for others with disabilities.

Another under-represented group on panels and forums is parents and carers of dependent children, both partnered and unpartnered – a fact that was apparent from both the case studies and the questionnaires. As a point of comparison, Hills (2007) reported that 18 per cent of social housing tenants were lone parents, as against 5 per cent of the questionnaire respondents, with only a further 7 per cent of respondents coming from two-parent households. This suggests that there are considerable barriers for these important groups. When it came to economic activity, only 17 per cent of the sample were working, and all of these had dependents. The obvious barriers for this group lie in the fact that virtually all panel meetings took place during the working day, and in the high level of commitment needed to work and bring up a family, particularly for a lone working parent. The extensive travelling involved in attending meetings in some associations posed an additional barrier for those who worked. For some larger associations this meant an overnight stay. If associations are to address these issues it is essential for them to understand who their harder to reach groups are by ensuring that profiling information is collected and updated, and – importantly – is referred to when planning involvement activities.

Whether people are working or not working, caring for children or other family members, are younger or from a minority ethnic background, or have a disability that is more challenging to accommodate, it is important that they have a real opportunity to be involved in developing, monitoring and commenting upon services. These groups are often referred to as 'harder to reach groups' simply because they are harder to reach, but their input is vital if services are to be responsive to the needs of the whole tenant community. Success in this respect will depend on there being systems and structures in place to ensure that opportunities and activities are accessible and desirable, that they are organised in such a way as to make it relatively easy for tenants to share ideas and views, that the tenants are actively supported to do so, and that they feel valued. Regulators and inspectors have persistently expressed concern about the under-representation of 'harder to reach' groups on panels and forums, and the likely impact of this on the effectiveness of services, and new initiatives in meeting their specific needs (see figure 6.22, page 212)

The barriers to tenant involvement are substantial, and fall into three main categories: access; developing group capacity and identity; and the involvement process a potential fourth category could be managing change and succession. Table 9.1 contains a breakdown of

barriers to access to involvement. Although barriers to access were not the specific focus of this study, they are an important finding as a view taken from the *inside* of tenant involvement. Table 9.1 also contains some more general information about barriers to access from the literature, to add the perspective of those who have chosen not to get involved at all.

Table 9.1 Access barriers to tenant involvement

Access Barriers
Reasons for non-involvement from the literature (from the outside looking in)
• Tenants have competing priorities and complex lives, and some are socially or geographically excluded and/or vulnerable • Tenants are unaware of opportunities, or what involvement is or means and what is on offer is too vague • Tenants think it will be a waste of time or are not attracted to what is on offer: they do not want to attend meetings • They lack confidence • Previous negative involvement experiences with agencies have been damaging or caused loss of trust • The opportunity cost is too high • They prefer to let others do the work • Timings are unsuitable or clash with other commitments • They are happy with the service and see no need for involvement
Access barriers identified from my research (from the inside looking out)
Barriers created by the organisation
• Times of meetings suit staff rather than tenants • Location of meetings only at head office
• No/unclear or out of date strategy or action plan • Poor management of action plan items
• No information about, or understanding of, tenant profile • No clear effort to involve harder to reach groups (though a wish to do so) • Unclear focus of resources to reach out to harder to reach groups
• No/poor incentives; expenses policies not published or unclear
• No clear menu of opportunities, or promotion of these (or out of date) • Limited and unexciting options (focus on type of activity rather than issue of interest)
• Recruitment to groups is unstructured, with no clear role description • Lack of attention to diversity in recruitment to groups, and weak succession planning • Recruiting only compliant tenants or those who volunteer for specific groups or projects • No clear terms of reference for the group that shows what the group does and why, the limits and extent of the role

How access barrier impacts on panels and forums
• Many tenants do not participate, especially younger people, one and two parent families, working people and those from minority ethnic backgrounds   • Panels/forums contain predominantly older white males and females, with older white males dominating key positions and board membership   • Existing panel/forum members appear on all other working or consultation groups   • Existing groups grow smaller over time and cliques emerge, blocking others   • Less diverse range of skills and abilities in the involvement arena   • Potential for making a difference limited and potential for a cozy settlement increased
Reasons and organisation created access barriers

• Other organisational priorities are seen as more important, such as development
 • A culture that does not put tenants at the centre as they are not the primary focus – organisational growth is the main focus
 • Prevailing attitudes to tenants from management and board that do not respect and understand the diversity of people living in housing association homes
 • Lack of support and commitment, from senior managers and other managers, for involvement in their areas of work, which results in:
     o Lack of budget, lack of clear strategy and lack of organisational priority
     o Relatively lowly position of involvement staff in relation to the managers whom they must seek to influence
     o Poor involvement staff management, training and support in strategy planning, communication, cultural awareness and facilitation
     o No benchmarking/good practice information
     o Unclear grasp of regulatory requirements
     o Lack of time and resources

Given the nature of the work of panels and forums there are considerable disadvantages to working with a relatively homogenous group. Not only are the views of whole sectors of the tenant population absent from the discussion, but the range of knowledge, skills and resources that can be brought to the involvement game is reduced. The paucity of working tenants, for example, affects both the flow of information to the group and external linkages, especially in relation to technology and new ways of working (although this does depend on the types of working tenants that might get involved). That said, if tenants were truly able to influence the shaping of services, the missing voices of under-represented groups would still mean that services would almost certainly fail to meet the needs of those groups. Whether they be working tenants, tenants with children, tenants from minority ethnic groups or tenants who are geographically isolated from central areas of the housing stock, they are all likely to experience specific barriers to accessing appropriate services because of their circumstances.

Finally, as an involved tenant in a traditional association, I was keen to discover whether there were differences in the characteristics of involved tenants between traditional associations and the large scale voluntary transfer associations, and I did find some. In general traditional associations were rather more successful in recruiting members in the 36 to 45 age group, and had a higher number of women aged 76 to 85, whereas the preponderance of tenants in the 56 to 65 age range was particularly noticeable in the LSVTs.

9.2.1 Skills and backgrounds

The diversity of skills amongst panel members is also important, regardless of the diversity of their other characteristics. Knowledge of members' backgrounds, skills and capabilities can be used to improve the confidence and effectiveness of tenant groups working with staff, through wise facilitation and focused support. From the questionnaire results it is striking that 51 per cent of all involved men had a military background, and 28 per cent of all respondents had a degree or professional qualification. This suggests that there is a high level of skills and resources potentially available to panels and forums, although there may have been some bias in the sample, as these groups may have been more likely to complete the questionnaire. However, the case study groups appeared to be of a similar makeup, and although I was not able to formally profile these groups, in my own panel four of the five younger women had a professional qualification or degree, and one of the older men had a professional background. It is unclear why the associations did not make more use of these potential skills, especially as a resource to support other members of the panels and forums. It should be noted, however, that none of the involvement staff in the case study associations had a degree or professional qualification themselves (although some were working towards one), suggesting that involved tenants quite often had a higher level of education than the staff. Interestingly, several staff acknowledged that they had inadvertently stereotyped tenants in terms of their capacity. It appears, therefore, that 'taken for granted', or even subconscious, views about tenants as an underclass or as 'disadvantaged', played out in staff attitudes to involved tenants.

This failure to recognise and utilise the personal resources that tenants bring to the table is not confined to staff – this significant potential is neither acknowledged nor utilised by the tenants themselves. Recognition of these resources would transform approaches to training and methods of working, and could significantly increase the potential for involvement that

makes a difference and empowers those involved. It also raises challenges, as the diversity of educational background has implications for how training is delivered, and business conducted in a way that works for everyone. The failure to recognise this diversity helps to explain the differences I observed in behaviour, attitudes and approaches, both to giving and receiving views and information.

Using Clegg's (1989) concept of 'standing conditions', the diversity of panel membership and the variety of knowledge and skills brought to the table have a significant bearing on the standing conditions in terms of the power to understand and construct meaning, and the power to shape the views and attitudes of those one wishes to influence. If knowledge and skills are shared amongst the group, they have the potential to increase the capacity of the whole group (rather than merely benefiting a few privileged individuals), thus significantly improve the standing conditions. This is hugely important, as it has the capacity to shape the panels and their activities in a major way. Moreover, I found that many involved tenants had been tenants for some considerable time, and quite a number had been involved with their landlord over a lengthy period, suggesting that they have considerable experience of working in corporate settings with professionals. Again this experience could be used to support newer members in getting to grips with the formal rules of involvement as well as the unwritten 'way we do things round here' dimension. Instead of this, in most of the case study panels and forums that I observed, individuals and small cliques used their knowledge to gate-keep or exclude others from the opportunities that emerged, such as membership of a working group, training and, very importantly, attendance at conferences.   Thus the opportunity for experienced active tenants to bring on new members is lost.   It is also interesting to note that tenants are generally involved with their landlords for rather longer than the involvement staff, who typically move on after two or three years in post, making the longevity of involved tenants a potential asset. Indeed, most staff seem to change their job every few years, and this, coupled with frequent major restructuring within the association (and its governance), leads to considerable fragility for tenant involvement groups, who must then spend time and energy creating new alliances with staff and reinforcing their previously hard-won gains, not always with success.

9.3 The shape of tenant involvement: strategy, policy, staff and support

This section explores the context within which panels and forums operate, the forces (both national and local) that shape it, and the consequent resources and support available to the involvement process.

9.3.1 The aims of tenant involvement and exogenous influence

9.3.1.1 <u>Strategy and policy</u>

Power and influence can be exercised through the definition of purpose and issues, and the creation and dissemination of text. Staff servicing the various panels and forums can therefore have a substantial influence over potential outcomes. The tenant involvement policies and strategies examined as part of the case studies contained a range of aims, all of which at some point included empowerment, partnership, influence, and building social capital or capacity, as well as improving services and accountability. Social capital and accountability did not appear in policies and strategies before 2004: the later documents reflected a shift towards regulator aims and objectives as set out in the Housing Corporation Involvement Policy 2004. Conversely, the use of 'empowerment' as a key aim of involvement has fallen away since 2004. About the same time, the term 'tenant' was replaced with 'resident' or, by some organisations, 'customer', 'consumer' or 'service user', reflecting a wider paradigm shift in public policy towards individuals as consumers rather than citizens (Newman et al, 2006). This was linked to an increasing focus on service improvement as a key aim, along with value for money. However, the various aims were not fleshed out, or even defined; nor did most strategies follow the pattern of 'where are we today, where do we want to get to, and how are we going to get there?'. Instead they tended to conflate an agreement on how to work with tenants with some strategic aims, mixing these with some basic policy statements. The result was a general statement about how involvement would be conducted, with a small number of proposed actions to involve more tenants, such as to develop an involvement database, or to take steps to embed involvement throughout the work of the association. Rarely were these suggestions supported by good action plans or specific resource allocations.

There were some examples of good strategies, based on sound research and a clear understanding of where the organisation was heading (5,7,23,26). All of these aimed to

increase the involvement of harder to reach groups and to embed involvement in the work of all departments in order to improve services. However, departmental managers continued to resist the involvement of tenants in their areas of work. Efforts to involve 'harder to reach' groups fared better, with some younger women being recruited to panels, and some new involvement groups being set up. This was achieved with the help of consultants, and was supported by a substantially larger budget than was common in the other case study associations. Yet in all associations it was down to the involvement staff to make it happen, which depended on their personal skills, attitudes and abilities and on how much support and resources they had available to them.

Much of the strategy and policy contained in the formal documentation of associations was linked to national policy, but in practical terms it did not have much impact on day-to-day involvement activities prior to 2004. Where policies and strategies included action plans, many staff struggled to deliver the targets. In some instances projects were shelved, and this was more likely where there was a change in tenant involvement staff or managers (see page 225) The analysis of inspection reports in 2008 confirmed that this was an area of significant weakness, with 43 per cent of associations identified as unable to develop and monitor strategies effectively, and 54 per cent having weaknesses in the planning and reviewing of involvement.

The standing conditions and relations of meaning and membership are influenced by the emphasis that national policy makers and regulators place on tenant involvement. However, they are also affected by organisations' interpretation of national policy, their capacity to deliver that policy, and the organisation's perception of the potential consequences of following, or not following, national directives.

It can already be seen that power is exercised in many ways, through the choice of terminology in expressing aims in policies and strategies, and the terms of reference for groups, all of which serve to shape the broad definition of the formal 'rules' of involvement in particular organisations. This terminology is used by staff, and thus influences the social relations of meaning and membership between staff and tenants. Even the ascription of titles to those participating is a 'top down' process, and for some, accepting a new title can be experienced as disempowering. Using language is a powerful act. As Weedon (1987) put it:

'If language is the site where meaningful experience is constituted, then language also determines how we perceive possibilities of change. Language in this sense consists of a range of discourses which offer different versions of the meaning of social relations and their effects on the individual' (Weedon, 1987: 86)

My research revealed a great deal of uncertainty about what terms like 'empowerment' or 'increasing capacity' or 'accountability' really mean. As one member of staff put it, 'Well, if we listen to them about what needs doing, then they are empowered and services improve, therefore we are accountable aren't we?' (manager, 1). This view of empowerment and accountability is nebulous at best – the more so if the tenants have been told nothing of the extent to which their views have been taken on board, or how a service has changed. As a result, they are unlikely to feel that they are making a difference, or that their time has been well spent. Indeed, many staff struggled to make the link between accountability and feedback. In both the questionnaire and the case studies the lack of feedback was found to be a major issue.

The focus from the organisation's point of view was generally on process rather than outcome. Even when the Housing Corporation created a duty (in 2004) to produce an impact statement for involvement, all bar one of the case study associations (5) produced a statement that listed what had been done rather than what had changed or where tenants had made a difference. Language then is a site of potential empowerment and disempowerment, and discourse shapes the way that staff and tenants inform themselves about the involvement process, its limits and potential.

9.3.1.2 Exogenous influences – lost potential

The section on the history and development of tenant involvement in Chapter 2 demonstrates that many changes were made to the way housing associations were regulated and funded from the 1970s onwards. Within these developing regulatory frameworks there was an increasing emphasis on service users, in particular on tenants having a say in the development of services, and later, to be involved in the governance of these organisations. Policies developed by housing associations encapsulated these aims, and from these, structures were developed to deliver them. The role of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service and the Priority Estates Project were crucial to the development of the shape of tenant involvement and community development in the 1980s and1990s because of the lack of other channels for

disseminating information and good practice, and because they provided support to tenants and landlords. Web-based information systems were in their infancy at that time and had little impact. These organisations therefore became key nodal points and had the power to shape the discourse and practice of involvement. The shape of involvement structures became broadly similar across the housing association sector. In many of the case study associations there was a key group of tenants, which met every two or three months to look through a wide range of new documentation (plans and policies) – it should be noted that this generally took place after the documentation had been completed and the policy direction chosen, but before it went to the board. In some associations there were also smaller working or standing groups, which met to talk over specific service-related issues; in others the main group would look at these too. Either way the same tenants attended most groups. In addition, the strategic direction, and ideas for involvement, were often copied from one organisation to another through informal involvement worker networks.

It is interesting to note that the Chartered Institute of Housing funded academic publications and developed a training module for staff, which was the only accredited training for involvement available, but many staff did not take this course and none of the case study landlords provided funding for this at the time of my research (although they did for tenants). Moreover, the Chartered Institute encouraged joint training between staff and tenants, but landlords were either unaware of these opportunities or did not value the opportunity for tenants and staff to attend together. These were missed opportunities, although it may simply have reflected prevailing attitudes to tenant involvement in comparison to other landlord services.

All these organisations served to shape the way in which involvement worked. However, the most important influence is the regulator, who operates as a key external nodal point through which all housing associations have to pass, because of the associations' collective dependence on regulation and its relationship with access to funding (Mullins and Riseborough, 2000). The regulator therefore has a potentially powerful role in how tenant involvement can be shaped, and thus operates as an exogenous influence in Clegg's terms, with the power to reshape the rules and social relations, and thus the potential to empower tenants, albeit from a distance. From the Housing Corporation's point of view, however, the shape of tenant involvement structures and the details of policy were the domain of the

individual housing association. On the other hand, these policies needed to reflect, on paper at least, the key themes important to the regulator. These themes were beginning to change in the period between 1998 and 2004 as the Housing Corporation became more prescriptive in relation to tenant involvement. There were clear indications in the language used and the key concepts contained in the policy documents during this period that showed a changing emphasis. For instance, *Making consumers count,* published in 1998, focused on developing accountability to tenants, who were seen as consumers, therefore indicating an increasing focus on the individual as well as on groups. This was closely followed by *Communities in control* in 2000, which focused on promoting more organisational involvement, and explored the potential for delegated powers and governance. It was this document that introduced the term 'resident' instead of tenants, to be more closely aligned to those who actually live in the communities. None of these policies and the associated good practice documents appeared to make any difference to the work of my case study associations. There was rather a resistance to developing those aspects of involvement that devolved power to tenants through the development of TMOs and EMBs. Similarly there was no evidence in the inspection results of 2002 to suggest that there had been any change in practice apart from the continuing development of panels and forums.

In relation to the circuits of power, an exogenous influence working through the system integration and social integration levels of the circuit should have a big impact on rules of practice, and ultimately on the relations of meaning and membership. However, this shift in power and increase in accountability did not happen, largely because the regulator left the implementation of the new policy open to interpretation by individual organisations, and organisations struggled to follow this through. In addition, tenants were not sufficiently aware of the changes in regulatory policy to negotiate with their landlords. Most importantly, the regulator did not effectively regulate in relation to this issue, and the consequences of failure to implement the new approach were negligible.

The shape of involvement in my case study organisations did not really start to change until at least a year after the Housing Corporation Involvement Policy 2004 was published, which had an accompanying Regulatory Circular (01/04) setting out some specific tasks for housing associations to complete in respect of tenant involvement. This policy came about as a result of research undertaken by the Audit Commission (2004), in partnership with the Housing

Corporation, which found many weaknesses in involvement practices, particularly in governance and organisational involvement. Simply having forums and panels was not considered good enough if they did not achieve an impact and were not value for money (Audit Commission, 2004). The influence of a group of tenants (of which I was a member), which operated at an advisory level at the Housing Corporation, was important here. This group worked hard to ensure that the 2004 policy had some teeth, and this resulted in the regulatory circular. This policy had an impact on all the case study associations, to differing extents, as they tried to work out what it meant and then tried to comply with the stipulated two-part process (which involved setting out a plan for the following year based on some key themes, and measuring its impact a year later). The point to stress here is that housing associations could now legitimately wind up any panels and forums they felt were not working or delivering in terms of what the Housing Corporation policy considered value for money. It also aimed at improving feedback and accountability to both involved and non-involved tenants (now residents) (Housing Corporation, 2004).

This national policy development worked through the system integration level of the circuit of power, serving potentially to restrict or direct staff in a number of ways: there were certain things that they could not do without involving tenants: they had to collect information on the costs and benefits of tenant involvement and they had to know who their tenants were. This imposed new working practices, including submissions to be made to the regulator (affecting techniques of discipline and production), and empowering tenants through a right to be involved at all levels in all services. At the same time the policy potentially disempowered panels and forums that were not delivering outcomes. This transformed the rules of the game and potentially, at least, had the power to override key nodal points in the organisations (the managers and the involvement staff), thus affecting social relations of meaning and membership and ultimately the standing conditions. In theory, tenants would now have the regulator on their side. It was thought that this would significantly change the quality and effectiveness of involvement and thus the potential for empowerment.

In practice, the way that organisations applied the policy to their strategies revealed a mixed commitment to the policy itself and involvement in general. This was partly due to the way discretion was used by boards and senior and middle managers, and partly due to regulator practices in relation to enforcement. The biggest weakness was that the guidance provided to

housing associations was weak and poorly written, and that the Housing Corporation staff involved in putting it together had all departed, as had the tenants who had been involved, as there was major restructuring in progress at the Housing Corporation. The new rules were vague, and the meaning was unclear in terms of their practical interpretation, which was therefore open to discretion, contestation and negotiation between the regulator and associations. It was very difficult for all parties to come to agreements about outcomes and/or impacts. Compliance with circular 01/04 was reported by self-assessment. The review on how well the policy had worked was based on this self-assessed information, and it was reported that most associations had complied, apart from some of the new LSVTs (Housing Corporation 2007). Amongst my case study associations, however, half the group were non-compliant with the circular despite the fact that they had reported compliance in their self-assessments. When asked about this issue, some said it had just gone off the radar, while others knew that they were required to carry out impact assessments but had failed to collect evidence over the year, or even to plan a way to achieve this. In some associations staff in a different department had completed the submission to the Housing Corporation.

9.3.1.3 The power of inspection

The Audit Commission report (2004) also influenced the development of the Key Lines of Enquiry, which were used to scope inspection work. This also prompted an increasing focus on diversity, access and value for money in tenant involvement activities. Here again, the power that the inspectorate had as an exogenous influence was high. In theory, organisations could get low grades for poor tenant involvement, which could have a business critical effect on associations. In the 15 of my case studies that had been inspected during the research period, there was a massive improvement in attitude and approach to tenant involvement running up to the inspection and immediately afterwards. Recommendations from the inspection directly affected the rules of practice operating through the social integration level of the circuit. In most cases, panels and forums were criticised for being unrepresentative, inward looking and not accountable to the wider community. Those 'settled' panels where the staff and tenant obligatory passage points had sewn up all the power came under considerable criticism and, in four cases, tenant involvement staff retired early following an inspection. In these instances, the inspectorate had more power than any other body to effect change in involvement, at least in the short term. In the longer term, however, associations

failed to keep up the post-inspection momentum, which could have been due to staff changes, changes in focus over time or perhaps a general lack of commitment to tenant involvement during periods when inspections were unlikely to occur. The difference between inspection outcomes in 2002 and 2008 shows that in 2008 the inspectorate was focusing more intently on areas such as diversity, access, levels and range of involvement, together with planning, reviewing and strategic aims, which skews the data somewhat as it actually looks as if organisations were getting worse rather than better in relation to tenant involvement, which was not the case.

One important change in emphasis that came out of the inspection regime as time progressed was a focus on that individual managers across the range of departments were responsible for tenant involvement within their service area, and it was those individuals who would be interviewed on the subject during inspections. This particular exogenous influence worked through the circuits to change the rules of practice and thus the relations of meaning and membership within organisations, eventually enhancing the status of involvement staff as a useful resource for managers. Working through the system, it broadened the scope of areas on which tenants could have an impact. In addition, it was no longer acceptable to simply turn up at a panel or forum with a draft policy and get it rubber stamped, or leave everything to the involvement staff. From 2006 onwards more involvement manager posts appeared in the sector, as organisations struggled to accommodate involvement as a cross cutting theme; in other words to embed it in every aspect of their practice.

9.3.2 Access to support and training (knowledge is power to do)

The standing conditions do not remain fixed once training and support are put into effect. The extent to which changes occur in the balance of power between those agencies participating in the involvement game (i.e. the tenants and the staff), depends on the usefulness of the training and support provided, and the overt and covert agendas of those undertaking and developing the training itself. This includes the willingness/confidence of tenants to maximise the benefit available from training and support, and to use it actively to help others, thus building the capacity of the whole group.

9.3.2.1 <u>Access to training</u>

Clegg (1989) points out that access to resources and knowledge are key tools for informing the strategies of those who are subordinated in any system, if they wish to empower themselves and transform power. The acquisition of knowledge could indeed be seen as empowering in its own right. Therefore access to, and the quality of, training and support is crucial to transforming power and the potential outcomes of tenant involvement activities. Training was an issue that was picked up in the questionnaires, the case studies and the inspection reports, all of which revealed that not everyone got training, although by 2008 this appeared to be improving. However, much of the training delivered in house was in the form of corporate briefings, and most involvement staff were not trained or skilled in training or facilitation. Of interest is the fact that one in ten of the survey respondents had been funded to attend the CIH Certificate course (one of the most expensive forms of training on offer). Only one tenant, however, had completed the course[22]. Indeed what is noticeable from this research is that a relatively small minority of tenants consumed most of the external training and opportunities. As a result, there were tensions over the rationing of only a few places each year to key conferences, and complaints that the same people always got to go. That said, 47 per cent made positive comments about sharing information and networking, as well as the benefits of the training available at conferences.

It was clear that some tenants were not aware of opportunities and that others sourced information about potential training themselves and encouraged staff to let them attend. The group most likely to miss out on training was older women (over 66), who made up 36 per cent of the female involved tenant group in the questionnaire. Further conversations with older women tenants revealed a different attitude to training and support. Several of them pointed out that they could not be bothered with it, did not want to travel, and that 'these days things go over my head' or 'I am past all that now'. Here it appears that the cultural and gender mores of a particular generation play out in relation to access to, and views about, training. As a result, some panel and forum members are to some extent left behind in terms of their knowledge of, and ability to take an active part in, the subject(s) under discussion. If training is to add value to the involvement process, then it needs to be easily accessible.

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[22] There were a wide range of reasons for failure to complete: family circumstances, ill health, the course being too demanding, and falling out with the sponsoring landlord.

Increasing the accessibility of training will increase the standing conditions of the tenants and thus affect their positioning in relation to staff. It also has the added benefit of building the team spirit, and the self-awareness and confidence of involved tenants. It needs, however, to be attractive, to be relevant to the tasks that tenants will be undertaking when working with staff, and to add value to their current skills base. One issue that became apparent here was that tenants were acting as individuals competing for scarce resources, and that staff have the potential to, and sometimes do, take advantage of this by allocating opportunities to those they favour (i.e. who are not difficult or challenging). One way of dealing with this is to train the group as a whole, using skilled trainers who can assess the capacity and diversity within the group and build on it.

The use of external trainers was not maximised in many associations in the early part of the research period; however I noticed an increased use of these after 2004. In general, this opportunity was not used well, as in most organisations training was voluntary, which meant that many tenants did not attend. As a result this became very expensive training when costed on a 'per head' basis. Three associations (5,11,26) were notable for their use of consultants for training, both in general and for facilitating existing panels (consultants were generally brought in to deal with a problem panel or with problem people on a panel). Sometimes in training sessions the members would try to hijack the session and the trainer in an attempt to resolve the problems they were having with the organisation. Conversations with these consultants, and my own reflections as a consultant trainer, indicated that when a panel's behaviour became too difficult to manage and trust had been lost (often indicated by staff going off sick, and/or tenants threatening to go to the press), consultants would be brought in to mediate. In these instances my colleagues working with such groups would discuss the issues, set up new plans and agreements about the scope of work of the group, and specify codes of conduct and service standards, covering feedback and access to information, between the organisation and the panel. There were considerable training needs identified in this process; however the goal of the organisation was to fix the problem. The agreement looked promising for both parties on the surface, but the panel or forum and staff almost always reverted to previous modes of working and communication after a couple of meetings. This indicates that the issues may therefore be more to do with how and why the groups are set up in the first place, the quality of team building, and the quality of ongoing support for the groups in question. In particular, there has frequently been a high tolerance of

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inappropriate behaviour from some dominant members of the panel over a period of time, which has not been dealt with in the group or by the brief to the consultant. That said, the training and support for staff and managers in understanding their role and responsibilities to the panel of forum is clearly a crucial factor.

9.3.2.2 <u>Outcomes of training and access to information</u>

For most tenants the outcomes of training were positive and made their work as an involved tenant significantly or generally easier. For some it made no difference as the information was too basic, and for others it was too long or too short or went over their heads. That said, for the majority it increased their knowledge or introduced them to new ideas or ways of thinking, gave them greater insight into how things worked, and increased their self-confidence. In none of the case studies, however, was information about skills and areas of interest, or even the potential work of the group, used to inform a training plan for either individuals or panels and forums in general. This might be the result of stereotyping tenants as already mentioned. However, this situation is also influenced by national policy, which shapes and funds subsidised training opportunities, and other grant funding for training and support, and which is itself limited to certain externally chosen and acceptable subjects (Furbey et al, 1996). The case studies and questionnaires revealed a wide range of training that tenants wanted, which related to soft skills such as assertiveness and communication skills and wider issues, like the history of involvement, which are rarely funded (see page 223 for examples). In addition, tenants rarely got the opportunity to design training plans or plan their own training schedule. This is an area where tenants are constantly disempowered. Training is important; however, as are ongoing support and access to information, in order to develop capacity.

It is worth noting that in all the questionnaire and case study associations there was no access to independent tenant advice, which for those who had recently transferred from a local authority was a disappointment, as they felt that such advice during the transfer process had empowered and guided them at a challenging time. Most tenants, however, had not been through this process, and were unaware that independent tenant advice existed. Tenants also struggled to access information, especially in the period before many had access to regulator and inspectorate websites. The plethora of good practice guides and other published work generally did not reach tenants, and sometimes did not even get to the involvement staff or

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the managers working with tenants. This has now become less of an issue for staff as electronic copies are easily downloadable, which also benefits those tenants that have access to the internet. The housing press was a major resource to which most panels did not have access, and in the cases where an individual did have access, it was not spoken about nor was information passed around the group. Again, it is evident that some tenants had access to considerably more resources than others and that they often preferred to keep it that way. The main information source for many panels and forums was the annual TPAS conference, where hard copies of good practice information and other resources were freely available, but again, only a minority of tenants were present. Tenants also struggled to access basic organisational information such as policies and procedures. A third of all respondents said that their most common experience when requesting information was 'that the information was not always provided'.

9.3.2.3 Staff capacity to support training

The answer to the question about why training is not supported properly could be less to do with a deliberate wish to keep tenants ignorant, disempowered or unskilled, but rather to do with the capacity of staff to address training and support. Discussions with the involvement staff that support and resource panels and forums revealed that they did not feel that they had the skills to undertake proper training needs analyses, and that they felt they would not get the support of senior managers and budget holders to 'do a proper job.' Staff pointed out that there was huge pressure to provide much of the training and support themselves, which they had not been trained to do. Nor had they the technical knowledge to give the essential information to tenants to help them make informed decisions. For some of them, it appeared that the organisation in which they worked did not have an understanding of their role and the skills that would be needed to facilitate and support involved tenants. For most of them, the pressure of work mitigated against going away on courses or undertaking significant study or qualification. Some staff commented that they did not even have time to do the reading or research into good practice. What is also interesting is that neither the Audit Commission study in 2004 nor the inspection findings picked up this issue.

Using the circuits of power framework, it follows that if the tenants' standing conditions remain static in respect of access to, and usefulness of, the resources of knowledge and opportunities to work with other tenants in training environments, the tenants will remain

subordinated and the involvement structure will remain static and ineffective in meeting the needs of both the tenants and the organisation. Added to this was the fact that the staff in this study were largely unaware of the importance of information and knowledge, and the relationship this had with the learning and speaking styles of tenants. Thirdly, there was limited understanding of the benefit of team working and collective identity, and the importance of the concept of team roles. Staff also need to understand the dynamics of competition for scarce resources, such as attending a TPAS conference or attaining places on staff working groups. As a result, certain tenants tended to benefit at the expense of others, and the potential of many individuals was not realised. Many panels and forums continued to act as groups of individuals, as opposed to operating as a team with a diverse range of skills and resources which could be shared, and which would increase their overall position in relation to the standing conditions and thus their potential to transform power.

Taking all this into account, together with the relative characteristics and position of staff in the organisation, the regulatory requirements, structure and policy aims, it is hardly surprising that the tenant involvement process very soon becomes settled into a set of routine meetings, for which staff set the agendas, and during which drafts of plans and policies are presented to tenants for comment. Appendix G shows how power flows through the episodic power in the agency level of the circuit, where it experiences no resistance and even if there are episodes of challenge from within, they are soon overcome. This situation remains static because the tenants are not experienced enough to know that they have options to empower themselves, or to effect change for the better, or particularly, that the rules can be used in their favour or even challenged. They may not even be aware that there are rules or that they are working in a dynamic environment or a 'game'. In this scenario, the standing conditions and the relations of membership and meaning are fixed and to an extent reified, and therefore services are shaped by professionals, and 'involvement' can be seen as merely window dressing. To some extent, this may explain why, despite involvement, services do not improve, as evidenced by the Housing Quality Network report on inspections 2002-2006, which showed that 79 per cent of associations on first inspection got one star or less and that, in all of these organisations, the prevailing culture was one of underdeveloped tenant involvement (HQN, 2006). The table below shows how the way that the group is set up, and the way in which training and access to information are conducted, will affect outcomes. In

many cases the group became settled as an informal complaints channel, with one or two dominant members, and with outcomes remaining provider led.

Table 9.2 Barriers to the development of group indent and group capacity

Developing groups and capacity		
Barrier created by the organisation	**Response of tenants and further outcomes/barriers**	**Reasons and further outcomes**
No shared understanding of the role and function of the groups – terms of reference unclear.	Unsure what they are there for so use group for instrumental gains as individuals. Allow support staff to lead the way. Use group as an informal complaints channel.	The organisation may not be clear what the role of the panel or forum is, and how in practical terms an effective role and purpose can be achieved. Senior staff may not have the skills to develop a clear role and function in partnership with tenants.
No focus on team building and developing team roles, understanding the team dynamic, or understanding diversity in the group. Important to include staff in this.	Group does not form as a team, and have limited tolerance and understanding of different communication styles and the behaviour of group members and staff. Tenants compete with each other.	Limited knowledge of team dynamics, culture of the real world versus corporate worlds. Not willing to put in resources to develop the team, as not clear of the value of the group, their position in the organisation and the scope of shared power. Stereotypical view of tenants.
No training needs analyses, or focus on individual needs, from which a comprehensive training plan can be drawn.	Training does not meet tenants needs, and impacts on their capacity to be meaningfully involved; creates bigger gap between tenants – better educated tenants dominate.	Lack of skills and abilities of staff, and limited resources to staff; focussing resources in the wrong direction; or not achieving value for money with training resources.
No clear link between training and the function of the group.	Some tenants struggle to understand what others are talking about, and with reading documents.	No clear understanding of what the group will do and the capacities needed to do it.
Not involving tenants in developing the training plan	Tenants do not own training and may not attend it, feeling that it is not for them, which	Unaware that training is necessary and/or not willing to put in the time/resources, as

for the group.	affects group dynamics and capacity.	limited time to set up group and no skills to do this in partnership with tenants.
Limited range of training options. Not enough on HA practice, regulation and history of involvement, and limited training on soft skills, communication and IT training.	Capacity to engage fully in the corporate arena is limited, and items are not debated from a position of knowledge. Good communicators dominate. Poor communicators excluded or compete with other group members.	Unaware that knowledge is essential to effective participation, suggesting that there is a tacit/unconscious assumption that unskilled tenants will create fewer problems and staff can remain unchallenged and the service remain provider-focussed. Staff respond to good communicators. Staff avoid poor communicators or label them as troublesome.
No ongoing support or independent advice.	Some tenants remain confident. Others are affected by dynamics and capacity; some may leave and others consume the majority of resources. Power struggles may emerge.	Expensive – organisations only willing to use independent advisors if there is separate funding; or external funding; or a statutory requirement ; or to contain an out of control panel.
Lack of access to good practice, regulatory requirements and sector-wide standards, and the housing press.	Capacity to make a difference is limited and provider priorities prevail. Some tenants may have information and keep it for themselves, or dominate the discussion with their knowledge.	Staff time and capacity. Staff wary also of managing expectations, as organisation may not be able to be as good as 'good practice'. Staff uncomfortable when challenged using regulations.
Lack of access to the organisation's information, policies and procedures, performance etc.	Tenants give up asking for items or do not know that they can ask for items.	Unclear rules about access and poor use of data protection legislation. No access to organisation data bases
Limited training and support for staff in facilitating and supporting, managing conflict and setting up groups	Group internal dynamics and power struggles dominate the group's time The group does not have capacity and shared vision to work well with the organisation	Lack of understanding at a senior level of the staff skills needed or the scope of work involved. Managers place low value on involvement skills for their staff across the departments.

9.3.3 Persistent barriers in the process of involvement

This section forms a bridge to the one that follows. I turn here to the process of involvement, which revealed many barriers, some of which persisted over many years. Table 9.3 below identifies these barriers, their effects on tenants, and my understanding of the reasons behind these, based on my observation of the organisations in practice. The persistent barriers that I identified include a lack of accountability (in terms of regular, timely feedback), a lack of information on costs and performance, and the failure to follow things through to their conclusion. Organisations struggled to be strategic and to monitor plans and performance (mentioned in 72 per cent of more recent reports). Tenants were not involved early enough in initiatives, and were not able to exert influence at a strategic level. This was raised in 50 per cent of the more recent inspection reports. One very specific problem that arose repeatedly in the case studies, but was not evident at all in the literature, was the management of tenants' expenses and the appropriateness of expenses systems. Chapter 6 highlights a range of issues relating to expenses, such as timeliness of payment, lack of cash on the day and a lack of appreciation regarding realistic child care costs. Added to this, the findings from the survey indicated that 51 per cent of respondents had never seen their organisation's expenses policy. This issue is, in essence, an administrative function requiring different departments to work together in the best interests of the tenant, to make involvement as accessible as possible. It affects tenants in a very practical way, but also affects whether they feel valued and respected, and it represents a significant barrier.

Table 9.3 Barriers arising from the process of involvement

Process barriers		
Barriers created by the organisation	**Response of tenants and further outcomes /barriers**	**Reasons and further outcomes**
Meeting cycles chosen by staff and managers – always daytime meetings.	Tenants accept this as appropriate practice.	Expediency in an effort to make the panel or forum fit in with existing structures and corporate processes. Unwillingness of staff to work in the evenings.
Agenda and agenda items set by staff and managers – often packed agendas plus tabled papers.	Items do not reflect tenants' concerns. Meetings are rushed, with	Organisation's priorities are seen as more important than those of tenants.

	limited time for debate, and often important items are left to the end. No room in the meeting for tenants priorities to be discussed. Some tenants challenge this.	Items not debated well and input of tenants limited. Tenants' priorities not reflected in any plans or initiatives; services and allocation of resources do not reflect tenant priorities unless supported by other data from tenants.
Style and format of papers and information chosen by staff – tenants only able to comment at draft report stage; contextual information given verbally.	Tenants struggle to deal with the load and the terminology and scope of work – papers are passed as fit when they may not be. Tenants limited in their scope to change anything.	Limited challenge to organisational documentation makes the process easier for staff.
Minutes taken by staff – content controlled by managers – too much or not enough information, and views of tenants often not included.	Nature and scope of the meeting is contained within the organisation's view of what happened; importance to tenants of some issues is not fully captured. Accountability is weak. Some tenants' voices were completely missing, and others may become challenging.	Staff control tenant involvement outcomes and limit the scope and range of influence. Staff limit voice of group and of specific individual tenants. Staff resist challenges by viewing tenants as being difficult.
Actions not always captured, are not acted upon, and no timescales for actions are agreed – minutes sent out months after meetings.	Lack of responsiveness to tenant views. Some items fall off the agenda and hot topics are not always followed up, or do not appear in the minutes as important. Tenants may challenge this lack of responsiveness, and the same issues are complained about in every meeting.	Reduces the workload arising from meetings. Reduces the impact of bottom up tenant initiatives/priorities and reduces accountability to tenants. Staff ignore any challenge or say they will sort something out after the meeting. Tenants labelled as complaining or parochial.
Poor administration of the group meetings. Meetings cancelled at short notice, transport fails to turn up, and there is poor management of expenses	Tenants put up with the problems and are out of pocket for some months. Some tenants do not know what they can claim for.	Limited time and administrative skills of those responsible – often no clear expenses policy and procedure. Some tenants find they cannot afford to be involved.

Tenant involvement staff have considerable discretion over how national and local policy is implemented. Often working in isolation, unsupervised, unsupported, under-resourced and unskilled, they make decisions that help them get through the work, often at the expense of the tenants involved and *their* strategic aims. The staff's inability to support and develop the capacity of panels and forums is a further reflection of this. Departmental and senior managers also play their part by limiting the scope of involvement in their departments, failing to engage with the panel or forum directly and/or not following through on commitments made at meetings. This can result in unrepresentative, unskilled, politically unaware panels and forums that are unable to realise their full potential, and which remain subordinated and thus disempowered in the involvement process. Tenants who challenge this are seen as troublesome or difficult; alternatively the staff react to contain and disarm challengers. The following sections explore in more depth how staff use their position of power and discretion to create this outcome.

9.4   The dynamics of involvement and the circuits of power

It is by exploring the dynamics of some key moments in the life of panels and forums that it is possible to understand how situations that empower and disempower tenants come about. More specifically, this section explores, using Clegg's circuits of power, how power can transform between individuals and between groups, even when one group or individual is in a subordinate position. This offers some clues as to why panels and forums tend to operate in similar ways within different organisations.

9.4.1 The formal rules - who makes them and what do they mean?

In a typical involvement environment, the staff member operates as a nodal point or obligatory passage point that all tenants who want to achieve something have to pass through. The case studies revealed that terms of reference and constitutions were vague about the scope of the work in which the panel and forum could be involved, concentrating instead on who could be members, for how long, and the role of the chair. This, taken together with involvement policies which were primarily statements of intent rather than specific in content, meant that there was considerable scope for those who wanted to contest and

interpret, and ultimately determine or fix, what the rules were seeking to achieve and how this would be done. Clegg points out that:

> Rules can never provide for their own interpretation. Issues of interpretation are always implicated in the process where agencies instantiate and signify rules. Ruling is an activity. It is accomplished by some agency as a constitutive sense making process whereby meaning is fixed'. (Clegg 1989:201)

It is noteworthy that 55 per cent of the questionnaire respondents had not seen their association's tenant involvement policy, despite the fact that 72 per cent indicated that it had been agreed with tenants. It appeared that tenants were never given the final copy of these policies, so may have forgotten what they had been involved in months back. And even where the formal rules were really clear and supported greater involvement of the panel or forum, this was not reflected in tenants' day-to-day experiences. This can be explained by the informal rules – the real rules or those rules that govern 'the way we do things round here'. Once actions are delegated by management to staff for implementation, how staff undertake or implement policy directives cannot be fully controlled, as staff interpret language and meaning based on their own experiences and professional philosophy. Their actions are then influenced by competing organisational priorities and by their scope to act independently. Individual members of staff can therefore use their discretion in different ways.

Clegg (1989) points out that discretion is an exercise of power by members of organisations, which is not strictly sanctioned by the formal position that the member holds in the organisation. Although involvement officers are front line staff in terms of grade, there are usually only one or two of them, and this, together with the lack of knowledge of their role within the rest of the organisation, and the prevailing attitudes toward involvement activities generally, results in staff having considerable latitude in the way in which they perform their roles. Clegg points out that: 'such exercises are premised on an illegitimate or informal use of resource control, access to which is given by the members' place in the organisational division of labour' (Clegg, 1989:189).

In some organisations, individual tenant involvement staff embraced involvement as part of a personal philosophy that supported the empowerment of tenants, and these staff tried their hardest to enable tenants to make a difference. However, this was not always supported in

practical terms by their managers. This scenario was found in all the case studies at some point during the period of my research. There were also instances of managers who worked with staff to make involvement meaningful in their service area, but these were sporadic and not part of the general culture of the organisation. At other times managers were willing to support the work of involvement staff, but the staff themselves had beliefs that undermined the involvement process: for example, that tenants were only interested in their own ends; or that tenants would give them a hard time; or that tenants had an inappropriate agenda; were not representative; did not have the capacity to really contribute or make a difference; or that they only turned up for the free lunch. These views may have been based on their experience of working with some particular tenants, or with groups in the past. Even those who had a strong desire to make involvement work may have had such views about some of the tenants they worked with. In most cases, as already mentioned, workloads can be such that staff simply do not have the capacity to support more in depth work with tenant panels and forums, nor do they have the time to source documents, literature or training. In three of the case study associations, all of them traditional housing associations, there were no specific involvement staff before 2005, and no training or support for managers, or the wider staff groups, in order to develop and undertake involvement activities. In all three there was evidence of negative attitudes towards involvement from staff, who expressed the types of views mentioned above (1,33,27). There was clearly a tendency amongst staff to focus on getting through the business and the meeting cycles, and it could be said that staff exercise discretion, and thus power, in order to cope with their workload and other pressures, doing this in a way that may ultimately disempower tenants, albeit in an unintended or unconscious way (cf. Lipsky, 1980, 1993)

As already mentioned access to information was problematic for tenants. As a result, many involved tenants were ignorant of their rights to consultation, or the expectations on landlords to involve them in certain ways. In most of my case study organisations, tenants had not been part of the process of creating tenant involvement policies and strategies, and were therefore subject to staff interpretations of policy and practice, and the constitutions and codes of conduct that supported the work of their panels and forums. In the absence of information about the scope and content of national policy, tenants were therefore operating in a vacuum, and were not able to judge how good or otherwise their organisation's strategy and/or policy was in meeting national requirements. Thus an opportunity for tenants to be

empowered was missed and barriers remained firmly in place. For many involvement staff, this heavy administrative and strategic burden went against their way of working. Many were creative and liked planning community events. Servicing panels and forums, and developing action plans and strategies were not, however, part of their skills set, which may explain why so much of the documentation was out of date, or never completed or followed through.

9.4.2   Using the rules and playing the game

In order to use the rules, tenants first need to become aware of both the formal and informal rules in place within their organisation. Once they are aware that staff have power and considerable flexibility in the way that they can interpret rules, tenants can use that knowledge to influence the way in which rules are interpreted, by working with the member of staff to enrol him or her into ideas about the various benefits that can be accrued from interpreting the rules in one way or another. For example, tenants might change the way that papers and minutes are managed, by offering to take on the task of writing up the minutes themselves. This could be construed as a way of reducing the workload of staff and making things run more smoothly. However, in reality, this represents tenants gaining control of the interpretation of meaning and the flow of information to others. This is especially important when tenant forum or panel minutes go to the organisation's board. Another approach that tenants had used in the case study associations involved playing by the written word, and working to 'rule'. This involved using the rules in a literal way to make a point or to create some change, thus ultimately changing the social relations of meaning and membership. By 'working to rule', the tenants are getting involved in the game and acting powerfully where they can, and therefore the potential for transformation is increased.

A specific example from one of the case study organisations concerned a younger and relatively dynamic panel that wanted to make a change to the organisation's approach to addressing homophobic issues. They were not sure whether they were permitted to influence services in this way. There was an involvement policy in place, but no agreement about how the tenants and staff were to work together in practice. Tenants could not draw on a comprehensive rule book, but only on basic terms of reference for the panel. These terms of reference stated that they were a consultative group, stated how many meetings would be held each year, and gave information about officer roles.

In terms of Clegg's standing conditions, tenants saw themselves as having some resources, including previous experience in trades unions and politics. As one member put it 'we are the smart militant tendency, we play it like a game of chess'. Here it can be viewed that the tenants were aware that they were in a dynamic of unequal power relations and that strategies would be needed; in short they were aware of 'the game'. One of the panel members, a newly appointed board member, who had developed a good working relationship with a number of members of staff, was making inroads into the board, and was the most politically astute person amongst the group, therefore representing a major resource to the panel. Another key player was a new addition to the panel who had a housing management background, who stated 'it was clear to me that staff did not want the tenants to become knowledgeable about standards of services in the sector, as this would put more pressure on them to perform to a reasonable standard on some of these issues'. Her agenda was to pass on this knowledge to the other tenants to enable them to be effective in challenging the way in which services were delivered by this housing association.

This example represents a context in which the rules are vague and therefore open to interpretation, with the power to interpret held by the relevant manager running the panel. Initially, panel members thought that they were working within the rules by asking for access to a policy and for changes to be made. This activity worked itself through the agency level of the circuit, where the tenants came up against the unwritten rules of 'the way we do things round here'. Their requests for access to the policy, though received positively at the meeting, were subsequently ignored, as were their requests for action to be taken on the issue raised. A further barrier was created when staff pointed out that these issues 'will only be dealt with on a case by case basis and if the people involved would like to write to the association, then we will take the matter up' (staff, 1). The manager here was attempting to close down the collective challenge by placing it back with the individual, away from the panel, and thus back in the realm of the confidential. The minutes that were subsequently written by this staff member did not reflect the discussion and were circulated eight weeks after the meeting, making them difficult to challenge. Nothing in this exchange changed any outcomes or power relationships, and the (unwritten) rules became fixed and apparent to the group. In other words, the manager used her power as a channel to actively block change, and to confirm who was in charge.

9.4.3   Using the rules and fixing their meaning

Agents who are subordinated or who wish to change the balance of power need to act strategically and collectively. In the above example, panel members began to record the panel meetings verbatim so that when the minutes were eventually published, they could challenge them through due process. This proved an effective mechanism. Eventually, to avoid upheaval in the early part of the meeting on points of accuracy, staff passed over the minute-taking role to the tenants, who organised this by having one member record the meeting proceedings verbatim, and another to summarise this into minutes. Here, panel members were using meeting etiquette (rules) to effect a change that gave them more control over what was reported, and thus what information the board saw. Staff continued to try to alter the minutes, but these were challenged at each subsequent meeting – bargaining took place over the precise content of the minutes. Here the panel members took control, and forced the manager to be more accountable to the panel. The rules themselves had not changed, but their interpretation had become further defined and fixed by their usage. This scenario tracked through the circuit of social integration, where relations of meaning and membership are either reproduced or changed. In this case they were contested, which affected both the social relations and standing conditions in the agency circuit in a lasting way. Panel members felt that they had become more empowered by their own actions.

9.4.4   Individuals as obligatory passage points – the challenge for tenants

The above example shows how staff act to 'gate-keep', something that was identified as common practice in all the case study organisations. The member(s) of staff that service the panels and forums operate as key nodal points, or obligatory passage points, through their positioning in relation to the organisation and its resources. If these members of staff are to be 'outflanked', because they are blocking access to information, training, expansion in the scope of involvement, or requests for better accountability, the tenants may require additional resources. This might take the form of patronage, where those with more power within the organisation support tenants to achieve these ends. However, even when individual actions are changed by such a mechanism, there is no guarantee of long term benefits or indeed empowerment. When a forum or panel successfully challenges practice, using the existing

rules, or taking advantage of the lack of clarity in key documents or practices, the staff are likely to retrench - to reduce the scope and level of involvement back to an earlier position. Staff may realise that the formal rules need to be stronger and clearer because, if interpretation is not disciplined, as Clegg points out, 'new powers will be produced and existing powers transformed' (Clegg 1989:202). Continuing with the same example, the manager brought in powerful people at this point in the form of manager colleagues, in an attempt to regain control of the panel, drawing on her access to a network of powerful others as a form of defence. The initial feeling of trust between the panel and the manager had diminished. The panel members took this as an opportunity to enrol these managers (power holders) into an understanding of the issues tenants were experiencing out on the estates. This led to small changes and some individual housing management issues being resolved. However, this also alienated the key member of staff further, who was trying to implement her own agenda and restrict the access of, and accountability to, panel members. Everything had to go through this individual. She had the power to cancel and reschedule meetings and control what went on the agenda. In addition, panel members had to apply to her for any additional funding or training required. As a result of the skirmishes at the agency level of the circuit, panel members had achieved instrumental gains in terms of changes in services, as opposed to empowerment gains in statute terms. None of this affected the position of the (staff member as) obligatory passage point, or the rules, as everyone still had to go through the staff member, who was now less well-disposed towards the group.

It is at this point that the question needs to be asked, 'why was this staff member behaving like this?' Did she not want to have effective services, or was she herself homophobic or anti-tenant? The answer lies in the previous point: that staff can be unskilled and unsupported. The manager in this case may have already known that the policies were underdeveloped, or that discrimination was taking place. In this instance, the individual was the manager with the remit for the areas of work under challenge, and therefore the extra work involved in reshaping policy and practice would fall to her. She therefore had many 'rational' reasons for trying to keep the tenants away from this area, as well as the detail of practice more generally: 'if they go into this area, they will be looking at all our policies and procedures – then what?' (manager, 1). It is in this context that the next step in the process needs to be understood.

9.4.5   Using enrolment to circumvent the obligatory passage point

In a second challenge, members of this same panel now wanted to clarify the rules (i.e. to re-interpret and fix them) to make their access to information more explicit, and to seek the outcome of better services for those suffering from harassment – their original issue.

Panel members were able to enrol a lower level member of staff into their activity by getting them to send them a copy of the relevant policy (it was unclear whether this was permitted under the formal rules), so that they had clear evidence that standards and procedures were not effectively set out in relation to homophobic abuse. Their strategy was then to enrol board members to override what they saw as a blockage by an individual manager. They spent time creating a written description of the issue and researching potential solutions, with reference to good practice, and produced a paper on the subject, which they wanted placed on the board agenda as an important diversity issue. Thus they were using the language and the processes of bureaucratic organisation to get their voice heard at a higher level. By demonstrating understanding, using the socially available discourse, and constructing problems that made sense to others in the organisation, this panel used power to shape meaning, thus attempting to influence powerful others in order to gain their support. This is often difficult for tenants to achieve, as their everyday culture is distinctly different from that of the organisation. This explains why those with the most social or intellectual capital, who can use the 'right' language and style, may come to dominate tenant involvement activities.

In this instance, the tenants tried to circumvent the obligatory passage point in the form of a particular member of staff who acted as a 'gate-keeper' in a situation where trust was weak. However, further gate-keeping activity was evident. Initially, panel members were told that they could not put their paper to the next board meeting as the agenda was already set. They had to wait a further two months to attempt to table a paper, which they were finally allowed to do under 'any other business' at the end of that board meeting. Their paper was not allowed to go out with the rest of the board papers, but had to be tabled on the day. Panel members felt that this was yet another strategy employed by staff, in the name of the chair, to prevent the board considering the issues. They also felt that this tacitly indicated that their paper was not sanctioned by staff or was not being put forward through the right channels, because, in the staff's terms, panel members were seen to be acting outside the panel remit. However, the terms of reference did not provide any clarity about such an issue; all board

members had constitutional rights to bring up issues under any other business, or in fact to contact the chair of the board directly, without going through staff. However, in practice the tenant board members were treated in a different way, and board members generally never brought anything up, either as any other business or through the chair. As the tenant board member put it 'there are independents who are treated differently from the councillors, who are broadly tolerated members, then there is us – the lowest of the low' (Tenant Board Member, HA1).

The board chair tried to block discussion of the issue at the meeting, saying that 'as other discussions had overrun, there is not really time here to deal with this now. Could everyone take it away and read it and if they have any comments, let me know' thus trying to avoid any collective discussion on the subject. However, one of the councillor board members (who was often overridden by the chair at meetings) stuck fast and said, 'Let the tenants have their five penn'orth as they have gone to all this effort to write a report, which has never happened before' (Board Member HA1).

The female tenant board member had her say and sat down, expecting a discussion. However, the relevant manager responded by saying that this paper was premature as there was a review underway which would report in six months' time, and in any case, the tenants experiencing the problem had now left. The chair then thanked the tenant and said that 'this paper was for information only and would feed into the review, and if board members have any comments then please to contact the member of staff'. In this way the manager ultimately headed off the challenge with the tacit support of the chair of the board, thus reasserting her position as the obligatory passage point with the support of the board chair, with the result that the organisation outflanked the attempt of the tenant panel to bypass the obligatory passage point.

It was at this point that the tenant board member requested formal involvement in the review, before decisions were made, and noted that it would be really helpful to tenants if they could have formal access to policies and procedures so that they could give the right advice to other tenants, as well as giving informed input into consultation about service improvements. The board chair agreed to this as long as it was only policies about services. The tenant board members checked that this was clearly minuted. An unintended outcome of this last ditch effort to secure something from the process resulted in new interpretations from the 'higher

ups' on rules of practice, which were now fixed and could be used in the future to force staff to provide certain information.

The outcome from this action by the tenant panel was that nothing changed with regards to homophobic harassment, and the review did not happen, as staff structures changed. However, the rules of engagement had changed, as the panel members could request policies and procedures, and they also had control of the minutes of their meetings. At a later date, they also secured access to the old copies of the housing press, which they had not known existed when they started this journey. The whole process took a year to achieve and the outcome for the tenants was a far more effective panel that was starting to impact on some of the (top down) initiatives that staff brought to their attention, although it was only those issues that were addressed. Unfortunately, within a year the region had been restructured, and the panel split between two geographical (county-based) areas. This resulted in a weakening of the group, although tenants attempted some cross-county working, but a number of tenants left at this point.

It is possible to see in the circuits model that some outcomes, where changes that occur in circuit one (agency level as episodic power relations), can then influence the rules that fix relations of meaning and membership, which is part of the social integration level of the circuit, and is concerned with fixing and refixing rules of practice and relations of meaning and membership. The staff realised now that they were in a game and that they needed to organise themselves by developing a strategy which ensured that their agenda was met, and that the rules were watertight.

One question still remains: how aware are the staff of the extent to which they use power to keep tenants away from important issues, and the extent to which they do not trust tenants, or feel threatened by educated, able tenants, especially those who act collectively? Tenants in this panel had to work hard to win a few rights of access and accountability. However, their concerns were not shaping services and there was no real agenda for empowerment. Using Clegg's (1989) model, it is possible to see how power on a micro level was transformed for this group in the medium term at least, but the cost was high in terms of loss of trust. Looking at a situation like this it is not surprising that many tenants believe that, at times, staff do these things deliberately, whereas it is far more likely that they merely act to protect their modes of working, position and respect within their organisational structures.

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9.4.6   Leadership power - tenant obligatory passage points

Tenants too can become key nodal points, operating as obligatory passage points within the group. For instance, a dominant chair may have more personal resources in the first place, and once they have become chair, may utilise their position to meet both the aims of the group and their personal aims. In the case studies the majority of panel and forum chairs were male and older, and had kept the position for a significant period of time. This could have positive and negative aspects both for the group and the individuals concerned.

There were many instances where the panel or forum chair used his or her position to work behind the scenes to make something happen, by doing deals. This might occur through not challenging plans, or pushing things through quickly, or ratifying something that had already gone to the board. One example was a forum in a stock transfer association, where the forum had a large membership, although only 15 tenants regularly attended meetings. The forum contained mainly older members and just one younger female member. There was a high level of solidarity within this group, as they had worked together through the transfer process three years previously. Four members of the forum were board members – two women and two men. The chair was not a board member, in line with the constitution. This group was used to a heavily packed agenda that included policies and procedures that needed their approval. They made comments which were primarily about semantics or typographical errors, which were usually incorporated. There were many instances where these fairly dense documents were tabled at the meeting. Members had the opportunity to listen to the staff present the paper, then after a short discussion, it would be passed as fit for purpose and stamped with a tenant tick logo.

The chair of the forum was seen by staff as a steady, politically astute individual, though the rest of the forum were perceived as being sometimes difficult. Staff used the chair to smooth the way for various initiatives that they wished to push through quickly, and this individual, though not a board member, became a confident manipulator and mentor of the tenant board members. The chair told me

> 'the whole thing is always on the edge of falling over, as there is so much tension between departments and between staff at different levels, let alone the tenants with their varying agendas, all of which need to be sorted, which is what I spend the majority of my time doing, oiling wheels and keeping things moving' (forum chair, 7).

Staff, and the operations director in particular, told me 'we could never do it without him as he keeps everyone in order, without seeming to be doing anything'. The chair told me that he stored up 'brownie points', which from time to time he could use to make sure that something happened. An example he gave me was of getting a play area up and running, an initiative that had initially been blocked by middle management, but that was sorted out by the operations director. This forum chair had a really good relationship with the chair of the board, who had an informal lunch with him every once in a while.

In this case the panel and board members were constrained in how much they could make a difference, as they were not involved early enough in decisions. However, one key individual was needed by all the players in order to make the structure work, and to ensure that things got done, both for staff and tenants. This individual restricted himself to pursuing one or two key things for tenants, including the development and funding of a resource centre. This person, the forum chair, was a considerable power holder, and became over time an obligatory passage point, moving through the social integration circuit and fixing the meaning and membership relations, thus establishing the rules about 'the way we do things round here that have a chance of working' from the tenant point of view. This individual was careful not to abuse his position. Even when ill, staff and tenants continued to pass every issue through him to ensure that things got done. When, eventually, the forum chair was sick for a longer period, the forum became unstable, as members started to pursue their own agendas without recourse to the rest of the group, effectively operating as individuals. Staff had no apparent skills to manage this, and made unilateral decisions which upset people, causing some to leave.

Forum members also had control of a resource centre, which was funded by the organisation, and was staffed by tenants for the use of the wider community. However, in reality tenants were not impacting directly on the work of the organisation through their interaction in the working groups and forum, because they were not given the necessary resources and power to make a real contribution. They were mostly taken up the direct provision of services through the resource centre.

This example is interesting because both the staff and the group felt that this arrangement had worked well for many years. However, the question remains as to whether tenant interests would have been better served by more open, accountable involvement practices, or whether

the gains that tenants had made had depended on the operation of the existing system. At least in this situation, bottom-up issues and tenant priorities could in theory be dealt with, as long as the chair of the forum agreed. However, it begs the question of what will happen when this individual finally leaves, and what the outcome might be if the chair did not have the interests of the group at heart.

The level of an individual tenant's control can be high, as in the example given. However, the gains achieved in the above examples were not apparent in all the case study organisations, as success depended on a wide and unpredictable range of factors: the tenants' skills, abilities and level of awareness of what was going on around them; the level of staff control over them; and whose interests the chair supported: whether their own, or those of the panel, the organisation or the wider community.

In most instances the staff administering and supporting the panels and forums came to a comfortable accommodation with the key players, and in many respects the rest of the tenants were just pawns in the game. The groups worked as informal complaints channels, which dominated much of the available time. The scope for challenging, changing or influencing was effectively shut down by this 'comfortable accommodation' as the strategic work of the panel was limited to passing draft reports and viewing limited amounts of key performance information, which were duly nodded through. No transformation of power occurred here. Indeed power had become reified, with actions taking place in the first episodic circuit, where any challenge is easily managed by either the dominant tenants or the staff. In this instance the dominant tenants had become 'captured' insofar as the staff supporting the groups had been able to enrol them into their conceptions of how the group should run. In some instances the panel was able to support the member of staff in their internal games, in an effort to reduce the breadth of work imposed by more senior managers on that member of staff.

Not all panels and forums demonstrated such a peaceful accommodation. But where chairs and supporters were abusive to support staff and managers, this was often born out of frustration. What is critical here is that trust was viewed as being lost between the group and the organisation in question. Meetings became sites of argument and bitterness. It was especially apparent when the organisations decided that they wanted to replace the chair (again a top down decision), and the chair would then use their role to challenge the attempt

through reference to what were often unclear terms of reference (or the constitution), or indeed to change the terms of reference in order to retain their role. Some chairs dominated groups for nine years or more, consuming the majority of resources and opportunities, and keeping challengers at bay. In these cases, the panel and forums tended to become stagnant over time through a lack of new members.

9.5 Outcomes that make a difference

9.5.1 Protecting rights

It is not only when tenants try to get involved in new areas, or try to effect change, that power struggles occur. Hard-won rights and resources need protecting, and expanding as well. The following examples show how different panels dealt with similar issues by acting strategically. This example relates to out of pocket expenses, which was a big issue in one of the housing associations and at the Housing Corporation. At the Housing Corporation Consumer Panel, the mileage rate was reduced from 35p to 10p and was applied retrospectively without consultation. The thinking behind this was that tenants should use public transport, as did many of the Housing Corporation staff based at the London office. An involved staff member pointed out that, 'we all use public transport here in London and your activities are being funded by public money' (Manager, Housing Corporation). At the same time, one of the large housing associations in the study wanted to introduce a 9p mileage rate for tenants instead of using NJC rates for general involvement business and a 25p rate for conferences. The new policy stated that tenants should either use the transport provided by the association, or that public transport should be used. There was no consultation about this policy, or the administration of expenses generally. The Head of Operations at head office said 'we don't want tenants making money out of us' (Director, 1). Tenants responded in an effort to protect their expenses systems, with differing results. Their actions and the organisations' responses are explored below and are set within the circuits of power model.

9.5.1.1 <u>The Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel</u>

The Housing Corporation Tenant Consumer Panel members contained national representatives, many with years of experience and links to trades unions and political parties. Several members had experience of direct action in their communities, such as occupying council offices, or obstructing highways. The difference in standing conditions between the tenants and the Housing Corporation contrasted significantly with that between housing associations and their panels and forums in general. The tenants in the Housing Corporation's Tenant Consumer Panel were specifically recruited for their knowledge and experience, and their ability to make an effective input into national policy. Meanwhile, the Housing Corporation had limited experience of working with service users of any kind compared with that of housing associations. By the time I had the opportunity to be part of this group the rules and relationships of meaning and membership were fixed, and the panel had, over a period of two years, settled into a mode of operation where everyone knew where they stood. In this instance, however, the Housing Corporation was imposing new rules of engagement in relation to expenses management, which resulted in a significant reduction in the mileage rate. The first response from panel members was to attempt to establish what the problem was, and to deal informally with the member of staff who created the new policy in the hope of reasoning with them. In essence, the tenants were saying, 'Leave the rules alone. They work well for us and for you'. They were aware that this was an accommodation, which they felt worked well for all parties concerned, but they were also saying that they wished to be valued as highly as other volunteers, such as board members: 'We deserve our expenses as do other volunteers' (male panel member).

Unable to obtain a satisfactory response from the creator of the new rules, the panel members approached the director and explained the situation verbally. In Clegg's terms, they were seeking to enrol others to understand and come to agreement about the definition of the problem. This did not make any difference, as the director's focus was the directive to reduce travelling costs for all staff and others: in essence, other targets were more important at that time. Members then moved on to the chief executive and the chair, making a formal statement to both about the issue, explaining that many panel members lived in rural areas away from public transport links, and usually used a combination of types of transport depending on the journey, which for most members was hundreds of miles for each meeting.

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Members of the group would be out of pocket if they continued to participate, and were upset that there was no debate or consultation, and that the new policy was passed with retrospective effect. This meant that they were already out of pocket for journeys they had taken, and that they had been deprived of their decision-making powers, as they might well not have attended these meetings had the expenses rate been known to them at the time.

For the more radical members of the group, this action represented the power holder's domination over those without power and was a misuse of that power, and they made this clear to anyone who would listen. They also pointed out in their statement that tenants represented the poorest people in society, who were giving up their time without payment, only to be penalised or expected to pay in order to make an input into national policy. In addition they stated that if this new rule was applied, they would resign and go the housing press. The panel members knew that it would look bad for the Housing Corporation if the story went public, and they were also aware of how hard it had been for the Housing Corporation to recruit the group in the first place. They had a sense of identity as a group, and although the new policy only affected two members of the panel, as the rest already used public transport, the issue was the 'principle of the matter, and what was in the group's best interests' (male panel member). It was the chair of the Housing Corporation who finally vetoed the new policy. The expenses rates were restored to those that had previously been in place, and a £200 fee was introduced to recognise the contribution, and other out of pocket expenses, of panel members. However, when questioned, the Housing Corporation never admitted that they paid this to panel members. This group remained protected until the Housing Corporation's current chair came to the end of their term of office, at which point the panel was summarily wound up without consultation. For several years thereafter there was no direct tenant involvement in the work of the Housing Corporation.

9.5.1.2 The housing association example (Landlord 1)

Involved tenants within this association were organised by area and region, and each region operated with a high degree of autonomy. However, the directive about the new expenses policy had come from the centre of the organisation. In this case a powerful exogenous player was seeking to change the rules of practice. Informal approaches were made to the usual obligatory passage points in the different regions: the housing managers. All the managers responded to the effect that these were the new rules, and everyone had to abide by

them, as they were now contained in their documentation (fixed). The standing conditions were different in each region through the levels of skill and resources that the panel members had, the skills and resources available to managers and the different involvement policies and strategies that each region had developed.

Finding no way through the usual obligatory passage points, panel members in different regions sought out their directors, and tried different ways to enrol them, by expressing the view that they would be badly affected, as the new expenses would not cover the costs of petrol in older cars, let alone wear and tear. Two of the regions exhibited quite different outcomes from these representations, thus demonstrating the power of an individual to interpret (or even ignore) rules that had ostensibly been set at an organisational level.

In the first region, an argument was put forward to the regional director about the time put in by the panel members – voluntary time, campaigning time and time spent running community events. A critical fact for this region was that staff and other board members were entitled to different rates of expenses, thus creating discrimination against the poorest people, and a two-tier system that was regressive. The director decided that this was true, so continued to pay the previous rate to all, and ignored the directive. However, the director did not make any representation to the centre of the organisation about this, as she knew that they would force the issue, and she would be required to comply. The board was unaware of the matter, and the panel members and tenant board members kept quiet. This is an example of enrolment working well, from the tenants' point of view, resulting in a refix of the rules and meanings of membership, though the settlement was unofficial.

In the second region, panel members also made representation to the regional director, based on the same formal reasons, which had been passed to them by the first region. In this case, the director referred back to the centre for clarification. The centre came back to say that those tenant board members who were also panel members could continue with their NJC expenses rate whichever activity they were undertaking. Here we see the centre of the organisation, as obligatory passage point, moving rules in favour of some of the involved tenants and not others, thus dividing the group, in the hope that the tenant board members would look out for themselves and the problem would go away. Enrolment opportunities here were limited, as tenants did not have easy access to the regional chairs and no access to the group chief executive, and there was no organisation-wide tenants' group in place. It is

perhaps worth noting here that the association appeared to be blocking tenant contact between the regions by refusing to share the necessary contact details and by not organising an association-wide tenant conference, thus restricting the opportunity for tenants to share information and experiences across the organisation.

The tenant board members therefore went on strike. Other (non-tenant) board members did not understand or fully comprehend the issues, and there was acrimony. The tenant panel members, who regularly gave lifts to other tenants in order to save money, refused to do so, and thus for panel meetings to take place, taxis had to be provided by the organisation, raising costs further. As the tenant on the main board, I wrote a letter to the Chief Executive, pointing out the discrimination between the different types of volunteer, and suggesting that if the rate was to be 9p, then this should be the rate for everyone, otherwise this would represent discrimination against the poorest volunteers. This dispute took a year to play out, and in that time some senior staff realised that they would not be able to achieve any tenant involvement in some regions, which would not look good with the regulator. Trust was broken between the tenants, the centre of the organisation and those directors that failed to resolve the problem. In one region, panel meetings stopped for a year, as tenants and staff could not agree on the protocols. In regions where the senior management were not in favour of tenant involvement, the implementation of the new expenses policy killed off involvement altogether. Within two years, all seven of the panels and forums were wound up without any consultation, and without any analysis of the costs and benefits of the work that these groups had undertaken.

9.5.1.3 Why the difference

Key factors in the 'success' of the Housing Corporation panel members in achieving change were the skills and experience available to the Housing Corporation involved tenants, their sense of collective identity, political awareness, access to key power holders, links with the housing press and their understanding of the rules and meanings of membership. Although in many ways the Housing Corporation lacked a real commitment to effective tenant involvement in their work, and also lacked the skills to undertake it, they needed to be seen to be doing it well, and the chair of the organisation was committed to the idea even if some of the staff were not. There was a weakness in terms of the standing conditions: the

organisation was fearful of being exposed, and the chief executive and chair held different views. The panel members were aware of this and used it to their advantage.

Within the housing association example, key factors in the poor outcome for tenants were the organisation's lack of real commitment to tenant involvement amongst the senior staff; the tenants' lack of access to power holders; a fracturing across different regions which undermined any collective identity for involved tenants; the difficulty of making contact with involved tenants in other regions; tenants' lack of skills and experience; and the skill of the association in dividing the tenants on this contentious issue. The ultimate demise of the panels and forums came about due to one of the many restructures of the regions that happened over a ten year period.

This picture reframed in Clegg's model helps us understand how often unconscious actions based on a need to cope with a given situation further disempower the very people one is trying to empower in an already unequal situation. In the examples above it was the strong desire to limit the scope and power of tenants that was most interesting. Taken together, the static findings and the dynamic understandings reveal the strong potential to block empowerment at all levels, leading to disenfranchised tenants and services that reflect provider interests.

9.6 Where benefits accrue and the link to empowerment

In this section I consider my findings using Somerville's (1998) typology. This typology explores involvement initiatives in terms of: (a) the direction of action (whether 'top down' or 'bottom up'); (b) the dependency effect (whether it is increasing or decreasing); and (c) the extent that institutional change is achieved (whether it is radical, reformist, or reinforces the status quo i.e. conservative). The ultimate question is that of who benefits: whether it is elites, groups or individuals. This enables me to explore the longer term prospects for effective involvement and the transformation of power in each example.

As Somerville (1998) points out, empowerment can be seen as principally top down or bottom up, originating from those who have power and wish to see the balance shift towards

those currently without power, or starting the other way round, with those without power seeking to gain power from those who currently hold it.

9.6.1 Exploring bottom up pressure and empowerment

There were instances where tenants acted on their own agenda to bring things to the attention of staff, which can be seen as bottom up pressure. Many panels and forums operate as conduits for information that flows from individuals and the community, raising these matters through the panel meeting. Associations do not always record or respond to these issues formally, although many are addressed on an individual basis by the staff attending the meetings. Housing associations differ from local authorities, in that they tend to adopt consumerist approaches to involvement, and where panels and forums are set up the representatives tend not to have a constituency or a mandate. Housing associations are more interested in the group itself being a representative cross-section of all the tenants they house, rather than being representatives of their communities. This tends to result in less interest in views from a specific community or area expressed by a panel or forum member. The detailed examples from the case studies described above demonstrate how collective, bottom up efforts were made, to expand involvement activities and gain rights of access by the group, to change or improve housing management practices, or to protect existing rights and support.

Some of the groups were able to transform power in the short or medium term over some key issues. For the panel that attempted to address the homophobia issue, the outcome from start to finish resulted in improved access to resources, and control over the construction of important minutes, and hence the power to regulate meaning through the construction of issues, which therefore achieved greater rights, although the original issue of homophobia was never addressed. Relating this to Somerville's typology, it shows that they used their existing rights to press for involvement in policy issues, which failed, but that they won additional rights in relation to process. These outcomes reduced dependency on staff in one sense, as tenants took active control of some parts of the involvement process. However, they were also likely to increase dependency on staff in the future, as the new powers were utilised, with requests made to staff to provide information, to accept the interpretation of minutes and so forth. The benefit of this action accrued to the whole group along with any future members, and thus the collective. This organisation had never before allowed tenants

to control information or to access policy. I consider it to be a reformist level of change, as it represented only a step change in the empowerment process, albeit an important one. The power to veto the new rights was still firmly in the hands of the manager and the board. However, the group made good use of their hard-won powers. Therefore the standing conditions continued to improve over time, operating a kind of multiplier effect, which did ultimately improve services in the region. The existence of any obligatory passage point means dependency on that channel will continue to exist.

In the example concerning the defence of existing rights in relation to expenses, the groups concerned achieved different outcomes due to their position in relation to their standing conditions and those of the organisation they were dealing with; their ability to be aware of their position in the organisation; and the ability to act collectively in order to successfully enrol powerful others. Where the outcomes were positive for the tenants, in particular in the regulator example, the tenants won additional rights which accrued to the collective. In this case, dependency was increased in as much as the patronage of the chair of the organisation became essential for the panel, as trust was lost with the staff. In this case, the outcome could be viewed as reformist, representing a step change towards empowerment. In practice there was no real transformation in power in relation to the rest of the organisation, because the panel was wound up at the first opportunity, without consultation.

In the successful panel in the housing association example, the rights were preserved, but only informally, and therefore on paper tenants had lost certain rights. Their informal success resulted from their ability to act collectively (avoiding the division between tenant panel and tenant board members) and their capacity to enrol a senior member of staff who continued to protect the group. The status quo was maintained. The dependency of the panel was increased in terms of this type of patronage, which to some extent empowered the senior staff in relation to the panel. The benefits accrued both to the collective and to the individual senior member of staff, thus reinforcing the status quo.

9.6.2   Exploring top down approaches to involvement and empowerment

Panels and forums that are dominated by one individual do achieve some outcomes that benefit individuals, and in some instances, groups. The example in section 9.4.6 shows how a forum chair managed to operate as a key nodal point, in effect an obligatory passage point,

for all tenants in the forum, and also managers and staff. Over a period of time a set of informal rules of practice were developed that served to promote 'bottom up' issues that were deemed important by this individual. This leadership role resulted in the smooth running of operations and, over time, additional resources for the forum. From the point of view of Somerville's typology, the empowerment process for this group was essentially 'top down', but subject to a level of negotiation by one power holder who could use their power to achieve selected ends in exchange for getting papers passed by the forum as a whole. The rights won only applied to this individual; if other tenants wanted issues dealt with they had to go through this individual and their channels. Empowerment accrued to this individual. Although the rest of the forum may have considered themselves empowered and operating as a collective, each individual was reliant on the chair. The dependency effect of this was strong, as forum members and staff depended on the panel chair, and the chair depended on staff and managers. However, it is unclear to what extent the panel chair was manipulated by senior staff (if at all). The primary beneficiaries in this case were individual tenants and senior staff. Institutional change was limited, and thus the outcome was conservative in nature, preserving the status quo. This approach creates a very vulnerable structure, for if that one key person is taken out of the picture, the group will fail to operate effectively. In addition, if the power holder is adversarial, dominating and controlling towards the other members of the group, the potential outcomes for the group, and therefore the quality of experience in this kind of involvement, will only empower that one person, and the potential of tenants to maximise the effect of the rights and resources conferred on them is reduced. These groups become inward looking over time, with individuals competing against each other for the patronage of the chair, or access to other resources. Frontline involvement staff often respond to this sort of dynamic by setting up other involvement structures, as the repercussions of winding up a group such as this are potentially high, especially if the senior staff are not supportive or are unwilling to address the issue directly.

Considering the dynamics of the most common type of panel or forum operating within the case study associations, the shape and development of involvement was primarily 'top down'. The staff were able to determine the formal and informal rules of the involvement game, and were able to use power and discretion in many ways to affect four important areas: resourcing; level of access to information and training; the conferral of rights (statute); and the transfer, or not, of specific powers to involved tenants. The case studies and the

information from the inspection reports, together with the information from the questionnaire, reveal that 'top down' initiatives to support the development of involvement are subject to a range of barriers, which are experienced by both staff and tenants. Barriers persist in the areas of access, involvement opportunities at an organisational level, diversity, access to training and support, conferral of rights or transfer of specific powers, and, importantly, resourcing for involvement, despite a range of written guidance. In this respect 'top down' initiatives, as they are currently structured, will not empower tenants, and this potentially affects the quality of outcomes. Although there were examples of 'bottom up' pressure from tenants, such pressure only succeeded when tenants worked together as a collective, and had sufficient skills to be able to communicate their message to those whom they could enrol into a common understanding of the problems and solutions, whether for housing services in general, or indeed the infrastructure for tenant involvement itself, which was a strong focus for many panel members. To succeed they had both to protect rights and to broaden the scope of involvement, within an informal context of feeding through complaints and issues from the community. In practice the housing association was generally not geared up to listen to or deal with such representations.

9.7   Conclusion

This chapter shows that tenants can empower themselves and push from the bottom into new areas of involvement, primarily with the help of powerful others. This, however, did not appear to have any lasting effect in the examples from my case studies, as tenant structures and support mechanisms, such as expenses management, were vulnerable to termination or restructuring at any point. It was apparent that once rights had been won they needed to be protected, which used up valuable time and resources, changing the focus away from tenant priorities for service improvement. The weight of other organisational demands, that were generally deemed to be of greater priority, and the relative position that tenant involvement, and the involvement staff, hold in organisations, serves to diminish or dilute the effects of actions, national policies, and the personal aims of both staff and tenants. It became apparent from this research that managerial support for tenant involvement and the capacity of staff to facilitate it were key. The staff use of discretion to exert power over the process served to reduce both the potential for improved services, and the empowerment of tenants.

The combined effect of these barriers and pressures limits the potential both for 'bottom up' pressure to transform power in organisations, and for that pressure to affect the informal working cultures of the 'way we do things round here' (i.e. 'the rules') in the long term. The 'top down' mechanisms for developing involvement at an organisational level are not currently fit for purpose, because of poor administrative practices and a lack of understanding of, and knowledge about, the tenants that staff are working with, together with a lack of awareness of power dynamics in these situations. 'Top down' solutions do, however, have the potential to support empowerment, but if the power holders do not have the best interests of tenants at heart, do not have an understanding of the needs and aspirations of tenants, or have an overriding need to protect themselves, the future for effective tenant involvement is bleak. The continuing dependency of tenants on individual managers and staff remains high, as does the dependency of individual tenants on their own chairs and leaders, who may or may not be able or willing to pursue the tenant community's best interests, or may only be aware of certain interests within communities at the expense of others. I now move on to chapter 10 where I return to the scope of this research together with my concluding comments.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSIONS

My final chapter starts by returning to the original reason for my research: my own experience as an involved tenant (both as a panel and a board member), and my wish to find out why involvement was not working for me or my fellow tenants. This, together with a literature review and a consideration of the historical context of involvement and policy development in this area, helped me to establish my research questions. The first section of this chapter looks at the scope and boundaries of my work, and assesses both the effectiveness and the limitations of the methods I employed. The second section returns to my four key research questions, which I consider in relation to my findings, before assessing their contribution to the development of knowledge and theoretical understandings in tenant involvement, particularly within housing association organisational structures. The third section outlines my final reflections together with my recommendations for national policy and local practice.

10.1   Scope and limitations of this study

10.1.1 Scope

The aim of this thesis has been to explore and explain the experience of tenant involvement activities within organisational structures of housing associations in England, specifically organisation-wide panels, forums and boards, by looking at the barriers that tenants experience. Organisational level involvement of this type was the main vehicle used by housing associations to involve their tenants in more strategic issues, and is an arena where tenants should be able to influence plans and initiatives. However, it had seen little academic scrutiny, partly because such groups had only come into existence relatively recently, but more importantly, because housing associations were semi-private entities in competition with each other, and were under no obligation to allow external review. Entry for researchers was generally restricted to the invited. At the outset it was unclear to me whether all associations had similar involvement structures and operated in similar ways. I wanted therefore to establish the shape of involvement across the sector, to discover the kinds of

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tenants that became involved at this level, and to explore tenants' experiences; I also wanted to gain an understanding of associations' involvement practices.

To achieve this I needed to research a number of organisations if I was to gain a useful picture. I was aware that there was considerable research into local authority practice, but I felt that the history, culture, management, governance style, and regulatory influence in housing associations was different from that of local authority housing, even taking into account the newly formed Large Scale Voluntary Transfer organisations that were transferring stock from the council into the housing association sector. Other areas that had been more widely researched were those of community development, and involvement at a community level, but these included a wider range of partners and took place in communities, rather than corporate settings. My particular interest, therefore, was in what happens when tenants get closely involved with staff, managers and board members in corporate undertakings in bureaucratic settings, as from my own experience I had found this to be a critical area for empowerment and disempowerment. If the rhetoric of successive governments was true and service users (customers, consumers, tenants) should and could have a voice at the policy-making table, then it is in this arena that their contributions should be examined.

10.1.2 Focus

Barriers emerge in many different parts of the involvement process; they occur in many different forms and at many different levels. I wanted to understand how they came about rather than simply establishing what they were. I had found no other work that had attempted to look at the barriers as entities in themselves, and for this reason I made this my particular area of focus. I explored both the literature and my own research to try and understand the barriers better: who generates them and how they persist. For a full understanding it was essential that I focused specifically on the dynamics between involved tenants, and between tenants, staff and board members, to establish why it was that some tenant involvement initiatives seemed to be more successful than others, and what factors lay behind these differences. For this reason, I selected a theoretical model that would shed light on the processes involved and reveal possibilities for change, by establishing how the parties concerned used power and achieved, or not, their aims. Above all I was interested in the way that the game of involvement was played. I was keen to understand why, despite regulatory

requirements, inspection, the rhetoric of involvement as essential to service improvement, and increasing accountability, involvement at an organisational level remained largely tokenistic.

Since the start of this research, regulators and other organisations have commissioned a number of studies that have explored tenant involvement within housing associations, using analyses of surveys and self-assessment material but never including direct observation over a period of time. A number of these studies have included some material on organisation-level involvement, as outlined in chapter 3. Interestingly, these studies revealed some of the barriers to involvement that I have identified in my own work, although I have seen little lasting impact of these understandings on the way that housing associations continue to work with tenants.

10.1.3 The effectiveness and the limitations of the methods used

The methodology employed combined questionnaires, participant observation, analyses of inspection reports, and case studies – the latter undertaken over a period of eight years. This brought richness and depth to my work, but I would be the first to admit that my findings may have been subject to bias due to my own position, both as an involved tenant and as a consultant working with a number of the organisations under review. Particularly distinctive in my work, however, are the benefits that accrued from a longitudinal approach to data collection.

My questionnaire collected a wide range of data from each respondent about their personal characteristics and involvement experience. This information was set alongside the data from the seventeen case study associations, and the three national organisations in which tenants were working: namely the Housing Corporation and the two inspectorates. Together with an analysis of inspection reports published in 2003 and 2008, these findings painted a picture of involvement that was both broad and deep. The limitations of the data relate to the self-selecting nature of those who responded to the questionnaire, and the fact that the responses reflect the self-perception of each individual in relation to issues that may have occurred some time in the past. In addition, the information generated was limited in scope: there were 128 respondents from 22 associations – these responses may not be indicative of the general experience of involved tenants across all English housing associations. This concern was to

some extent ameliorated by the case study and inspection analyses, which between them covered a broader base.

A central ingredient was my own position as an insider, within one large association and with the national bodies as an involved tenant, and then my work as a consultant. This role as participant observer brought with it a range of considerations in relation to my own actions in the involvement environment and a need for self-awareness at all stages of the research process. However, as a tenant I am likely to bring a distinctive perspective to my narrative, and I feel that this is a refreshing contribution to the research literature in its own right, which will complement the work undertaken by practitioners and academics coming from a different position.

10.2 Contribution to knowledge – key research questions

10.2.1 The characteristics of those involved and the missing voices

My research revealed some interesting information about the characteristics of tenants which, at the time of writing in 2011, is only just starting to be collected as a matter of course by housing associations, and used to inform and support the development of tenant involvement. When looking at the diversity of tenants involved at an organisational level, I found that older men dominated, while some younger women were starting to access key roles in panels and forums, as well as board membership. There were, however, many voices missing from the table; these included lone parents, parents in general, working people, and younger people, in particular, younger men. Individuals from different ethnic backgrounds were also substantially under-represented. Regulators have developed 'equality schemes' and policies which are as applicable to tenant involvement as to any other service area, yet most organisations are still not monitoring the diversity of their involved tenants against the local tenant population. It is clear that certain people experience difficulty in accessing opportunities for involvement; indeed this is a significant and serious barrier for some identifiable groups. There has, moreover, been little change in this situation over the lengthy period of my research.

The lack of diversity within panels, forums and other groups working at an organisational level affected the capacity of these groups which, in turn, affected the impact and relevance of their work. Inspection is an important element in association business, yet organisations were persistently identified in inspections as failing to understand the needs of the communities they served, through their failure to collect data on the profile of their tenant population. Both staff and inspectors criticised the forums and panels for not being representative, yet I found little evidence that organisations were trying to address this issue despite its inclusion in strategies and action plans over the period.

My research also revealed that panels, forums and tenant board members had a wide range of skills and backgrounds which were not known to staff, or indeed to each other. Celebrating different skills and capabilities within groups would help to develop tolerance and respect amongst group members, would open up the potential for less rigid roles, and would help to avoid the concentration of power and resources on one or two key individuals. A third of panel and forum members in my study had higher level (degree or professional) qualifications. Encouraging staff to work actively with, and understand, tenants in relation to the skills, capabilities and experiences they bring would prevent them from inadvertently stereotyping tenants as a homogenous group. An understanding of team roles is also essential, as is the development of a sense of shared goals and shared experience. This should be facilitated in the early days of a panel's or forum's existence, and also form part of succession planning for these groups. A second point follows from this. Staff need to be brave enough to be part of that training, and not just procure or deliver this at the development stage of the group, as if their own roles were irrelevant.

10.2.2 Barriers

The study revealed a great deal of information about how organisations ran their involvement activities, and how they managed national and local policy interventions and competing priorities. Interestingly it transpired that staff and managers had significant discretion, and a range of other priorities, which caused key national policy aims to be considerably diluted. The role of the regulator was therefore key, as an external nodal point that all associations had to pass through, and was thus a powerful exogenous influence. However, the potential for meaningful, empowering involvement was substantially reduced by weak regulation, and

by the relatively low impact that a poor inspection rating on involvement had on the overall grade for the service.

A range of persistent barriers were identified right across the extended research period which, despite the publication of a plethora of good practice guides and regulatory requirements, continue to affect the prospect of successful involvement outcomes for tenants and staff. These include:

- accessibility for harder to reach groups;

- not shaping involvement around what was important to tenants;

- the failure to develop and monitor strategy, plans and agreements;

- service areas where tenants are not involved;

- tenants not being involved at a level or stage in the process that can make a difference;

- disempowering tenants through the way in which meetings are managed;

- a lack of feedback about outcomes;

- individual capabilities;

- the quality and effectiveness of training in relation to the focus of the group, group roles and communication.

These are compounded by an overall lack of agreed aims and shared vision, with staff and tenants having very different views about what is supposed to be happening in these forums and panels. Thus services and priorities are predominantly shaped by professionals, with little effective input from tenants.

There were important barriers to involvement that had not been identified by other research, but which created difficulties for those who participated in my enquiry. A good example of this is the failure to manage expenses, which became evident in all the case study organisations, and is documented in chapters 7 and 9 as an example of the dynamics of forums and panels at work. This subject is often avoided in open discussion because many

tenants are uncomfortable talking about money and issues to do with expenses. There were many instances in the case studies where tenants were disadvantaged through the inadequate management of expenses systems, which demonstrated a notable lack of understanding by staff of financial exclusion and poverty in general. These examples showed the extent to which tenants have to work hard to protect their rights, which uses up valuable time and energy, thus distracting them from the real issues of importance to tenants.

A second example of new research can be found in the experiences of the staff that support tenant panels and forums, and the way in which housing associations integrated the work of panels and forums into their corporate structures. Many of the areas of practice that were problematic related to the staff's capacity to support panels and forums, the support and resources that staff received themselves, and their level of awareness about the way in which power played out in involvement environments. The relative positioning of tenant involvement staff – who are often the only member of staff working in this area, or who are perceived as the 'expert' on involvement in the organisation, whilst frequently finding themselves at a substantially lower grade than the staff they sought to influence – resulted in considerable variation in how they undertook tasks and perceived their roles. In addition they were often under significant pressure from other members of staff. Consequently, their focus on 'getting through the business and on to the next task', at the expense of any real tenant involvement, served to disempower tenants, and represented an over-emphasis on process as opposed to outcomes. This was compounded by a lack of strategic vision about what tenant involvement could and should be achieving, and the uncertain commitment from senior staff and the board. All these factors militated against the possibility of tenants having an impact on strategic issues at a meaningful level, or the opportunity to monitor and develop services.

10.2.3 Power dynamics and empowerment

How professionals and service users consciously or unconsciously use power has been explored in a range of settings, but not specifically in this context, nor in the context of showing how the dynamics cause the barriers to be reproduced. Using Clegg's (1989) circuits of power model, I was able to look at key issues in the life of the panels and forums, which went some way to explaining why they behave in the way they do, and the shape that they most often take. Staff had the opportunity to control power in many ways, of which they may or may not have been aware. This included the power to shape formal and informal

rules of practice by determining meanings and priorities; controlling agendas, access to resources, and timing of meetings; choosing which individuals belonged to which groups; passing on information and other knowledge to groups; putting groups in touch with each other; broadening or limiting the scope of the work of panels and forums; cancelling meetings; and blocking access to other parties. Many of these activities could be identified as gate keeping: if managed well, these issues could serve as potential empowerment opportunities and development tools for panels and forums, rather than limiting their work and effectiveness.

The impact of staff decisions was frequently compounded by management decisions about when and how to involve tenants in the development and monitoring of services, and the extent to which they were willing to fund involvement activities effectively. The parallel studies of the national organisations revealed similar uses of power, which were more explicit, though similar in terms of themes. Interestingly, my research revealed that controlling behaviour, gate-keeping, and blocking the expansion of involvement are rarely done in a conscious way; more often, they result from the desire to get things done within an organisational time frame and within a context of competing priorities.

From the tenants' point of view, the extent to which this is perceived as deliberate and designed to 'keep the tenants down' is a moot point. The words that tenants used regarding their perceived position in the association as a panel member, or a tenant inspector within the inspectorate, spoke volumes about the lack of trust between some involved tenants and the organisations with which they worked. Cynicism was evident, perhaps based on previous experiences that tenants had had of being a service user within a range of agencies, including their landlord. Tenants consider themselves to be a subordinate group within the dynamics of involvement activities. They may not be aware that they can effect positive changes by acting collectively, and by developing and sharing resources. Too often their tendency to reproduce existing inequalities within panels and forums, to compete with each other over scarce resources, and to accept the dominance of key individuals who may, or may not, have the wider interests of tenants at heart, leads to stagnation and conflict both within groups, and between groups and the organisation. Tenants may have differing views on this. For some, having a key channel to the organisation through the panel or forum has proved effective and has achieved a range of instrumental gains in the right circumstances. For others, the

experience was more negative. Above all, my research revealed that the dynamics of power and empowerment were not really understood by the practitioners. The few who were more aware of the dynamics of disempowerment and exclusion, and who attempted to undertake the task of facilitating tenants to take on more of these issues as a collectivity or group, struggled to manage the power dynamics, in part because of the lack of tenant awareness of the issue but also because of the lack of commitment and support from middle and senior management.

10.2.4 Responding to issues important to tenants and the effectiveness of current approaches

Bottom up pressure from involved tenants working in panels and forums often took the form of pursuing individual complaints from the community, which the representatives took through the forum to attending managers, who generally dealt with some of the issues, but not others, and always informally. However, underlying issues of policy and practice were rarely drawn out, and tenants were frequently castigated for bringing individual cases to the meeting inappropriately, when they should have been dealing with 'more strategic' issues. This practice illustrates a number of important points. First, tenants frequently had little faith in the complaints procedure, not least because complaints were not treated as 'complaints' unless the 'official complaint' was spelt out in unambiguous terms. Secondly, it was often the case that tenants felt more comfortable dealing with tangible everyday issues rather than more abstract strategic ones. More importantly, staff used the opportunity to block ideas and to label matters important to tenants as an individual service issue, when they could have facilitated a more useful exchange. It was very rare that such 'individual cases' did not harbour an issue of principle that could usefully have been addressed. It was never clear whether staff used this as a deliberate blocking strategy, or whether they were genuinely incapable of discerning the underlying issue.

Whatever the case, the vision for the work of these groups was neither shared, nor indeed agreed. Often staff were trying to fit the panel into the organisation's idea of what the group should be doing (top down): for instance being strategic, or monitoring performance. This is likely to continue with the development of scrutiny panels, which are part of the ongoing promotion of tenant-led self-regulation (CIH, 2007) or what is now termed co-regulation (TSA 2009). It is probable, therefore, that these newer groups will ultimately fail, due to the

lack of a shared vision, and because of the barriers and dynamics already outlined. Tenants
need to be recruited to panels and forums on the basis of the work that they will be
undertaking. They need to be adequately rewarded and recompensed, trained, listened to and
supported, with their needs addressed and the necessary administration conducted effectively.
Most importantly, wherever possible, they need to be given the 'power to become
empowered' and to be valued by the organisation.

A number of examples in my research revealed situations in which tenants put collective,
bottom-up pressure on associations to improve services or to deal with issues. These
revealed that the staff involved were unlikely to develop this level of accountability, or to
open up areas to tenant scrutiny, for a range of reasons that related to their own priorities and
limitations. This raises the issue of who should support and facilitate panels and forums and
the new emerging scrutiny groups. There is, I think, a potential role for independent support
and facilitation, to help address boundary issues relating to the role and scope of the work of
the group, to help to establish shared goals (and to remind all parties to keep these in mind),
and to circumvent the conflicts of interest for staff, especially managers. One panel was able
to win some rights of access to organisational resources, and control over their minutes, and
thus the constructions of meaning. But they did not achieve their original aim of specific
service improvements, which was an issue of importance to them. This illustration shows
that associations are not always able or willing to prioritise service improvement. In an
environment where resources are limited it is important that the priorities of those receiving
services are understood and taken into account, thus helping to inform strategy. This should
be set within a context of informed debate with groups of tenants, who have been able to
acquire a good understanding of the issues involved. From my research I found that debate at
panels was for the most part ill-informed, stifled, rushed, or nonexistent. More often than not
the responsibility for this deficit was set at the tenants' door, as a lack of capacity or as an
assumption that tenants were only interested in their own issues. It seems unlikely, therefore,
that the senior staff will be willing to share power with tenants in a way that might detract the
focus from their own priorities.

Tenants also found themselves in a position where they needed to defend certain rights, with
mixed results. In these instances it was the groups that acted as a collectivity, who had a
range of skills, were politically aware and, most importantly, enrolled powerful others, that

were more successful. They knew that they needed to be strategic and that they were participating in a game with high stakes. Where tenants operated either as individuals (thus divided), or were unable to enrol powerful others who could help, they were unable to protect their rights, which affected the quality of their future involvement. Those groups that benefited from patronage, however, were vulnerable to changes in staff, and were therefore only empowered to the extent that they could influence something by their actions. Power, however, did not transform in the longer term – thus the status quo was preserved.

The top down initiatives identified by this study were insufficiently developed to demonstrate a real commitment to empowerment, or to give tenants a realistic opportunity for meaningful involvement in practice. In theory, however, if managed well, top down initiatives could achieve empowerment and improved service outcomes. Conversely, the limited impact of tenant involvement on services was evident in every aspect of the data: the questionnaire responses, the case studies and the inspection report analysis. The reasons lie, as ever, in the barriers identified above and the lack of awareness of the power dynamics involved.

10.2.5 Contribution to the theoretical understanding of a social policy issue

The application of my chosen theoretical frameworks has shown that it *is* possible to unravel the complexities of dynamic interaction in order to establish why certain outcomes are achieved. For the most part the particular barriers that I have identified have been underlined in a wide range of research into service user and tenant involvement, as discussed in Chapter 3. However, these barriers re-occur constantly, despite knowledge of them by academics and policy makers. My research is distinctive in that the theory demonstrates how power is mediated, redirected or diluted when it comes to regulation, and how those who apparently have no power and only limited resources can effect change and transform power relationships over time and space if they work together as a collectivity and act strategically. A lack of awareness about the uses of power and resistance in both group dynamics and organisational structures, together with the failure to understand how individuals use power in 'everyday' ways, results in power-related barriers never being surmounted. Conversely, a greater awareness of such a theoretical perspective offers the opportunity for both practitioners and tenants to find ways of working together. In an age of individualised services and 'customer focus', it is easy to lose sight of the value of enabling a diverse group of tenants to develop effective group working skills, both in terms of their empowerment and

in achieving positive service outcomes that might not otherwise occur. That said, an insight into how power relations work in such corporate settings would of itself open the eyes of staff and managers to how power works. It would also reveal the autocratic nature of many housing associations, which still appear to have their roots firmly in the benevolent private sector of the 19th century.

10.3 Implications for practice

10.3.1 National

My study has shown that, when it comes to tenant involvement, associations do not take regulatory requirements particularly seriously. Despite a decade of national policy development and regulation by the Housing Corporation, and seven years of inspection, many aspects of the service remain considerably underdeveloped. Particular areas of weakness relate to the lack diversity of those who gain access (i.e. the tenants who get involved), and the inability of tenants to have strategic, meaningful influence. This may stem from the level of importance that national regulatory bodies attach to service user involvement, which was indicated time and time again in my research – not least by examples of the way in which these bodies interacted with tenants themselves. If practice is to change, then the potential for regulatory national bodies (now the Tenant Services Authority and the Homes and Community Agency) to be a significant exogenous influence through regulation and inspection needs to be recognised. Such bodies have the potential to transform power relations (or at least ameliorate the imbalance) and thus empower involved tenants. This might be achieved through:

- making underdeveloped tenant involvement (in terms of outcomes) one of the factors for increased inspection and regulation within a risk-based regulatory system;

- giving tenant involvement a higher profile in inspections, thus affecting overall grading when it is underdeveloped;

- using regulatory contact to carry out random checks of self-assessment information related to tenant involvement , and training and supporting lead regulators in order to improve their understanding of the importance and relevance of involvement;

- disseminating information to organisations that will help them to understand how power operates in the tenant involvement arena at an organisational level, as well as within local groups;

- finding a way to fund independent facilitation and support that can be used in an ongoing way to shed light on the dynamics of power within organisations and groups.

10.3.2 Local solutions

At a local level, there are a number of areas of housing association practice that could be addressed in order to improve involvement outcomes and the empowerment of tenants through the tenant involvement process. These include:

- developing a shared vision for tenant involvement, including shared language, and clarity of aims for any involvement activity, which is agreed and shared by staff and involved tenants;

- having a strategy and action plan that is regularly reviewed by all parties concerned, ensuring clarity about the work that panels or forums will undertake; and;

- encouraging a more robust approach to the profiling of tenants, and developing an understanding of how this information might be used to inform the recruitment of tenants to panels and forums - this would increase the impact of harder to reach groups on the development and review of services;

- facilitating collective debate, and supporting tenants to develop a collective or team identity, to improve the resources that tenants can bring to the table at an organisational level; providing appropriate resourcing and commitment to this over the medium and long term, to allow involved tenants to operate as an effective check and balance, as well as an additional resource, to the work of the professionals;

- enabling effective bottom-up pressure, by developing accountable ways to allow information about services to flow from the community into the organisation, and involvement mechanisms that support this, and allow for the collective discussion of issues; consider using feedback from complaints to inform service issues as part of this process;

- improving understanding of how power flows in particular groups, and the extent to which staff may have hijacked all the 'power to' opportunities in the name of expediency, or may simply not have noticed that they were inadvertently disempowering tenants. A facilitation programme could be developed to explore these issues in a safe, supportive way for both tenants and staff. Tenants will need to understand how power flows in their own groups and how inequalities are reproduced. Fundamental to this is an understanding of the diversity of their own personal and professional backgrounds, which brings potential strengths to the group; the roles they take; and the effects of their actions. The diversity of the backgrounds of involved tenants needs to inform the design of training and support in relation to the group's activities. The personal training needs of involved tenants could be addressed through personalised training and support plans.

- investigating the development of professional staff skills in tenant involvement, and the relative position of tenant involvement staff in organisational structures, to ensure that involvement is strategically developed and effectively supported, and that value for money is achieved. It is important that involvement is integrated into the work of the wider staff group, including management functions. Resourcing for tenant involvement needs to reflect this.

- developing the potential for ongoing support for staff and tenants, and possibly a role for independent advice for key groups working at an organisational level, to avoid protectionist behaviour and conflicts of interest.

10.4 Further research

My work has exposed areas that would benefit from further research. One of these is the experience of the staff who administer and facilitate tenant panels and forums, which I have begun to explore in the case studies. A better understanding of their experience would facilitate the reshaping of the support in place for tenant involvement, so that it becomes more effective for *all* those involved. Staff may, however, need new skills in order to undertake this work effectively. My contentions in this research about the use of discretion, and the lack of support for these individuals, were based on interviews and feedback from staff, and reveal a complex positioning in relation to the organisations they serve; this too

would benefit from further investigation. Specifically, conceptions of power, and models such as Clegg's circuit of power, could be used to explore how involvement staff manage the tensions between their commitment to involvement, and their commitment to other organisational priorities. This could include a consideration of the wider staff groups and managers, and competing philosophies about the housing service: its purpose and where tenant involvement fits in. It is through long-term ethnographical studies that these issues can be seen to play out.

Another area that could be explored further is the issue of expenses management, and in particular, incentives and the way that these affect tenants. This occurs in areas such as the payment of small fees to tenant inspectors, and the payment of board members who are tenants. These practices have now had time to develop in the sector and should be considered as a whole. The lack of clarity about these issues, and the consequent problems, experiences and solutions already present in the housing association sector, would benefit considerably from coordinated study. The more so in that it is an area in which staff and tenants construct a range of competing discourses about what can happen, or what is permitted to happen, and thus represents a potential area of empowerment and disempowerment in involvement activities.

10.5   Concluding remarks

This research has taken many years, covered a large group of housing associations and explored the views of hundreds of tenants, together with an analysis of over a hundred inspection reports. Whilst I believe that the vast majority of staff are genuinely trying to do a good job, I found that they were not well supported, and one thing became very clear: many housing associations do not consider explicitly why they undertake, and invest resources in, tenant involvement activities, other than to comply with regulatory requirements (in Clegg's terms, one of the exogenous contingencies). Similarly they fail to place sufficient importance on the value of a shared agreement with tenants about how they will work with them in a practical way, and they often fail to listen to tenants when the latter tell them about their real issues of concern. They continue to use power (often unconsciously) in a myriad ways that inadvertently subordinates tenants, in the name of expediency in a pressured under-resourced working environment. In addition, associations have failed to address the situations where dominant members on forums and panels control power, and consume the majority of

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resources and opportunities. There is a need for staff to develop the tools and capacities for dealing with such situations, which includes an understanding of how power works in groups and indeed how they use power themselves. Equally important are the situations where staff and tenants come to accommodations about how they work together that benefit neither the organisation nor the tenant community, but which are expedient for the parties involved. Such arrangements are often based on a perceived need to preserve the hard-won trust of a few involved tenants, who often stand to benefit the most from the arrangement. The positioning, capacity and influence of staff across the various departments and key service areas within housing associations will need to change if the culture within the organisation is to shift towards a greater service user/customer focus, underpinned by a high degree of tenant influence.

Future changes in policy and the regulatory framework will, in addition, have implications for how tenant involvement is resourced, delivered and managed. Without an understanding of how the power dynamics within tenant involvement play out, such changes will pose a threat, and the cultures and behaviours of tenants and staff will be likely to create a block to constructive change. Ultimately tenant involvement at an organisational level, however it is branded in the future, will continue to suffer the same barriers and lack of meaningful outcomes, unless a considerable shift in focus is achieved by regulators, policy makers and housing association staff.

Appendix A:

The involved tenants' questionnaire

Please note spaces have been reduced for space in the thesis

The experience of active tenants working inside housing associations

Thank you for agreeing to share your experience in this research.

Please answer as many questions as you can. If they do not apply to you please draw a line through the specific questions or groups of questions. If there is not enough room in the space provided to answer the question please continue on the back pages please make sure you put the question number next to your comments.

1. Name   **2.** M/F

3. Housing Association

(If you do not want to name your association please indicate its size and whether it is locally based in one or two counties or a national HA and whether your association is an LSVT)

4. Area (County/Metropolitan District) in which your main tenant involvement activities are located.

5. Are you a shareholding member?   **Y/N**

6. Please ring one of the following

Age under 25   26-35   36-45   46-55   56-65   66-75   76-85   over 85

7**.** How long have you been involved in your housing association i.e. within the organisation itself for example advisory group/customer panel/regional or area committees and main boards including best value review groups (for those in stock transfer associations include the time you were involved with your council before you transferred)

Years _____

8. What type of housing are you living in now?

 General needs (ordinary) ☐   Sheltered   ☐   Supported   ☐

9 Approximately how many homes are there in your estate?

5 and under ☐   6 – 20   ☐   21 – 50   ☐ 51 – 100   ☐ 101 – 200   ☐

201 – 300   ☐ 301 – 500 ☐   501 – 700 ☐ Over 701   ☐   don't know ☐

10. None of the above, I live in an individual property separate from other properties owned by my landlord. ☐

On the street

11. Are you currently actively involved in your local estate/street/community for instance: youth activities, community development, local multi-agency partnerships, social activities or tenants group?   **Y/N**

12. If so what kinds of things are you involved in?

13. If you are not presently involved, were you involved in one or more of the above   **Y/N** activities in the past (this includes time spent involved with other associations)

Inside your housing association

In what capacity are you involved in your housing association? Tick as many as apply

14.**Consumer or Customer Panel member** ☐

(Made up of tenants who regularly meet as an advisory group, sometimes referred

to as tenant committees)

15. Committee member   (Regional/Area) ☐

(either as a shareholder/cooptee/observer- more common in larger HAs)

16. Main Board member (shareholder, observer, cooptee) ☐

This voluntary board oversees the work of the association, and tenants are sometimes

referred to as non executive directors or tenant directors.

17. Working group member, within the last year or about to be in the next 3 months   ☐
(tenants and staff working together on a particular topic or policy)

18 Best Value Review Panel/Group ☐

within the last year or about to be in the next 3 months

19 Reading Group (where tenants receive information and papers on a topic   ☐
which is being worked on by another committee, mostly a supporting role with an
opportunity for input)

20**. If you are involved in another way, please describe how.**

20a. Were you elected   ☐   **or appointed** ☐

21. If you sit on committees outside the housing association, linked to your housing role for example local councillor or involved in a multi agency partnership or any kind of wider community group including national organisations and government advisory groups, please list them below.

Training

22. Has your housing association made you aware of the training opportunities available to tenants?   **Y/N**

23. Have you taken any training? *(If No please go to Q30)*   **Y/N**

24. Was this? *(Please answer this section if you have taken any training or attended conference workshops, tick as appropriate)*

In house

a) Someone in the housing association coming to tell you what they did   ☐
b) The Association training department providing specific courses designed for tenants   ☐
c) Training that the staff usually take that has been made available to tenants   ☐

From outside

d) Attending courses on specific topics provided by agencies such as PEP (Priority Estate Projects), TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) or other consultants/trainers.   ☐
e) Workshops at conferences   ☐
f) Courses like the Tenant Participation Certificate provided by a college or

University including correspondence courses in participation.   ☐

25. On the whole has the training you received made participating in your organisation (tick one only)?

Significantly easier   ☐
generally easier   ☐
only slightly easier   ☐
no significant change   ☐
made things worse   ☐

26. What did you like about the training you received? (think about the positive aspects that stand out in your mind from the courses you have attended)

27. Was there anything you disliked about the training you received?

28. Can you, off the top of your head, list some of the courses you can remember taking?

29. Who chose the training agenda tenants ☐ or staff ☐

30. If you have had the opportunity to attend national conferences, which ones have you attended?

31. What do you think are the main benefits to tenants in attending conferences?

Making involvement work

32. Many tenants learn about participation by doing it. Much of the learning is through trial and error. If you could go back in time and change something about the way you learned how to participate what would you change?

33. What do you think are the qualities that make a member of staff good at supporting and working with tenants in your housing association?

34. What behaviours in staff, in your experience, make working together difficult?

35. Is there anything about the structure of the organisation itself that makes participation problematic?

36. How easy is it to resolve problems?

37. Below is a list of various types of training and education, please tick any of these that you have experienced in your life

a) Secondary education ☐ **a**

b) College or post sixteen ☐ **b**

c) Adult education classes (short courses on any subject) ☐ **c**

d) Adult education on a subject leading to a recognised qualification (GCSE/NVQ)☐ **d**

e) Work training ☐ **e**

f) Apprenticeship, leading to a skilled occupation ☐ **f**

g) Military ☐ **g**

h) Training from participating in your housing association ☐ **h**

i) Correspondence courses leading to accreditation ☐ **i**

j) University (first degree) ☐ **j**

k) Post graduate qualification ☐ **k**

l) Professional qualification (teacher, social worker, counsellor etc) ☐ **l**

The work you have done in your Housing Association

38. If you are a board member (area, regional or national), have you ever been excluded from a meeting because you are a tenant? Y/N

39. Looking back on all the things you have been involved in, list any of those activities or events/issues that you think made a difference to the quality of service tenants receive.

40. Can you think of any instances where the effort of participating tenants has saved your Association money?

41. Can you list any instances where you think your input made no difference to the outcome or that you thought the organisation was not consulting you at a time where your input could make a difference anyway? (*Think in terms of the information you may give your landlord to help improve the service)*

42. Does your Association respond to initiatives brought to their attention by tenants in their various boards and committees and can you recall any instances?

43. Please list below any areas in your Association that you would like to be involved with but at present your association does not have tenant involvement in these areas?

44. In your association has the Tenant Involvement Policy been agreed between tenants and management?   Y/N

45. In your Association are tenants involved in any reviews or monitoring of the tenant participation policy?   Y/N

46. In your Association are tenants involved in the Best Value review process?   Y/N

(*not simply consulted at estate level but formally part of the working groups*)

Information

47. Does your housing Association provide updates on national housing policy?   Y/N

48. Have you seen your Association's Tenant Participation Policy?   Y/N

49. In general (your most common experience) when participating in an advisory group how much time do you have to read and digest papers or information before you are required to put forward a view?

Please tick one only

2 weeks or more ☐   one week ☐   a few days ☐   at the meeting ☐

50. Do you have access through your Association to the housing press, for instance Housing Today and Inside Housing? Y/N

51. Do you receive publications from governmental bodies like The Housing

Corporation and the DTLR from your Association? Y/N

52. Do you receive information from your Association about the Tenant Participation Advisory Service? (or TPAS Information Service)   Y/N

53. Does your Association provide access to funding advice and information   Y/N

54. In general (your most common experience) if you ask for information on a topic or policy does your Association provide this:

In writing with an explanation   ☐   In writing only   ☐

Verbally only   ☐   Information not always provided   ☐

55. Generally how long does it take to obtain information from your association? _____

56. Have you had a written copy of tenant expenses procedures in your association? Y/N

57. Have there been any problems in claiming expenses e.g. for travel, costs and

Childcare etc. *(please list)*   Y/N

58. Have you received a copy of the association's Equal Opportunities Policy   Y/N

59. Do you have access to the Internet either at home, work or through your association? Y/N

60. Are you aware (contact details) of all other tenants active in your association i.e. tenants who sit on the various panels and committees? (*Not just your local area)*   Y/N

61. Do you have an opportunity to meet together at least once a year?   Y/N

All about you - *Before you start this section please read through it all first.*

Please tick the categories that most closely describe your situation

If you are working (*if you are not working please go to question 71 onwards*)

(Answer this section if you are working full time)

62. If you are working **full time**, what kind of work do you do?

63) If you are working full time and have children or other dependents at home, how many?
a) children   _____   **b)** other dependents   _____**c)** dependent partner_____

64. Are you the main provider for the family? (tick yes even if you receive some sort of state benefit)   **Y/N**

65. If you have a partner does he or she also work?   **Y/N**

Answer this section if you are working part time
66. If you are working part time, what kind of work do you do?

67. If you are working part time and have children and other dependents at home how many?
 a) children   _____   **b**) other dependents   _____**c)** dependent partner _____

68. Are you the main provider for the family? **Y/N**

69. If you have a partner does he or she also work?   **Y/N**

70. If you are working part time are you also a student **Y/N**

If you are at home *(only fill in this section if you have not filled in the working section).*

**Please tick any of the categories below that describe your situation. (*You can tick one or more for instance you may be a single parent and a student at home)*

71. A partnered parent caring for children where the partner works. ☐

72. If so how many children do you have living with you or staying with you on a regular basis?

73. A single parent caring for children. ☐

74. If so how many children do you have living with you or staying with you on a regular basis -
____

75. A partnered couple caring for children. ☐

76. If so how many children do you have living with you or staying with you on a regular basis? ____

77. Caring for another adult in the family ☐

78. Seeking employment ☐

79. Student (who is not working) ☐

80. Retired ☐

81. Unable to work due to ill health or disability. ☐

82. Fostering ☐

83. How would you describe your ethnic group? Please tick one only
White

British ☐   Irish ☐   European ☐   other ☐

Mixed

White and Black Caribbean   ☐   White and Black African ☐

White and Asian   ☐   Other ☐

Asian or Asian British

Indian ☐   Pakistani ☐   Bangladeshi ☐   other ☐

South East Asian   ☐

Black or Black British

Caribbean ☐   African ☐   Other ☐

84. Do you consider you have a disability   **Y/N**

I am available for further contact on this research ☐   **telephone number** _____

Use the space on the back of the questionnaire for comments about participation and involvement that you feel I should know, feel free to add pages as necessary

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this demanding questionnaire, please seal it in the envelope provided and either post it back to me if the envelope has stamps on it or return it to your association who will forward it to me.

Appendix B:

Introductory letters relating to the questionnaire

Introductory letter to tenants where participation already agreed

<div align="right">
Xxxxxx Close
Exmouth
Devon
EX8 5SL
</div>

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to take part. As you may already know I am a tenant undertaking research into Tenant Participation within the organisational structure of housing associations. I am active in my Association and aim to investigate the barriers to effective, sustainable participation that tenants experience in other associations. I am interested in those tenants that participate within the association itself i.e. on Boards, Committees, working groups and advisory panels.

Part of the research includes talking to association staff and voluntary board members. However the main body of the research revolves around tenants' experience, therefore I should therefore be grateful if you would kindly fill in the attached questionnaire. I really want to hear what you think.

All information given will remain strictly confidential and readers of the research will not be able to identify either the individuals or associations that have taken part in the study. I will be keeping a list of all participants who are happy to have their names included in the back of the report as contributors. However there will be no way of identifying what they have said or in which association they participate (unless they are really famous). If you want to be in this list please tick the box. This research is a 3-year project so please bear with me.

I thank you again for taking the trouble to read this and very much hope you will enjoy your participation in this research. Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided and either post to me directly if there are stamps on the envelope or return it to your Association who will forward it to me. If there are any issues or difficulties that arise or you need clarification on any item in the questionnaire please do not hesitate to give me a call.

Yours Sincerely

Debbie Hay

Introductory letter: cold call

xxxThomas Close
Exmouth
Devon
EX8 5SL

01395 272xxx

Dear Colleague,

I am a tenant undertaking research into Tenant Participation within the organisational structure of housing associations. I am active in my Association and aim to investigate the barriers to effective, sustainable participation that tenants experience in other associations. I am interested in those tenants that participate within the association itself i.e. on Boards, Committees, Working Groups and Advisory Panels. Part of the research includes talking to association staff and voluntary board members. However the main body of the research revolves around tenants' experience, therefore I should be grateful if you would kindly fill in the attached questionnaire. I really want to hear what you think.

All information given will remain strictly confidential and readers of the research will not be able to identify either the individuals or associations that have taken part in the study. I will be keeping a list of all participants who are happy to have their names included in the back of the report as contributors. However there will be no way of identifying what they have said or in which association they participate (unless they are really famous). If you want to be in this list please tick the box. This research is a 3-year project so please bear with me.

I thank you again for taking the trouble to read this and very much hope you will enjoy your participation in this research. Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided and either post to me directly if there are stamps on the envelope or return it to your Association who will forward it to me.

If there are any issues or difficulties that arise or you need clarification on any item in the questionnaire please do not hesitate to give me a call.

Yours Sincerely

Debbie Hay

Appendix C:

Ethical considerations

There are a number of ethical considerations to address when undertaking research as a participant or non-participant observer, particularly where a range of settings are involved over a lengthy period of time. These include making and keeping people aware of the researcher's presence and role, managing confidentiality, and complying with the provisions of the data protection legislation. I have set out these out below in the order in which they occurred.

Items discussed with the School Ethics Committee

At an early stage in my research I made a presentation to the School Ethics committee to seek their approval for my intended research proposal, specifically in relation to my questionnaire and associated correspondence, and my approach to the case studies. We discussed the content of the questionnaire, my mode of approach to the housing associations, and the associated documentation. I was given advice on issues related to the storage, protection and disposal of information, as well as on the coding to be used in the databases.

We also discussed the implications of my position as an involved tenant in one of the associations that I was researching. Although this had already been agreed with the association and with the panel and board of which I was a member, I raised with the committee the sensitivities within the housing association sector generally, and explored with them how I would protect the identity of my own association. I proposed that I would refrain from writing in the first person when reporting matters relating to that association, and agreed to make clear verbally, on a regular basis, that I was still conducting my research. This was important, as I was aware that people easily forget that events and conversations may be recorded for later use. I also agreed to make a

formal declaration annually regarding my research, as part of my 'declaration of interests' as a board member.

At the time of the meeting other case studies were only at the planning stage, and there were no further discussions about these beyond issues of compliance with the data protection legislation and the need for care in ensuring that confidentiality was maintained in relation to both associations and individuals. My identity as the researcher was completely transparent in all the other case studies.

Subject to these provisos, the Committee accepted my proposal.

Further discussions with my supervisors over the period of the research

A number of issues arose during the course of the research, which I discussed with my supervisor(s) as they arose. The lack of academic penetration into the corporate and governance arena within housing associations meant that I had to be very careful in what I said about boards, and make sure that I did not break any code of conduct in my role as a board member. I have been careful to keep all information obtained from attending board meetings, whether of my own association or of others, strictly confidential. Moreover, where active tenants have told me confidential information about their own organisation, particularly where it relates to the work of the board, I have kept it confidential. Where appropriate I went so far as to point out to these individuals that their behaviour was in breach of their association's own code of conduct.

My later role as a consultant opened up many avenues of enquiry and broadened my contact base within associations. Permission to conduct a case study, and to include specific material, was requested and freely given. I gave organisations regular reminders of my research work, but was aware that people had a tendency to forget quite quickly. In all cases permission was obtained from either the Chief Executive Officer or the Operations Director of the association, as well as the tenants involved.

It was not possible for me to hide the identity of the national bodies that I included in my case studies. However, these organisations now no longer exist in the form current at the time of my research.

As a tenant inspector, and latterly a tenant inspection advisor, I was not permitted to write about the work of the inspectorates as regards their interface with inspected organisations. However, this did not prevent me from looking at the shape of training and support for tenant inspectors, and this I did. In addition, all the inspection reports were in the public domain. Any other information that I obtained as part of the inspection process has not been used. I did, however, take the opportunity to approach one of the inspected organisations with whom I had developed a particular rapport after 12 months had elapsed, which I was permitted to do under the inspectorate's own code of conduct.

All members of the Housing Corporation's Tenant Consumer Panel were aware of my role as a researcher and I shared my findings on barriers to involvement with the then non-tenant chair, which resulted in a small improvement in the administration of the panel. Apart from the material describing the development of the 2004 Involvement Policy, I have not used any information that was given to the panel, or seen by me while attending the Corporation Board.

One of the greatest challenges lay in determining the appropriate level of my involvement whilst attending meetings with involved tenants. I was torn between my desire to remain strictly an observer, in order to gain maximum insight into how things were working, and the desire to improve things for tenants by intervening. Wherever possible I remained purely the observer. However, where I felt I could do so without jeopardising the research I did give some general advice on how to do things and where to find things, which was considered a fair exchange by those with whom I interacted. I was very careful never to get drawn into the specific issues with which they were dealing.

Appendix D: Staff interview question sheet

Semi-structured interview with the housing association

Code for association

1) Do tenants as individuals or as representatives of tenants groups participate (explanation) within your organisation?

2) Brief outline of structure

Board Membership

3) Main Board

   a) Is there a numbers policy or limit for tenants, if so what is it?
   b) Do you set targets for recruitment if so what are they?
   c) How do you monitor targets?
   d) Do your keep profiles of the members on the main board?
   e) What is the composition and size of the board?
   f) How many tenants are there on this board?
   g) Are there any circumstances where tenants are excluded from board business?
   h) Does the board receive regular policy updates/housing press/other info?
   i) How do you induct new board members?
   j) Are tenant members inducted in the same way?
   k) What training is available to board members including tenant
   l) What training has been taken in the last year?

Area/regional Committees comprising of members and tenants who have a governing role of - (HA)

4)   a)   How many tenant members are there?

   b)   What is the size of these Committees?

   c)   What is the makeup of these committees
   d)   Is there a numbers policy or limits for tenants, if so what is it?

   e)   Do you set targets for tenant members, if so what are they?

f) How do monitor them
g) How many committees of this type are there in your association?
h) How are new members inducted
i) What training is available to members
j) What training has been taken in the last year
k) How do tenants get to be on these?
l) Who services these Committees?

Customer Panels/consultative committees (advisory) made up of tenants

a) How many tenant members make up a panel or forum?

b) Who services them? (level/grade/title)?

c) Who takes the minutes, tenants or staff?

d) Do you keep tenant profiles of the members?

e) How many panels are there?

f) How do people get to be on them?

g) Does the panel have a budget?

h) Are the tenants involved in the management and use of the budget?

i) Do these tenants have access to the housing press/regular policy updates?

j) What training is available to members?

k) What training has been taken in the last year?

Working parties/focus groups made up of tenants/staff and or committee members targeted at specific issues.

8) How do people get to be on these?

a) How do you feed back to these groups (action points, timescales and monitoring   etc)?

Estate-scheme level/tenants associations

9) Do you encourage the formation of tenants associations?

a) How so you usually support them?
b) Do you support and acknowledge informal tenant groups and individuals who want to participate? Do you offer training to these groups

Other

11) Are there any more tenants participating within the structure of the organisation?

a) If so in what form?
b) How many tenants (approx) in total participate in your organisation excluding tenant associations?

Staff

12) Do you have a participation manager or person who has overall responsibility for tenant participation in your organisation? Grade

13) Do you have locally based TP/CD officers?

a) Have these had specific training in TP or CD work?
b) If talking to TP officer and they have not had training how did they become a TP office

14) The training that you offer

a) Is the training in house? or from outside?
b) How do you monitor training needs and skills bas
c) Do these tenants attend national conferences?
d) Is the in house training specifically designed for tenants?

15) Do you offer board and committee members training in working with tenants?

16) Is TP training a standard part of staff training i.e. compulsory?

17) Where involvement happens, barrier and outcomes

a) Best Value process where in the process is this organisation and how have you involved tenants?

b) Setting policy (at what stage in the process do you involve tenants)

c) Monitoring service standards/reality checks/setting performance targets

d) Have tenants been involved in agreeing a Tenant participation Policy

e) How has this been monitored?

18) What do you think the main barriers are to tenant participation in housing organisations in terms of?

  a) Tenants themselves
  b) The organisation and its staff
  c) Other

19) What are outcomes and impact of TP?

a) Can you think of any instances when participation has saved the organisation money?

b) Can you think of any instances where the service has improved due to the participation of

c) tenants in this organisation?

d) What costs are involved**?**

e) How do you budget for TP?

f) Can you think of any instances when tenants themselves have benefited personally

g) In situations where tenants are elected through a democratic process to the board how does

h) the organisation balance skills against popularity?

i) How do you manage to include tenants in rural areas?

j) Do you have BME and Diversity strategies?

k) Do you do equal opportunities monitoring of your boards committees forums or panels?

Is your organisation affiliated to TPAS or PEP or any other organisation where tenants can access support and information?

Appendix E: Findings from the involved tenants' questionnaire

Table E5.1: Board membership analysed by housing association

Housing association	Board member	Not Board member	Total
1	21	27	48
2	1		1
3	1		1
4	4		4
5	1	2	3
6	1		1
7	1	8	9
8	8	4	12
9		1	1
11		10	10
12	2		2
13	2		2
14		1	1
15	1		1
16	1	2	3
17	5		5
18	1		1
19		6	6
20		1	1
21		1	1
22	3	5	8
23	4	3	7
Total	57	71	128

Table E5.2: Analysis of board membership in HA1 by region

HA1 regions	Board member	Not board member	Total
1	1	2	3
2	8	8	16
3	2	6	8
4	1	2	3
5	1	4	5

6	4	12	16
7	2	2	4
8	1	6	7
9	1	6	7
Not specified		4	4
Total	21	52	73

Table E5.3: Housing associations analysed by size

HA by size	No.	%
10,000+ units	3	14%
5,000 -10,000 units	3	14%
3,000 - 5,000 units	16	73%
Total	22	100%

Table E6.1: Where the tenants came from – type of housing

Type of accommodation	No.	%
General needs	93	74%
Sheltered	32	25%
Supported	1	1%
Total	126	100%

Table E6.2: Where the tenants came from - analysis by size of estate/scheme where tenant lived

Size of estate/scheme	No.	%
Under 5 units	2	2%
6-20 units	23	18%
21-50 units	51	40%
51-100 units	18	14%
101-200 units	11	8%
201-300 units	4	3%
301-500 units	6	5%
501-700 units	5	4%
Over 700 units	3	2%
Don't know	5	4%
Total	128	100%

Table E6.3: Analysis of questionnaire respondents by gender

Men	55	43%
Women	72	57%
Total	127	100%

Table E6.4: Housing association case study participants by gender

Male	80	42%
Female	112	58%
Total	192	100%

Table E6.5: Analysis by age and gender of questionnaire respondents

	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Male		1	5	9	20	16	4		55
Female	1	3	11	15	15	12	13	1	71
Total	1	4	16	24	35	28	17	1	126
	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Male	0%	2%	9%	16%	36%	29%	7%	0%	100%
Female	1%	4%	15%	21%	21%	17%	18%	1%	100%
Total	1%	3%	13%	19%	28%	22%	13%	1%	100%

Table E6.6: Comparison of age of questionnaire respondents with head of household in housing associations (2004) and social housing residents over 16 (2006)

Age	Head of household	Residents over 16	Questionnaire respondents
16-24	6%	16%	1%
25-39	29%	28%	13%
40-64	34%	30%	52%
65+	34%	26%	34%

Table E6.7: Types of paid work being undertaken by involved tenants

Full time
- care assistant
- counsellor
- carers
- accounts manager
- HR manager
- toolmaker
- horticulturist
- councillor
- van delivery person
- community development worker
- care manager
- access development officer in education
- social work
- vineyard foreman
- chef
- coffee shop assistant

Part time
- consultant on strategic services advisor in security
- voluntary Chair in an RSL
- writing articles for a magazine on railway architecture
- Housing Corporation Inspector
- selling wines and spirits, giving talks and tasting sessions

Table E6.8: Comparison of economic activity between questionnaire respondents, housing association tenants (2004) and social housing tenants (2006)

	HA tenants 2004[1]	Social housing tenants 2006[2]	Questionnaire respondents
Economically active	25%	32%	17%
Retired	36%	30-35%	54%
Disability amongst those under 66 or of working age	Not collected	25%	35%
Lone parents		18%	6%

[1] Housing Corporation (2006)
[2] Hills (2007)

Table E6.9: Analysis of questionnaire respondents by disability and inability to work through sickness

	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Disabled		1	8	13	22	9	6	1	60
Unable to work			6	10	14	2			32
Total sample	1	4	16	24	35	29	17	1	127
	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Disabled	0%	25%	50%	54%	63%	31%	35%	100%	47%
Unable to work	0%	0%	38%	42%	40%	7%	0%	0%	25%
Total sample	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table E6.10: Disability levels amongst involved tenants in the case study associations

Housing association	No. on panel/ forum	No. disabled	% disabled
1	25	16	64%
2	12	4	33%
3	9	4	44%
4	10	6	60%
5	11	5	45%
6	23	14	61%
7	10	4	40%
8	0	0	0
9	9	6	67%
10	8	5	63%
11	8	5	63%
12	11	4	36%
13	10	5	50%
14	13	7	54%
15	10	5	50%
16	11	7	64%
17	10	5	50%
Total	190	102	54%

Table E6.11: Length of engagement of questionnaire respondents with their housing association in tenant involvement activities

Length of involvement		
<2 years	23	18%
2-4 years	55	44%
5-9 years	30	24%
10+ years	17	14%
Total	125	100%

Table E6.12: Analysis of types of education and/or training undertaken by questionnaire respondents

Level of education/training	No.	%
Secondary education	112	88%
College or post 16	50	39%
Adult education classes (Short courses on any subject)	69	54%
Adult education leading to a recognised qualification(GCSE/NVQ)	48	37%
Work training	61	47%
Apprenticeship leading to a skilled occupation	25	19%
Military	35	27%
Training from participating in the housing association	53	41%
Correspondence courses leading to accreditation	24	19%
University (first degree)	21	16%
Postgraduate qualification	9	7%
Professional qualification (teacher, social worker, counsellor etc)	27	21%

Table E6.13: Tenants with a higher level qualification analysed by gender and age

Age	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Men graduate/ professional	0	0	1	3	5	6	1	0	16
Men not graduate/ professional	0	1	3	6	14	10	3	0	37
Total men	0	1	4	9	19	16	4	0	53
Women graduate/ professional	0	1	7	4	2	3	1	0	18
Women not graduate/ professional	1	2	3	10	13	9	12	1	51
Total women	1	3	10	14	15	12	13	1	69
Grand total	1	4	14	23	34	28	17	1	122

Age	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Men graduate/ professional	0%	0%	25%	33%	26%	38%	25%	0%	30%
Men not graduate/ professional	0%	100%	75%	67%	74%	63%	75%	0%	70%
Total men	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%
Women graduate/ professional	0%	33%	70%	29%	13%	25%	8%	0%	26%
Women not graduate/ professional	100%	67%	30%	71%	87%	75%	92%	100%	74%
Total women	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Grand total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table E6.14: Tenants with a military education analysed by age and gender

	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Men - military	0	0	1	2	8	14	3	0	28
Men - not military	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	4
Total men	0	0	1	3	9	14	5	0	32
Women - military	0	1	4	7	12	2	1	0	27
Women - not military	1	3	11	14	14	12	11	1	67
Total women	1	4	15	21	26	14	12	1	94
Grand total	1	4	16	24	35	28	17	1	126
	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Men - military			100%	67%	89%	100%	60%		88%
Men - not military			0%	33%	11%	0%	40%		13%
Total men			100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		100%
Women - military	0%	25%	27%	33%	46%	14%	8%	0%	29%
Women - not military	100%	75%	73%	67%	54%	86%	92%	100%	71%
Total women	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Grand total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table E6.15: Comparison of involved tenants by age structure, gender and type of association

Age	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
LSVT M		1	1	4	12	9	3		30
LSVT F	1	1	4	8	10	5	4		33
Total LSVT	1	2	5	12	22	14	7		63
Trad M			4	5	8	7	1		25
Trad F		2	7	7	5	7	9	1	38
Total Trad		2	11	12	13	14	10	1	63
Grand Total	1	4	16	24	35	28	17	1	126
Age	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
LSVT M	0%	3%	3%	13%	40%	30%	10%	0%	100%
LSVT F	3%	3%	12%	24%	30%	15%	12%	0%	100%
Total LSVT	2%	3%	8%	19%	35%	22%	11%	0%	100%
Trad M	0%	0%	16%	20%	32%	28%	4%	0%	100%
Trad F	0%	5%	18%	18%	13%	18%	24%	3%	100%
Total Trad	0%	3%	17%	19%	21%	22%	16%	2%	100%
Grand Total	1%	3%	13%	19%	28%	22%	13%	1%	100%

Table E6.16: Analysis of board members by age and gender

Age	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total	%age of gender group
Male board members		1	1	3	13	11	2		31	55%
Male non-board members				4	8	7	2	4		25	
Total men		1	5	11	20	13	6		56	
Female board members				4	6	7	5	2		24	34%
Female non-board members	1	3	7	7	8	10	9	1	46	
Total women	1	3	11	13	15	15	11	1	70	
Grand total	1	4	16	24	35	28	17	1	126	

Table E6.17: Analysis of board members by age and gender – case studies (Older = 55+)

	Older	Younger	Total
Males	33	1	34
Females	16	8	24
Total	49	9	58

	Older	Younger	Total
Males	97%	3%	100%
Females	67%	33%	100%
Total	84%	16%	100%

	Older	Younger	Total
Males	67%	11%	59%
Females	33%	89%	41%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Table E6.18: Analysis of board membership by length of involvement with the association

Length of involvement with HA	BM	Not BM	Total	Cumulative totals BM	Not BM	Total
0-1	1	6	7	1	6	7
1-2	5	11	16	6	17	23
2-3	8	19	27	14	36	50
3	7	12	19	21	48	69
4	3	6	9	24	54	78
5	2	4	6	26	58	84
6	4	1	5	30	59	89
7	5	2	7	35	61	96
8	6	2	8	41	63	104
9	4		4	45	63	108
10	2	1	3	47	64	111
11	0	2	2	47	66	113
12	1	2	3	48	68	116
13	1		1	49	68	117
14	1		1	50	68	118
15	1	1	2	51	69	120
16	1	1	2	52	70	122
17	0	0	0	52	70	122
18				52	70	122
19				52	70	122
20	1		1	53	70	123
21				53	70	123
22				53	70	123
23				53	70	123

24		1		1			54	70	124
Total		54	70	124					

Table E6.19: Analysis of board members and non-board members by educational background

Board members	Degree	Postgrad	Prof.	Military	Apprentice	One of these	None of these	Higher qual[23]	Total
Male BM	3	1	8	19	12	24	7	9	30
Female BM	9	2	8	1	1	12	14	9	26
Total BM	12	3	16	20	13	36	21	18	56
Non-board members									
Male non-BM	2	2	6	9	6	17	7	7	24
Female non-BM	3	1	7	3	6	16	30	9	46
Total non-BM	5	3	13	12	12	33	37	16	70
All tenants	17	6	29	32	25	69	58	34	126
All males	5	3	14	28	18	41	14	16	
All females	12	3	15	4	7	28	44	18	

Board members	Degree	Postgrad	Prof.	Military	Apprentice	One of these	None of these	Higher qual
Male BM	60%[24]	33%	57%	68%	67%	59%	50%	56%
Female BM	75%	67%	53%	25%	14%	43%	32%	50%
Total BM								
Non-board members								
Male non-BM	40%	67%	43%	32%	33%	41%	50%	44%
Female non-BM	25%	33%	47%	75%	86%	57%	68%	50%
Total non-BM								
All tenants	13%	5%	23%	25%	20%	55%	46%	27%

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[23] 'Higher qualification' denotes degree, postgraduate and professional qualification groups combined

[24] Percentages are of educational group by gender e.g. 60% of men with degrees are board members

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Table E6.20: Analysis of female board membership amongst those who have none of the defined educational backgrounds

	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Female board members	0	0	2	3	5	1	2	0	13
Female non-board members	1	2	1	3	6	7	8	1	29
Total	1	2	3	6	11	8	10	1	42

Table E6.21: Comparison of LSVT and traditional HA board membership by gender and age

	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
LSVT male BMs		1			5	7	1		14
LSVT female BMs				4	4		1		9
Total LSVT BMs		1		4	9	7	2		23
LSVT male non-BMs			1	3	8	4	1		17
LSVT female non-BMs			4	4	3	2	3		16
Total LSVT non-BMs			5	7	11	6	4		33
Total LSVTs		1	5	11	20	13	6		56
Trad male BMs			1	4	7	2	2		16
Trad female BMs	1	1	4	4	6	5	3		24
Total trad BMs	1	1	5	8	13	7	5		40
Trad male non-BMs			3	2		3			8
Trad female non-BMs		2	3	3	2	5	6	1	22
Total trad non-BMs		2	6	5	2	8	6	1	30
Total trads	1	3	11	13	15	15	11	1	70
Grand Total	1	4	16	24	35	28	17	1	126

Table E6.22: Equalities/diversity issues raised by the inspectorate, 2003/2008

	2003	2003	2008	2008
No equalities and diversity consideration in strategy	1	2%	10	19%
No equality or diversity policy for tenants	2	3%	23	43%

No or poor diversity monitoring of involved tenants	1	2%	19	35%
Poor involvement of hard to reach groups e.g. young people/leaseholders/dispersed stock/BME	16	28%	25	46%
Low tenants' awareness of opportunities to participate/inadequate promotion of tenant involvement	8	14%	3	6%
Inadequate monitoring/review of outcomes	0	0%	23	43%

Table E7.1: Inspection reports - areas where tenant involvement is lacking or inadequate

	2003	2003	2008	2008
Developing/monitoring strategy	8	14%	23	43%
The budget	3	5%	4	7%
Service planning, monitoring and review (including Best Value)	6	10%	29	54%
Newsletter/literature/publications	4	7%	11	20%
Tenants not involved in some service areas	10	17%	20	37%
Tenant involvement not embedded in strategic decision making	0	0%	27	50%
Website underdeveloped/not customer focused	0	0%	18	33%

Table E7.2: Inspection reports - tenant involvement structures

	2003	2003	2008	2008
No structure/no clear driver	4	7%	14	26%
Strategy needs reviewing or no strategy	18	31%	15	28%
Inadequate constitutions/ terms of reference/role profile for groups	4	7%	0	0%
Lack of clarity for staff roles	6	10%	0	0%
Uncertain links between tenant involvement structure and the board	2	3%	12	22%
Low level of monitoring of tenant involvement activities by SMT and board	1	2%	10	19%
Panels/Forums over-managed or controlled by staff agenda (i.e. not working in partnership)	1	2%	0	0%

Lack of effective link between Tenants and Residents Associations and Panel/Forum	2	3%	1	2%
Tenant involvement agreement needed	2	3%	8	15%
Uncertain links between community development and tenant involvement	0	0%	4	7%

Table E7.3: Tenant Participation Policy agreed between tenants and management

HA code	Yes	No	Total
1	24	18	42
2	1		1
3	1		1
4	4		4
5	2	1	3
6	1		1
7	6	2	8
8	8	3	11
9	1		1
11	6	3	9
12	2		2
13	2		2
14	1		1
15	1		1
16	2		2
17	3	2	5
18	1		1
19	5	1	6
20	1		1
21	1		1
22	7	1	8
23	6		6
Grand Total	86	31	117
Percentages	74%	26%	100%
HA1 Regions			
1	1	1	2
2	7	4	11
3	2	2	4
4	1	1	2
5	2		2
6	5	4	9
7	2	1	3
8	2	2	4

	Yes	No	Total
9		3	3
???	2		2
Grand Total	24	18	42

Table E7.4: Involvement in any reviews or monitoring of the tenant participation policy

HA codes	Yes	No	Total
1	14	23	37
2	1		1
3	1		1
4	4		4
5	3		3
6	1		1
7	6	1	7
8	8	3	11
9	1		1
11	6	3	9
12	2		2
13	2		2
15	1		1
16	3		3
17	2	3	5
18	1		1
19	4	2	6
20		1	1
21		1	1
22	7	1	8
23	5	1	6
Grand Total	72	39	111
Precentages	65%	35%	100%
HA1 regions			
1	1		1
2	4	6	10
3	1	2	3
4	1	1	2
5	3		3
6	2	6	8
7		3	3
8	2	1	3
9		3	3
???		1	1
Grand Total	14	23	37

Table E7.5: Involvement in the 'Best Value' review process

HA codes	Yes	No	Total
1	17	25	42
2	1		1
3	1		1
4	4		4
5	3		3
6	1		1
7	6	3	9
8	9	2	11
9	1		1
11	5	4	9
12	2		2
13	2		2
14	1		1
15	1		1
16	3		3
17	3	2	5
18	1		1
19	4	2	6
20		1	1
21		1	1
22	8		8
23	5	1	6
Grand Total	78	41	119
Percentages	66%	34%	100%
HA1 regions			
1	1		1
2	4	7	11
3	1	2	3
4	1	1	2
5	3		3
6	2	7	9
7	1	2	3
8	1	3	4
9	1	2	3
???	1	1	2
Grand Total	16	25	41

Table E7.6: Inspection reports - monitoring

	2003	2003	2008	2008
Lack of monitoring, targets, action plans	10	17%	39	72%
Not using STATUS and other survey results to improve services and performance	2	3%	5	9%
Lack of internal and external benchmarking	1	2%	13	24%
Lack of impact information on tenant involvement and/or community development	2	3%	13	24%
Standards set are not challenging/SMART	0	0%	21	39%

Table E7.7   Other qualities valued in staff – taken from the questionnaire responses

Personal qualities

- Integrity: conscientiousness; honesty; not fobbing people off
- Attitude: unbiased/open-minded; willingness to accept that others may have the answers; have a genuine interest in tenants; respect for tenants; treat everyone equally; 'Advise – not tell people what to do'
- Other personal qualities: diplomacy; maturity; a sense of humour; ability to talk about self and family; informality; friendliness; approachability
- Aptitude for collaborative working: availability/willingness to talk with tenants; ability to work with tenants and share knowledge; supportive/encouraging tenants to move forward

Knowledge

- Good knowledge of the housing association
- Understanding the needs of disabled people
- Understanding the rights of tenants

Skills

- Time management
- Literate and IT proficient
- Good chairing skills
- Problem solving capacity

Other

- Trained staff
- A tenant centred culture with a lack of empire building
- Efficient and flexible
- More staff who are tenants

Table E7.8: Additional things that tenants found difficult about working with staff

Communication
- Lack of communication with tenants, including failure to respond, slowness in responding, not making information available
- Lack of communication between departments
- Staff ignoring tenants
- Lack of availability of staff
- Use of jargon (acronyms etc.), not using plain English, talking over tenants' heads

Knowledge and skills
- Knowledge: staff don't understand the issues; lack of knowledge of the job and experience in TP; lack of clarity about the limits of consultation.
- Skills: lack of literacy and IT skills; poor facilitation skills.
- Lack of training

Other staff attributes
- 'Lack of intelligence to deal with issues'
- 'Fear of making mistakes'
- 'Leaving consultation too late'
- 'Not empowering tenants'
- 'Not sharing good practice'
- 'Lack of maturity'
- 'Bureaucracy'

Table E7.9: Types of training taken: in house

Types of training taken – in house	No.	%
In house information	46	38%
In house training course	42	34%
Staff training	33	27%

Table E7.10: Types of training taken: external

External training taken	No.	%
Training courses	55	45%
Workshops at conferences	61	50%
College/university based	11	9%

Table E7.11: Who chose the training agenda?

Tenants	14	18%
Staff	46	58%
Both	20	25%
Total	80	100%

Table E7.12: Training undertaken analysed by age and gender

Men									
	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Trained M		1	3	5	16	13	3		41
No training M			2	4	4	3	1		14
Total		1	5	9	20	16	4		55
Women									
	<25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75	76-85	> 85	Total
Trained F	1	1	8	12	11	4	5		42
No training F		1	3	3	4	6	6	1	24
Total	1	2	11	15	15	10	11	1	66

Table E7.13: Being kept up to date with policy developments analysed by housing association

HA code	Yes	No	Total
1	15	26	41
2	1		1
3	1		1
4	4		4
5	3		3
6	1		1
7	6	2	8
8	7	3	10
9	1		1
11	7	2	9
12	2		2
13	2		2
14	1		1

15	1		1
16	3		3
17	4	1	5
18	1		1
19	3	3	6
20		1	1
21	1		1
22	7	1	8
23	5	1	6
Grand Total	76	40	116
	66%	34%	100%
HA1 regions			
1	1	1	2
2	2	9	11
3	3		3
4	1	1	2
5	1	1	2
6	1	9	10
7	1	1	2
8	2	2	4
9		2	2
???	2		2
Grand Total	14	26	40

Table E7.14: Being kept up to date with policy developments, analysed by housing association and board membership

HA code	Board member	Yes	No	Total
1	Yes	6	12	18
	No	9	14	23
1 Total		15	26	41
2	Yes	1		1
2 Total		1		1
3	Yes	1		1
3 Total		1		1
4	Yes	4		4
4 Total		4		4
5	Yes	1		1
	No	2		2
5 Total		3		3
6	Yes	1		1

6 Total			1		1
7	Yes		1		1
	No		5	2	7
7 Total			6	2	8
8	Yes		6		6
	No		1	3	4
8 Total			7	3	10
9	No		1		1
9 Total			1		1
11	No		7	2	9
11 Total			7	2	9
12	Yes		2		2
12 Total			2		2
13	Yes		2		2
13 Total			2		2
14	No		1		1
14 Total			1		1
15	Yes		1		1
15 Total			1		1
16	Yes		1		1
	No		2		2
16 Total			3		3
17	Yes		4	1	5
17 Total			4	1	5
18	Yes		1		1
18 Total			1		1
19	No		3	3	6
19 Total			3	3	6
20	No			1	1
20 Total				1	1
21	No		1		1
21 Total			1		1
22	Yes		3		3
	No		4	1	5
22 Total			7	1	8
23	Yes		4		4
	No		1	1	2
23 Total			5	1	6
Grand Total			76	40	116
HA1 regions					
1	Yes			1	1
	No		1		1
1 Total			1	1	2

381

2	Yes	1	6	7
	No	1	3	4
2 Total		2	9	11
3	Yes	2		2
	No	1		1
3 Total		3		3
4	Yes	1		1
	No		1	1
4 Total		1	1	2
5	Yes		1	1
	No	1		1
5 Total		1	1	2
6	Yes		4	4
	No	1	5	6
6 Total		1	9	10
7	Yes	1		1
	No		1	1
7 Total		1	1	2
8	Yes	1		1
	No	1	2	3
8 Total		2	2	4
9	No		2	2
9 Total			2	2
???	No	2		2
??? Total		2		2
Grand Total		14	26	40

Table E7.15: Tenants seen their association's tenant participation policy

HA code	Yes	No	Total
1	18	27	45
2	1		1
3	1		1
4	4		4
5	2	1	3
6	1		1
7	5	4	9
8	6	5	11
9	1		1
11	6	3	9
12	2		2
13	2		2
14		1	1
15	1		1

16	2	1	3
17	2	3	5
18	1		1
19	4	2	6
20	1		1
21	1		1
22	5	3	8
23	5	2	7
Grand Total	71	52	123

Table E7.16: Time given to read and digest papers and/or information for panel/forum meetings

HA code	2 weeks+	one week	a few days	at the meeting	Grand Total
1	24	6	9	4	43
2	1				1
3		1			1
4	2		2		4
5	1	1	1		3
6		1			1
7	3	2	2	2	9
8	7	2	2		11
9	1				1
11	6		1	3	10
12	1	1			2
13			2		2
14		1			1
15			1		1
16	1	1	1		3
17	1	4			5
18		1			1
19	1	2	3		6
20			1		1
21		1			1
22	6	2			8
23	1	3		1	5
Grand Total	56	29	25	10	120
	47%	24%	21%	8%	100%

Table E7.17: Access to housing press analysed by board membership –separating out HA1

All associations			
Board members	33	23	56
Not board members	21	41	62
Total	56	64	118
Board members	59%	41%	100%
Not board members	34%	66%	100%
Total	47%	54%	100%

All associations minus HA1			
Board members	27	8	35
Not board members	18	21	39
Total	47	29	72
Board members	77%	23%	100%
Not board members	46%	54%	100%
Total	65%	40%	100%

HA1			
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	6	15	21
No	3	20	23
Total	9	35	46
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	29%	71%	100%
No	13%	87%	100%
Total	20%	76%	100%

Table E7.18: Access to official publications

All associations			
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	28	28	56
No	18	48	66
Total	46	76	122

	Yes	No	Total
Yes	50%	50%	100%
No	27%	73%	100%
Total	38%	62%	100%

All associations minus HA1

Access to official publications			
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	25	10	35
No	14	28	42
Total	39	38	77

Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	71%	29%	100%
No	33%	67%	100%
Total	51%	49%	100%

HA1

Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	3	18	21
No	4	20	24
Total	7	38	45

Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	14%	86%	100%
No	17%	83%	100%
Total	16%	84%	100%

Table E7.19: Access to information about TPAS

All associations

Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	41	14	55
No	36	32	68
Total	77	46	123

Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	75%	25%	100%
No	53%	47%	100%
Total	63%	37%	100%

All associations minus HA1

Information about			

TPAS			
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	30	5	35
No	25	18	43
Total	55	23	78
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	86%	14%	100%
No	58%	42%	100%
Total	71%	29%	100%
HA1			
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	11	9	20
No	11	14	25
Total	22	23	45
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	55%	45%	100%
No	44%	56%	100%
Total	49%	51%	100%

Table E7.20: Access to information about TPAS by association

HA code	Yes	No	Total
1	22	23	45
2	1		1
3	1		1
4	2	2	4
5	1	2	3
6	1		1
7	4	5	9
8	7	4	11
9	1		1
11	6	4	10
12	2		2
13	2		2
15	1		1
16	2	1	3
17	3	2	5
18	1		1
19	6		6
20		1	1
21	1		1

22	7	1	8
23	6	1	7
Grand Total		77	46	123

HA1 regions			
1	1	1	2
2	4	8	12
3	2	2	4
4	1	1	2
5		3	3
6	6	3	9
7	3		3
8	2	2	4
9	1	2	3
???	1	1	2
Grand Total	21	23	44

Table E7.21: Access to information about fundraising

All associations			
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	36	18	54
No	39	28	67
Total	75	46	121
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	67%	33%	100%
No	58%	42%	100%
Total	62%	38%	100%
All associations minus HA1			
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	30	5	35
No	26	14	40
Total	56	19	75
Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	86%	14%	100%
No	65%	35%	100%
Total	75%	25%	100%
HA1			

Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	6	13	19
No	13	12	25
Total	19	25	44

Board member	Yes	No	Total
Yes	32%	68%	100%
No	52%	48%	100%
Total	43%	57%	100%

Table E7.22: Summary of access to information analysed by board membership

All associations	Board member	Non-board member	Total
Housing press	59%	34%	46%
Official publications	50%	27%	38%
TPAS information	75%	53%	63%
Funding advice	67%	58%	62%
All associations minus HA1			
	Board member	Non-board member	Total
Housing press	77%	46%	61%
Official publications	71%	33%	51%
TPAS information	86%	58%	71%
Funding advice	86%	65%	75%
HA1			
	Board member	Non-board member	Total
Housing press	29%	13%	20%
Official publications	14%	17%	16%
TPAS information	55%	44%	49%
Funding advice	32%	52%	43%

Table E7.23: Access to the internet

HA code	Yes	No	Total
1	22	22	44
2	1		1
3	1		1
4		4	4
5	3		3
6		1	1
7	7	2	9
8	9	2	11
9		1	1
11	3	6	9
12	2		2
13	2		2
14		1	1
15	1		1
16	2	1	3
17	4	1	5
18		1	1
19	4	2	6
20		1	1
21	1		1
22	6	2	8
23	6	1	7
Grand Total	74	48	122
	61%	39%	100%

Table E7.24: Resources for tenant involvement activity – inspection reports

	2003	2003	2008	2008
Low training opportunities/take up for involved tenants	14	24%	5	9%
Lack of skills audit to enable tailored training	1	2%	3	6%
Poor networking with other landlords	0	0%	9	17%
No expenses policy or awareness of right to expenses	2	3%	1	2%
Problems resourcing tenants groups and committees	8	14%	0	0%
Poor record keeping /information available (e.g. list of Tenant and Residents Associations out of date)	1	2%	3	6%
Tenant involvement staff isolated and unsupported	1	2%	0	0%

Table E8.1: Tenant involvement awareness/commitment within the organisation – inspection reports

	2003	2003	2008	2008
Low staff awareness of tenant involvement strategy and policies	4	7%	3	6%
Low involvement/awareness of tenant involvement in the rest of the organisation	2	3%	5	9%
Not enough consultation in key service areas	7	12%	26	48%
Tenants not involved early enough in the process	9	16%	12	22%
Limited range of methods for involving tenants	16	28%	4	7%
Taking too much time to move initiatives along	2	3%	4	7%
Failure to action/progress issues raised in meetings	2	3%	2	4%
Poor feedback to tenants	11	19%	22	41%
Poor at learning from own experience of tenant involvement	1	2%	21	39%
Tenant involvement not adequately promoted or supported	2	3%	3	6%

**Table E8.2 Ways in which involved tenants felt they had made a difference –
taken from the questionnaire responses**

Estate issues

- Adoptions (play areas) (2 instances)
- More information to tenants' about security of property
- A rail was erected to stop tenants slipping on ice down the slope in winter, salt boxes for road salt for the car park
- The refurbishment of our scheme
- On my estate - a quality of life project - new play areas - 'friends of local library'- saved our small local library from close down.
- Neighbourhood improvement schemes 3 years so three times. It's only a one a year thing
- Resolving cleaning and caretaking
- Understanding the youth
- I was very impressed with the work [the association] had done with young people, and included them in the whole process. This included 2 young people from our estate. They felt their views had been listened to.
- Issues - parking problems, nuisance neighbours, litter picking, repairs and maintenance, grass maintenance.
- Refurbish a whole estate inside houses and outside.

Policy issues

- Terms of reference
- Local lettings plan
- Policy of using always the cheapest contractor
- Rewritten policy on bad neighbours - anti social behaviour strategy.
- Complaints procedures
- Equality and diversity
- Designing services for sheltered housing

Practice issues

- Disabled adaptations
- Customer satisfaction slips
- Better response and more satisfactory outcomes to requests for repairs
- Better quality of work from employed contractors
- Better telephone response and manner from the staff
- More care required in correspondence style
- Service charges (2 instances)
- Availability of staff to tenants
- Things get done quicker

- Customer service standards
- Building programme - helping to decide where and when
- Helped get 32 houses for a housing association built.

Resources

- Tenants' handbook (2 instances)
- Resource centre
- Plain English guide for residents

Change management

- Stock transfer
- The events prior to transfer. Realising that we at last have the chance to have a say in our homes.

Monitoring and continuous improvement

- Harnessing tenant complaints to inform service improvements

Social

- Helping us to stay in our own homes as we get older, getting people together and making friends with others

Made a difference outside formal housing association activity

- We have amenities here in our communal home paid for by our own organised efforts that raise the quality of the service.
- I help to run social activities and it does make a difference

Other things that people felt had made a difference

- The Senior Housing Officer being prepared to visit people at home
- Increased knowledge and a better understanding of the issues
- Access to training – and learning from each other
- The opportunity for housing associations to realise that there are a lot of smart tenants in the country
- Stopping the management board trying to slip things past the tenants
- Keeping tenants interested and involved.
- I like to think being involved in all aspects of forum work as vice chair and being involved in lots of different committees has given me more patience and greater understanding within the groups.

Table E8.3: Areas of operation that tenants would like to be involved in that were not available at the time of the questionnaire

Area of interest	No. of mentions
Development and/or design issues	7
Allocations and lettings	4
Business plans, finance and budgets	4
Policy	3
Contracts (maintenance, cleaning, window cleaning etc)	3
Staff recruitment (including more senior staff than estate level)	2
Neighbourhood disputes/neighbour nuisance; plus mediation with children	2 + 1
Gardens and conservation	2

Other issues raised:

Self management	Security enhancements
Young people's activities	Estate walkabouts
Rent setting	Estate improvements
Complaints	Area forum
Care homes	Tenants associations
Training policy/decisions	Major repairs
Maintenance	Accountability of staff

Appendix F: Scenarios for conflicts of interest in board meetings

Example of decisions that when taken reflect the board member's understanding of their role and purpose at the board and in what circumstances they may have a conflict of interest

Transfer policy (pre CBL where association holds the central list)

There is an item on the agenda proposing a change to the Association's policy on transfers. There is a concern that because of the large number of transfers taking place the number of people being housed off the waiting list is being seriously reduced on an annual basis because of the time taken in re-letting. It is therefore proposed to introduce a quota system for different types of re-lets, which will result in a significant reduction in the number of permitted transfers.

A. In which of the following situations would there be a conflict of interest:

(1)   your sister-in-law is on the transfer list
(2)   you are not yet on the transfer list, but your wife is pregnant and you have children of opposite sexes sharing a bedroom, so you had been planning to go on the list very shortly
(3)   your next door neighbour, who is a good friend, is on the transfer list
(4)   you are trying for another child, and if you succeed you will need a transfer
(5)   you are on the transfer list yourself now
(6)   you are not on the transfer list now and you don't know anyone who is
(7)   you feel very strongly that existing tenants should have priority over new tenants because you spent 10 years waiting for a transfer yourself when you were desperate, and you feel that the Association should look after its own, and your views are well known amongst tenants and on the Board.

B. The Residents' Forum has been getting increasingly concerned about the length of time people have to wait to get a transfer, and have asked you to lobby on their behalf. Do you:

(1)   Declare an interest and vote against because you feel you should support the Forum.
(2)   Declare an interest. Accept that there needs to be some change to balance the needs of existing and prospective tenants, but propose that provision should be made for each estate to be considered on its merits to see if there is a need for a

local lettings policy to override the new policy where there are particular problems.

   (3)   Declare an interest, explain the tenants' position and abstain.

   (4)   Declare an interest, explain the tenants' position and vote against because you agree with the other tenants.

   (5)   Declare an interest and vote for the changed policy because you feel it's right.

Scenarios for conflicts of interest in Board meetings 2

Resident participation funding

It is proposed that the Resident Participation budget should be used differently in future, redistributing some of the money previously allocated to the Residents' Forum to fund initiatives to enable broader participation. The Forum has traditionally been funded very generously. The Association is in the top quartile for expenditure on participation, but the money has not been spent wisely in a way that would be compatible with Housing Corporation guidance. However the Forum has said that on no account should their budget be cut, and are requesting that money for other types of participation should be found from elsewhere. What should you do?

   (1)   Vote against the changes because the Forum is looking to you to represent their views.

   (2)   Vote for it because you feel that the money should be used more equitably than it is at present to enable wider participation.

   (3)   Vote for it but register the views of the Residents.

   (4)   Declare an interest; register the views of the Forum and vote for the change.

Scenarios for conflicts of interest in Board meetings 3

The hostel v the play area

The Board are considering building a hostel for ex-offenders on some spare land at the back of your estate. There are a number of sheltered housing units and a large amount of family housing on the estate. The residents' group (of which you are a member) have been campaigning for some time to get funding to build a play area on that land to take the pressure of noisy children away from the sheltered properties. However the financial

pressures of rent restructuring are biting hard and the HA needs the revenue from such a project, which in this case is fully grant funded.

What do you do?

 a) Vote against it as your group needs a play area.
 b) Vote against it because residents may not want ex-offenders in the area.
 c) Vote for it as it is valuable finance for the HA, provides support for people in need and meets the objectives of the association.
 d) Vote for it as it is valuable finance, but register the views of the local residents.
 e) Declare an interest; register the views of residents and vote for the hostel.

Scenarios for keeping out of trouble

(1)   Someone on your estate has come to you because they know you're on the Board and they've been trying to get a repair done for a long time and feel that they are being messed about. What do you do?

(2)   Residents on your estate have been getting increasingly fed up with the fact that the local Council have failed to adopt the play area on the estate. The Council says it will not adopt the play area until the Association brings it up to scratch, and the Association says it cannot afford to keep repairing it when the Council then takes so long to adopt it that it's been damaged again. The residents feel that the Association should be doing more to lobby the Council. The Residents' Association has finally gone to the local paper about it, but the Evening Argos has found out that you are a Resident Board Member and has phoned you up to do an interview. What do you say?

(3)   You have a friend whose been waiting a long time for a transfer, and who feels his case is not being considered properly when suitable properties come up. He knows you're on the Board and asks for your help. What do you do?

Appendix G

The status quo

Episodic power relations at the agency level of the circuit of power

Social relations   Agencies   Outcomes

Standing Conditions – fixed

| Stable and fixed | Tenants –

HA involvement staff –

HA managers |

Tenants – lack of access to organisational resources, wider sector resources, information on regulation and standards, IT, financial and mobility resources, minimum of skills, mixed motives, older white males dominate, lack of knowledge of policies and corporate practices, languages and communication styles and cultural norms, decision making or influencing mandates, previous experience of involvement activities, lack of feedback and change or positive experiences of influence and change – have determine expectations and different approaches to interaction with staff – power relations in the group determine who does what and to what extent – primary commitment, tenants, community

Staff – good access to IT and organisational and wider sector resources, better economic capital, corporate social capital – decision making mandates – only one person or small team, lack of time, budget support, training – competing priorities, lack of buy in from other departments, strategic goals and procedural guidance – primary commitment local and some tenants, control agenda, timings etc

Managers / departments – high levels of power to decide on service issues, high access to budget resources, high access to IT and partnerships, other departments, higher levels of cultural, economic and social capital, lack of skills and training on IR, little ongoing contact with tenants, competing priorities, lack of understanding why tenants must be consulted, lack of time, KPIs and operational mandates drive activities and priorities – primary commitment to staff and board, not tenants – may have a negative view of tenants due to previous work or experience or may have a positive view

Tenants – some services improve – individual tenants increase skills and social capital – informal complaints channel established and some complaints are addressed, accommodations are reached about power holders and gatekeepers about how to get things done – responds to top down initiatives keeps raising problems that need to be addressed or that are priorities of local community – unable to challenge rules – may not know them or feel have no right to do so though will challenge each other or struggle over power and access to scarce resources

Staff – lack of resources and training targets met – structure in place cycle of meetings and groups established and reports to board and regulator delivered – spend hours dealing with conflict with and between groups and complaints about personal issues – work long unsociable hours – tension with managers over roles and responsibilities for involvement

Managers – minimal contact with tenants – focus on satisfactory/performance indicators, present at some groups/draft policies and procedures or plans – get plans rubber stamped – deal with active tenants personal complaints – the focus is to deliver organisational objectives

EXOGENOUS INFLUENCE Circuits of Power

Power	Level of circuit	Type of power
Episodic Power Relations	Agency	Causal
Rules of Practice	Social Integration	Dispositional
Domination	System Integration	Facilitative

Outcomes
– new
Change

Standing conditions
Means & Resources

possibly better support
for tenants and staff
may empower tenants

Agencies

Social Relations
change

Reproduce/Transform

Control/Contest new
powers to be involved
may be involved

Rules Fixing Relations of
Meaning & Membership
new rules are made and
some players become
more important (RI staff
policy staff **DISCRETION**

Obligatory Passage Points
(Rules of the Game) new STR
and new social points emerge
or existing ones become more
important or less important

Fix/exit

Exogenous
Influence
HC regulation
– inspection

Facilitate/Restrict

Innovation in techniques of
Discipline and Production –
May require new models of
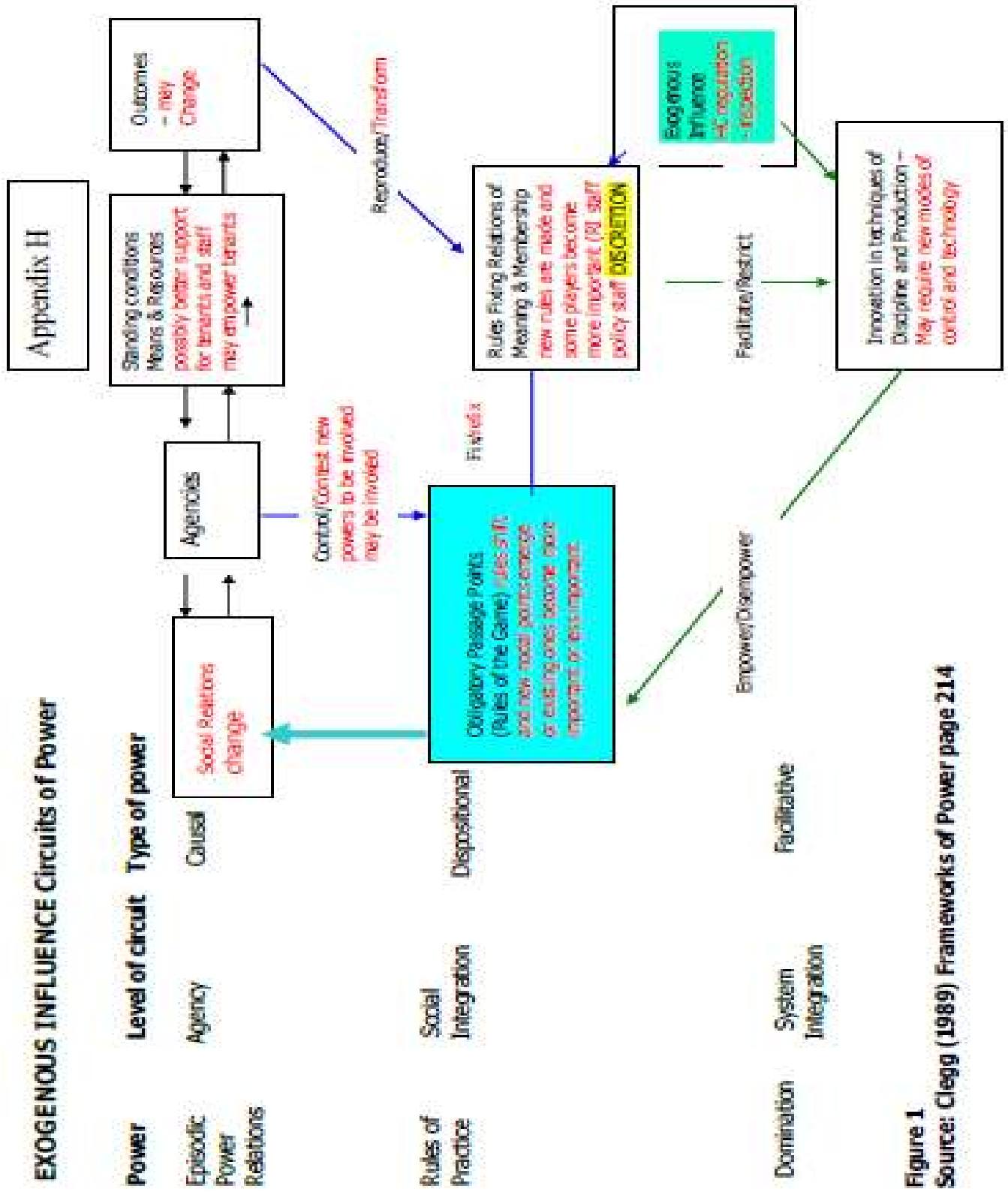control and technology

Empower/Disempower

Figure 1
Source: Clegg (1989) Frameworks of Power page 214

Appendix J

Case study example of items list for case study where I am not a participant

The items below represent main elements of information gathered and kept in hard copy files as well as with some information in electronic format – some items and some key dates have been changed to protect the identity of the organisation – this information is in note format and represents an example.

	Activity or item	**Observations information**
Codes	Med+	
	Traditional	Over x counties
2002	Budget from HA ex staff 60k + external funding 4 CD	older white/ m chair 6 f/4m 4 0D (1yf and 1ym) D
		Stable group white dominant chair on board in situ about 6 years
2.a	Meet with Operations Direct and go through project and discuss access to information, opps to attend meetings and talk to staff	Very positive and supportive – happy with my approach to sensitive data – old school - Fabian – very committed to social housing movement and well educated
2.b	Contact staff for contact information for Panel - staff suggest I attend the next meeting and talk to the group about my aims	Staff quite happy for me to look at policies and minutes of meetings and talk to other staff and the group members about their experience
2.1	Meeting with group and observation of meeting in action – talk to group arrange to interview some key members as well as talk to group members generally and agree to attend the next meeting in 3 months' time	Lively and friendly group meeting chaired with an agenda – agenda set by staff – lots of papers to approve and descriptions of what is in the papers – it is evident that some people have not read the papers and others have looked at them carefully these same people dominate discussions – seems to be a focus on the English and eradicating jargon rather than the substance of the matters – this is the first time the group have seen or been involved with many of the initiatives especially important was the E and D strategy and
2.2a	Interview with staff on how they undertake involvement and the barriers and benefits	Staff feel under-resourced have other priorities in the areas of community development and bidding for grants for involvement as well as the panel
2.3	Interview 1 – chair OWM	He feels that the group are not appreciated but have been involved in seeing most new polices and strategies – there are some overlaps with the work of the regional committees – the group does not monitor any

| | Member 6 years

Training E/D and ASB

Is also on Board

Attend TPAS 4 years | performance or get involved early in any areas of work but members are free to attend any focus groups – usually on he and one other member turns up – thinks the panel doe make a difference in small ways and at least is able to tell the staff what is not working and why however not sure if they really listen |
|---|---|---|
| 2.3a | Interview 2 OWF –

Member 4 years

ASB training | Sheltered tenant who used to attend with her husband – likes to get out and feels she feed back to her scheme on what I going on though she said much of it now goes over her head. She likes to get involved in judging the gardening competition where she has an interest |
| 2.3b | Interview 3 YWM

Member 4 years

E/D – ASB – DV- setting up a RA

TPAS on year | Young and challenging runs the interested tenants database which is called a network – does a newsletter for them – involved in setting up community activities in his locality part of a husband and wife team again very poorly |
| 2.3c | Interview 4 YWF

2 years

E/D – ASB – DV- setting up a RA | Part of a husband and wife team although she is very ill and has to spend many hours in hospital so does not get to many meetings – has a strong interest in health and housing and developing projects in the community where it will make a difference |
| 2.5 | Look at involvement policy | Heavy emphasis on CD and Play only describes the structure of panel, committees and board as well as the various working groups (most working groups are attended by panel and committee members)

strategy and new policy planned for next year – no agreement |
2.4	Previous minutes 4 meetings	Long and windy – same issues brought up – no action points – lots of plans presented to panel verbally – some papers tabled on the day – very little performance information and what there was – was not challenged
2.4	1a annual report to tenants	Good accessible performance, information, glossy photos and some interesting examples of community development
2.4B	1 b Staff newsletter	No mention of involvement lots on away days and conferences and new staff – bit on the board
2.4C	1c tenants newsletter	Good information on community development fund days and youth days , garden competition and tenant elections for 2000 for board and regional committees – what s going on in the various sheltered housing schemes and in two high density housing estates – recipes and word search
2.2B	2 c staff interview on tenant involvement structures and processes	Outline of committee structure board and panel – elected – won an award for doing it this way

- Have active tenant database |

		• Support with start-up grant for tenants associations however many do not apply for it • Offer training on setting up a group and running a group only if they ask • Run one off focus groups on different subjects • One officer for whole organisation working over 2 counties with admin support • No local CD or TP workers • There is no actual training budget or targets for training – does not do TNA or think about dynamics and communication skills etc • Do an email update on what is happening in the community and involvement for staff • Not sure what support regional committee members (who are essentially board members get) this is run by corporate services • Poor attendance at tenants conference and fun days • No evidence of middle level participation making a difference its either community fun or boards and regional committees (boards) • TP only really used to set up associations and support the panel • TP starting to support front line staff with advice • No TP agreement in place through have a strategy
2.1b	Panel meeting 2nd visit 8 attendees plus 4 staff and RI staff – Opps director attended	Noticed that not all members turned up – strong dominant chair working with dominant staff member – other managers visit with papers many tabled on the day – short discussion and pushed through the time – one of the members constantly refers to issues that are not under discussion – grounds maintenance – S quick look at the minutes reveals no mention of this at either this meeting or the last even though he constantly brings it up – he is just ignored – the context of what he says is important as there are areas on his estate where no-one cuts or weeds – sort of waste ground – the grounds maintenance people say it is not on their sheet and Highways say it belongs to the association – he can't seem to get a response to this issue despite staff at meetings in the distant past saying it is highways land
2003 3	Log of activities kept	Lots of circulation of papers and plans around active tenants Creative photography lessons ,fun and community days , BBQs, Sheltered scheme events None of these events which reach to some extent harder to reach groups were used to consult of services relevant to these groups 2 further tenants groups set up this years
3.1	Examination of Committee process interview with corporate	Roles unclear, lack of support and training needed as well as low attendance - org plans to address. It is not always the tenants that do not attend lots of the meetings was not able to at this stage look at minutes or

	services person	papers -
		Have stayed in touch with YWM and manager
3.1a	Board – thirds Structure charts and information flows	At the moment there are 17 board members of which 5 are tenants – inducted with a pack of information and a walk round the departments
3.2	Interview with corporate manager	Seems to be unhappy with the quality of board membership he says it is because they are elected from the tenant population and although they won an award for it – it does not make for the best board members and there is only a 20% response – very positive about the (ywm) who is joining soon. Problem is that tenants do not speak up of join in with a debate – can only talk about their own areas or estate – can't always translate their experience into strategic issues – do not get the big picture – Agrees there has been not actual training on these type of issues -
3.3	Interview with chair	He feels the organisation is growing and getting too big with so much development – has been challenged for chair this year but got in with paper election from the group – he feels that he is the only one apart from ywm who understands how the organisation works – he puts in 3 times as much time as the others and bothers to read the papers – he also calls in the office regularly as he is local – all the staff know him – I felt he was feeling a little shaken by the challenge – he told me he was 72 now and found it more of s struggle these days – I asked him whether he felt that the work of the panel made a difference to which he replied to be honest I feel we are ticking boxes – it's the work we do round the back that counts – that is how we get stuff done in our communities by knowing the right people to talk to
3.3a	Interview with 3 panel members together without the chair at a separate location	These three females wanted to talk about the way they feel treated by the the chair – how they never get a chance to go on the staff working groups and never to the TPAS conference – that he puts them down all the time but does not do this to the other guys on the group who bang
2004-5	Years' worth of tenant newsletter	On three copies this year – loads of good advice heating, gardening club items not many calls for involvement and no information about the work of the panel
4	Staffing at 2004-5 Manager 2CD workers I play worker	1.5 TI +admin 3 community development managers 1 more in post soon, 1 play development worker. All housing staff support RI and CDMs support the staff- all short term grant funded for 1-2 years – key role for them is obtain funding for future employment
4.1	Interview with staff in group	Concerns over lack of embedded involvement – other staff do not seem to think they have to consult of involve tenants before they change things or make plans for services – department heads are worst they say they will – they pay lip service and attend the panel knowing that this group has no

		influence – its just ticking boxes -
4.2	Interview with owf panel member	I have not got the energy to attend training as well as everything else that needs doing - my priority is my community I am too old now to do it all - my colleagues and friends on the panel keep me updated (older female panel member)
4.3	Interview with group of board members	good representation on paper, but dissatisfaction expressed amongst some TBMs and activists with role and remit, attendance, locations, times, lack of support and training
4.1a	Interview with new manager Substantial changes to the way involvement works	good community development work, regional committees now set performance targets, monitor and compare performance - good practice, 25 RAs and community groups, supported by grants and training to enable independence and sustainability, road shows to estates and individual schemes and Better summer conference with Big Brother style video opps for disparate communities to have their say. positive practice in CD to promote skills, empowerment, RI from go and sustainable project. Good advertising of RI opps, tailored training for t/f exercises Ex - ASB, residents positively aware of feedback and results of RI initiatives. Positive Practice - Residents Away Day organised by residents for residents and CIS fund administered by its committee evidencing budgetary powers and control, attempts to quantify real costs of RI and CD Still no information on actual outcomes though tenants feel things are improving
4.2a	Interview with current panel chair	Chair very excited as there is a possible merger on the cards though is concerned that tenant structures may be a casualty – the organisation of interest does have their own panel which is quite active and strong though located over 140 miles away – feels that the organisation are not really committed to allowing tenants to make a difference as they make decisions before allowing tenant to input however on the stakeholder working groups the work is more interesting and he feels that he has more chance to input into discussions. He pointed out he feels most effective when he talks to staff one to one and gets things sorted for tenants out there in the community – he says he knows these complaints will not be properly dealt with unless he takes them directly to the senior management
4.2b	Interview 1	Interview with ywm – he is very active in his areas which is 70 miles from head office – he has been improving his computer skills and is talking to staff on email now and being able to sort out complaints for people in his community. Again he is enjoying the stakeholder groups where he feels more listened too but is very
4.2c	Interview 2 5 years local to head office	Interview with OWF – she asked to speak to me as she was concerned with the fact that some people in the group seemed to know what was going on and the rest of us in the dark – she thought the chair sorted things out before the meeting and therefore what was the point in having the meeting in the first place – I asked her whether she felt that the group

		as a whole was influencing the way xxx develops services or help save money from good ideas on how to combat problems in estates
4.4	Obs panel meeting	Still very much the same – they are unable to tell me whether much has changed the same guy is talking about grounds maintenance – they are getting good briefings of policy updates and do see BV review reports – still really dominated by chair and ywm is coming up though not challenging the chair but working with him – staff member very strong and in control other members seem to go along with everything – not all read the papers and the discussions go off issue though never too much time to talk anyway –chair does not set the agenda – the set up seems settled and sewn up – no real impact on empowerment other than the two men or changes to services – no new members since last time ywf has left due to illness – big issues on responsiveness of customer care across all departments – no actual published service standards or CC policy
4.4a	Tea break discussion	6 members of the group attend all the other tenant working groups – the panel in essence is reproduced. In stakeholder working groups the chair always seems to attend though the ywm does attend many also
4.4b	Run up to inspection chat with panel as a group	Tenants are really keen to see the inspectors and are hoping that the organisation will do well – all of a sudden department managers are attending the panel meetings and extra meetings have been called – two of the panel members (owm ywm) are attending the working group for inspection. There seems to be a mass of documentation going through the panels and those who are members of the regional committees say the same there – there is only one focus here getting through inspection – the tenants feel at last as part of a team – the them and us is now the us and them (inspectorate)
4.5	Findings from inspection	Not enough RI in customer care, lettings and income management – tenants tell me it is the managers reluctance to involved then – the other managers indicated as such. Was criticised for not involving tenants well in BV reviews and using a sound methodology Tenants were not getting involved early enough where they could make a difference – praised of the link mag (tenant led) need a better quality strategy that has been based on a review – praised the community development work undertaken
4..1c	Post inspection activity interview with TP staff	The whole experience was manic for the whole organisation an the TP team seemed to be working hard for departments trying to find evidence especially after the inspectors left – lots of trawling through minutes to see if there was any impact – staff had to create a grid of all departments and evidence of involvement in each – tenants were really useful as they remembered what has happened despite poor notes and minutes which did not have enough detail – for instance panel members looked the new asb strategy – nothing else in the minutes – The inspectors would not accept that the panel looked at things they wanted evidence of impact
4.1d	Interview with manager	Really just a catch up to see where I was at and to confirm to him that the inspectors were right in their judgement of depth and breadth though

	PD	organisation one of the best for CD- talked a bit about the departmental managers and their views of the panel seems that most people think of members as the usual suspects and know exactly what they are going to say and many call it the xxx show as he has dominated the scene for years however he is unwell and they have their eye on ywm to take over
4.1e	Chat with staff after the meetings	Understands that the group use the panel as an informal complaints channel but does not have the energy to do anything about it at this stage and for them at least they get something out of it – to be honest it's a bit of a game of paper she says – we feed back the minutes to the senior staff who do nothing with them unless to censor controversial comments as these go to the committees – committee members who are not panel members rarely read them unless there is a really hot topic on the table such as demolition or mergers
2005-5	BV review in involvement	Interesting piece of work – involved lots of tenant at different stages Applied the 4 Cs Views got from conference, supported housing workshop, questionnaire to residents associations and staff consultation Looked at how much time involved in CD – employed one more as a result Looked at relationships with other agencies Planning a toolkit for staff and some training Looked at how much time taken involvement by other staff 10% housing officer and 20% sheltered staff – probably why so many sheltered residents are involved – these represent self-identified percentages Staff felt there was a conflict of interest between tenancy and estate management and tenant involvement Estate staff felt left out of the loop with no technology to connect to the organisation Comparison with other orgs revealed – no understanding of cost no training for staff no targets on aspects of the work and the organisation spent more on CD than any other landlord in the county
5.1	Youth Forum	Attempting to involvement to young people however its more about finding things that they can do or develop with a view to at a later date getting them involved in commenting or influencing services – this has potential but the size of the geography involved is challenging and the costs are high for all involved
5.1a	STATUS report	The diversity of the involved tenants at board, committees and panel nowhere near reflect the profile of tenants and the most dissatisfied groups are families and younger single people and those on the geographical margins also satisfaction with last contact is low at 74

		leaving 26% unhappy despite discussions at the forum about the responsiveness of staff to answer the phone and return messages
5.2	Revisit committee	New training agenda sorted now however many are not turning up though the key tenants are – other committee non-tenants are not taking this up – planning a restructure of the regions soon so the committees may be scaled down – training did not include team roles Belbin or communication skills etc.- basics about HA risk etc.- policy and strategy – seems more like briefings to me – on PowerPoint
2007 7	New strategy and statement	Very basic with actions to improve % happy with involvement on STATUS – involve harder to reach groups – the strategy describes all the different ways to be involved doesn't mention empowerment or control or increasing accountability – focussed more in community development but not as a purpose for social capital or empowerment or even social cohesion
7.1	Action plan	Key actions – develop network of associations seek permission to share information between them Tenants newsletter to have more information on supported housing More opps for involvement promoted to supported housing tenants annual estate meeting with their housing officer for RA and more consultation done by phone training and toolkit for staff develop more face to face contact involvement harder to reach groups record numbers of meetings and outcome information provide information on involvement in a wider range of format
7.1a	Budgets	138k less staff
7.1b	Opps update	Better opps to get involved in working groups for outside tenants not just panel and forum members – using the interested tenants database more effectively though have not updated it in some time and take too long following up approaches by tenants to be involved – just send them the leaflet and if form returned nothing much seems to happen – staff shortage of admin support seem the answer – staff in all department still appear to be unwilling to use the telephone
7.1c	Links update	Virtually being run by one younger member of the panel this newsletter links all the tenants associations and gives lots of interesting funding information – promotes independence –
7.2	ASB involvement	Paper on a range of workshops for the new strategy – I attended one of them – it was very much staff telling group what the rules now were from government and then everyone discussing together their own experience s it was unclear how the date from this was captured
7.3	Discussion with patch officers	Struggle to involved directly in day to day work – will send out a letter to everyone in a block to consult on local problems like parking and grounds maintenance – some staff do very little others are more involved especially on the new developments where some work has been done beforehand with tenants coming in – those managing stock in cities have

		conducted public meetings to deal with the problem of the children and pets
7.4	Training day with CD and RI officer s where I was asked to facilitate a session on the impact of involvement	Looking backwards the team agreed they did not keep good records on outcomes but rather recorded what happened at the meeting or activity the planned training established in the strategy did not happen and the toolkit is still in development

Have not improved communication technology

Some new young staff attended undertaking short term projects

Funding is falling away and projects have to be shelved

Staff in departments are still not thinking about when to involved tenants – there is a reluctance to run a focus group or use surveys or the telephone to canvas views – there are loads of TAs that could be written to or involved in some way already set up – it does not seem to be considered and the involvement staff feel overburdened with administering and supporting so many groups in the community as well as the panel – doing the conference |
| 7.1d | Community Development

Log of events and activities | Have now separated out community development and tenant involvement as alarge staff group look after a wide range of projects such as play, youth, energy awareness got funds from a wide range of organisations and charities. – young people benefit personally however it more like a series of fun events that people attend often from quite a wide area of operation for instance across the north of the county – the community only benefits as much as the individuals experience affects others – which is not measured or looked or even thought about – to me it seems more like wedding planning with no focus on talking to people at events to find out what is important to them and feeding this into plans for services bearing in mind these are typically the harder to reach groups |
7.1e	Opps leaflet designed by tenants	Brilliant and inviting – this together with the links document is really great – have developed a system where involved tenants get in touch with people showing a system therefore administratively much sounder
7.1f	Resident involvement statement	Tenants did not have any involvement in this at all – RI staff did not either it was done by a director seems that now it is a regulatory requirement others have taken control of this -
7.5	Obs of panel	New chair in place – other one left th ywm – apparently more popular with the older women as he gives everyone a chance to speak and makes sure things are minuted correctly. He is also now a board member. Despite these changes the meeting is similar with staff bringing paperwork to be signed off the only difference is that the minutes are used properly with matter arising formally addressed which has led to action points being recorded in minutes which then creates an expectation of a result of some sort – the chair informed me that of the 30 items over three meetings – only 10 had been actioned – the tenants were considering calling a meeting with managers to address some of the issues that have

		'fallen off the end'- though a softer approach he is using all available opportunities to empower the group – he seems more group focussed at this stage – in this meeting more members spoke however staff appear to working in the same way at this stage
7.6	Interview with new chair	Has big plans to take over the world quietly – feels the organisation needs a shake up and plans to take a position as vice chair of the board which is apparently on offer – he thinks the panel has been stuck in the doldrums in the past years due to the grip the old chair had on staff and all opportunities were taken by him and the organisation just accepted it because they could not be bothered to deal with the fall out. What he terms the path of least resistance. He felt that at board he could make a difference however new rules were coming in that did not allow the board member be a panel member therefore breaking the link – it will be interesting to see if he remains connected to the tenant involvement community a this organisation once he settle in at the board
7.5a	Feedback session with the panel on the research as a whole	Tenants very interested with the early findings and said that the information I was giving them about the issues many tenants and staff experience had resonance – they felt they were not on their own and that the sector had a long way to go – they really understood the idea of power and games which was great - I was commended for being a tenant doing research on the tenant's experience – if nothing else it was worth it to see this group feeling heard for once

Appendix K

Example of tenant story – involvement experience

Involved Female Tenant aged 40 in an LSVT

My first real experience with resident involvement was in 2003 a 'chips and chat' session in the park next to our house. The community development adviser wanted to find out what kids and parents in the area wanted. The kids were very clear on what they wanted – more play equipment, take down the useless goal shaped metal bar, and a fun day or activities to do on the summer holidays.

The community development person told me (but not the kids) this 'consultation' was not about the upcoming summer, but maybe the next one – not enough time to do any of those things this summer. I thought this was rude and counterproductive. Why ask kids what they want, but then not tell them when you might take their ideas on board or have any way of giving them a response?

Luckily she brought with her a youth worker, who took me aside and said if I wanted to do a fun day, she would help me. So that's what I did. I planned a fun day for August, calling around various community and sport groups asking if they would come along to do some activities and promote their cause. Every single one agreed. I got a couple of local retailers to donate prizes. Then I asked my landlord for £500, half of which would go to the youth organisation who helped me with organising, risk assessments and flyers, and half for food to be catered on the day. I arranged for the local paper to come on the day to take pictures.

The landlord said no, it could not be done, they did not have the money…..someone contacted the housing manager who instructed the resident involvement team to give me £500 even though it probably wouldn't prove a success.

Local kids delivered flyers all around themselves. The community development team and the police (who failed to attend) commented on how it was a waste of time for this lot – they would wreck everything, fight and maybe steal stuff. All the kids were extremely well behaved on the day – no fighting, no injuries, and no problems. The only problem was the marquee which the landlord agreed to bring and couldn't figure how to put together.

August 2003 - The fun day attracted 60 children from the neighbourhood. Activities were a rock climbing wall from the Army Cadets, athletics from the local athletics club, judo from the local judo club, rugby from the local team, St Johns Ambulance service (just in case I needed it because I was heavily pregnant!) and a few more I can't remember now. The children aged from 4 to 18 and everybody got a gift bag for participating and a few won prizes. Everyone was fed from a local burger van. The newspaper did a full page spread on the day. The landlord got great publicity. The resident involvement team were lukewarm on this whole event – I suppose because it made them look a bit silly for refusing to do anything in the first place.

I hoped the success of the event would motivate the community development team to do one every year, but we have not had one since. No event they have hosted in the area has proved to pull as big a crowd since.

October 2003 – A local political appointee rang me and asked if I wanted some money to do some more community activities. Unfortunately, I couldn't take her up on it because I had a new baby. I realised I had not had any such invitations from my landlord. Hmmmm….

I read my quarterly resident newsletter and saw they were looking for people to join the Residents Panel. I rang up to enquire more about it and see if I was interested in joining. I was told by the same community development person who offered no support at all for the fun day that 'this wasn't suitable for me'. The time

commitment was too great for me since I had small children. Actually, they met once a quarter and should have told me they would pay for the cost of childcare for me to attend. But she didn't. She just told me I might like to do something else. But I didn't want to do something else, so I hung up and forgot all about resident involvement.

Spring 2004 - This was the beginning of what I thought was a simple problem with a simple solution. A piece of equipment in the park was broken and half of it removed. I reported it and asked for it to be fixed. After erecting a huge triangle of fencing around the equipment I waited….and waited…and waited for it to be fixed. This was the same park where we had a successful event six months prior. I reasoned the landlord would want to fix it to show they were concerned with safety and such.

After six months and several phone calls of waiting and getting the newspaper out to run a story in August 2004, it was finally fixed sometime in October of 2006. At this time, I had called a local Councillor to see if she could help or offer advice. She gave me the phone number of a Sarsen Board Member and fellow Councillor. She came out to inspect the park and asked me to set up a meeting with the housing director. After this meeting, the outstanding work in the park was completed within a couple of weeks. I have to say I ranted and raved about the landlord's inability and apparent disinterest in completing a fairly simple and necessary repair to an amenity area. He listened and took my verbal punches like a trouper, and said to call him should anything else arise.   My previous experiences with housing staff were not so genuine or successful. This made me wonder how things really worked in there.

In the spring of the following year – this is now 2005 – I rang the same housing director asking for help to sort out an ongoing problem with our boiler. Our water was too hot – dangerously hot. Despite numerous visits from various operatives, the problem persisted. I lodged a formal complaint asking for mixed taps to be installed in our house to get around the problem as well as compensation for expensive gas bills. We were concerned our young children would scald themselves within seconds. I rang the Council to check into guidelines for safe water temperatures – they didn't have any for hot water – only cold water. Their response could not have been more disinterested. Once again, the housing director came to visit me at our home. I played in the park with my children while we chatted about this issue and other things like how I ended up in a small town in rural South West England. He asked me if I had ever considered getting involved with their activities at xxx I sort of snorted and laughed simultaneously, recalling my experience with the fun day, and how uncooperative and unsupportive their community development people were. We chatted a while about that, and he asked me something about the general attitude of people at Sarsen, how I perceived them, and the 'barriers' present to engaging people. Then he asked me if I would like to join the Residents Panel, he said something like 'we need somebody like you'. This shocked and surprised me, because our conversations were to date, frank, open and honest. I think he was shocked when I said I had asked about joining before and was told it wasn't the thing for me. He then shared with me – very confidentially – some issues and problems they were experiencing with this particular group, and more or less asked if I was prepared to get involved in the quagmire of difficulties he described. I'm always up for a good challenge – so I said I would give it a go. In short, the problems were infighting, power mongering, lack of commitment and a 'good old boys' attitude – literally.

Within 2 weeks, our boiler was fixed – the pipes were backwards. We agreed to monitor usage of gas, and I would be compensated following a discrepancy in spending over the next year. And he got the ball rolling for me to join the Residents Panel. This was April of 2007.

During the next few months, I learned about some other things I could do outside of the Residents Panel, and I was thrilled to hear they would pay for my childcare so I could participate in things. I didn't care if we talked about what potato we liked best – a couple of hours of adult conversation sounded good to me.

I decided the first thing I needed to do to understand resident involvement was to read their Resident Involvement Strategy. Then I read the Community Development Strategy and the Annual Report. It became apparent to me that goals and strategy for resident involvement bore no resemblance to what was actually on offer, and their claims of involving hundreds of people appeared far from true. I could find no evidence of the

feedback they constantly gathered from people ever being fed back to residents in the form of results or conclusions. There was a lot of information giving.

By September 2005, I had managed to actually get in touch with the right people to formally join the Residents Panel – this took 6 months! I was keen to get to the bottom of why hundreds of people offered their details, wanting to get involved, and yet the same crew of involved residents seemed to turn up everywhere.

I was offered the opportunity to do some tasking work – starting with getting all the details of these people into a database. So I set up my childcare and planned some work dates and tasks with staff members. But then…..the human resources department decided – after several months of me waiting around to do this work, that it wasn't possible. They didn't see how a volunteer could actually do work alongside real employees. So that never actually materialised. However, they did have to pay for the extra childcare I booked in for several months, and in my usual feeling of guilt, I decided I better make use of that time and do other volunteer activities with them – like going to meetings, and more meetings, and more meetings…..

In October 2005 I was asked to participate in the following: the Community Chest, Mission Possible for the Policy review section, Resident Involvement Strategy Group and the Community Index project.

The remit of the Community Chest panel was to decide whether to give funding to applicants in the community for various activities. I was warned by the staff member in charge of the group that (three panel members) they were 'a bunch of bigots' and it was a difficult group to work with. They were inclined to say 'no' to almost everything. There was no methodology to follow, no terms of reference, no consistency in decision making of any form. Few people on the panel actually bothered to respond to the applications which were supposed to be reviewed by post and returned – in other words, read. The result was applicants were waiting for months on end for a decision. It was mismanaged by the staff member, and the residents only wanted to debate the applications without reading them, which was to say, pondering why elderly people couldn't fund a bus ride themselves, why somebody wanted a chair and seats in their scheme….etc.

I was shocked, and could not believe this was how the doling out of money to community groups was being handled. Furthermore, access to applications was not open. The staff member was the gatekeeper, and funding tended to be for the same groups every year. There was little PR or encouragement to apply within the wider community. I couldn't believe giving small grants of up to £500 was so difficult, or that it was so difficult to administer. I was quick losing respect for this particular staff member and my fellow residents on this panel. The application itself was so badly written; I researched other similar programmes and applications and submitted a revised application after hours of research and editing. This got buried on somebody's desk, never to re-emerge.

In winter of 2006 at a Community Chest meeting, a fellow banker characterised an applicant as a 'stupid woman' because she applied for grant money. The rules did not prevent individuals applying. He didn't like the purpose, her being a single mother and had no consideration for her circumstances around the application. This was, in my view a direct blow to equality and diversity and a direct hit for discrimination. I was furious and lodged an official complaint (which by the way was never dealt with as an official complaint). I then found out a community group requested an application and was denied by the staff member. I was again, furious. But we did receive an application from the Police (who are frequently supported by our landlord in diversion activities) which had obviously been filled in by the staff member running the Community Chest. On the basis of these events – which I considered major problems - I asked for the whole thing to be shut down until proper methodology could be applied, saying the inspectors would have our blood if they knew about this.

The head of resident involvement said she would do this – and didn't – knowing it would reflect very badly on her and her team. So I brought up the issues in front of a consultant which was my only shot at getting the result I wanted: shut down this discriminatory, non-democratic programme immediately until they could put together one with good practice guidelines. The consultant issued a demand to shut it down immediately, and that is what happened. Of course the staff member running the scheme tried to get us to approve more funding for applications that had been hanging around for 6 months and insisted she had no idea this scheme

was supposed to be closed. I refused to approve any funding, and eventually she got the message this was shut down until further work was done to be compliant with good practice.

In September 2007, the same staff member pulled together a new group of residents to reform the Community Chest. We put together guidelines, reviewed the whole application, and once again wrote a whole new application which at our next meeting was lost. So were presented with the same old one we had before – luckily we were a little more savvy and brought along the new one, agreed the changes and set a deadline for it to be given back for review. We also felt the whole thing needed rebranding, with more of a 'helping hand' purpose, and we should really leverage the good work into some good PR. We wanted to be called the 'Bankers'. This was agreed, but then the same old staff member decided that was no good due to the current connotation of 'bankers' as negative in the credit crunch. We agreed we need evidence on every project to properly impact assess, and Bankers might want to go along to visit a project. We got local schools to participate in the rebranding of the scheme. We agreed to think of ways and places to promote the scheme, and handle this geographically.

We are now into spring of 2008. After waiting around for 6 months to get a new flyer and branding for the Community Chest and after the Bankers were promptly forgotten and left out of the very first visit to a project in progress we funded, I quit the Community Chest for good. As of September 2008, there is still no new flyer or information available on the Community Chest to give to the community.

Moving on to my involvement with Mission Possible, this was a long, drawn out frustrating experience involving lots of my time and effort and no outcome whatsoever. Mission Possible was a project designed to identify improvement across the business in 5 key service areas. The idea was to move from our self-predicted 'one star' rating to a 'three star' rating. Several residents were recruited from the set of 'usual suspects' to work alongside staff members in each key area to carry out an action plan of improvement. I took part in the section called 'How We Do Things' which was all about Policy and Procedure.

Our policies were out-dated and needed revising. There were no real 'procedures' in place. This was a small group recruited to work on this – I was the only resident amongst 6 members of staff. This started in November of 2007. The meetings took place roughly monthly. I believe this finished in the summer of 2008. Most of the meetings were poorly attended by staff members – some of them showing up only for 1 or 2 meetings over the course of 9 months. This gave me a big clue as to how seriously they really took this endeavour to improve – not at all. Those least likely to attend were middle managers.

The first thing I did was to read through every KLOE and pull out anything that related to policies and procedures – this gave me an idea of what policies we were completely missing. I soon figured out that apart from the person leading this 'team', my keen involvement was not what they wanted or expected. I guess I put a lot more effort in than they did and it might have made them look bad. They were perhaps hoping for a resident to just sit there looking dumb? The project leader did appreciate my effort – I cut down her work to do on this project significantly.

Stumbling block number one was to hire someone on a temporary contract to write the policies and process map procedures. This took months….which also gave me another big clue about my landlord: despite what appeared to be a very generous pay package (which was also upped) no one seemed to want this job. Or rather, no one seemed to want to work for my landlord. I actually applied for the job myself – how hard could it be to write policies anyway? I didn't even get an interview. So we waited several more months, and eventually hired a friend of someone who worked there – and she didn't know any more about policy writing than I did. She managed to knock out a few of them which went to board and were passed.

The process mapping proved more difficult. She could not get the necessary buy-in from the housing staff to write any procedures with their input. They clearly did NOT want procedures in place – making it up as they went along from one day to the next was how they had always done things, and how they wanted to continue to do things. They were also rather peeved at the idea of using Workflow which would tie into the process mapping. This was way too intrusive for their taste. So instead, the housing manager just never managed to

turn up to our meetings, and his staff never had time for this policy writer. In the end, the organisation was out the £28,000 they paid her for the contract with half the policies in place and no procedures whatsoever.

But none of that mattered anyway because xxxxx was canned by autumn of 2007. I was on yet another project group with two residents to select our mock inspector. I learned that xxxxx had indeed proved to be xxxx and was by all accounts, a complete flop. Those in charge of monitoring progress and implementation of the improvement plans and actions had failed to do so. So, the best course of action was to drop the whole thing and spend more money for a mock inspection. Funny enough, most of the gaps identified through xxxxx showed up again on the mock inspection report. But this time, there was a solid reason to follow it through – apart from the obvious £50,000 it cost – this exercise would help keep the real inspectors off our backs.

The Resident Involvement Working Strategy Group was a complete and utter waste of time. This was supposed to be about evaluating impact assessments, budgets and plans to achieve goals set out in the actual Strategy. It was so badly organised and the meetings were so badly run, I quit this within a couple of months of starting it. I won't do things if I don't understand why I'm doing it, what I am there for, and what the end goal should be. I could not figure any of these things out. The staff member running it changed her mind on what we were doing virtually every meeting – and that just makes me crazy. So I quit.

I was also asked to take part in the Community Index starting in the fall of 2007. This would culminate in developing and delivering a survey for key geographic areas as a follow up to a survey done 2 years previous, and big events to share the results with the communities surveyed. I was chosen because I had successfully delivered the children's fun day event a few years prior to this, and because of my interest in surveys and results.

It took a hell of a long time to develop this survey. It was clear to me the community development person running this project knew less about writing surveys than I knew about quantum physics. I know sweet nothing about any sort of physics. This also proved to be a highly unpleasant lesson in how the resident involvement and community development team really saw their tenants.

I was pushing for this survey to take additional forms to our traditional postal survey. We know some people do not speak English as a first language or have literacy issues – and they agreed we know this, and laughed about how perhaps they ought to try to make other arrangements for these people to respond. It was literally laughed off. I wanted to see the survey available on our website so people could respond that way if it suited them. This was on the back of a huge consultation which touted 'getting in touch with you in the way that suits you best' as a key part of engaging residents and a key part of the strategy as well. However, two years after this consultation, the only form of communication with the residents was by post. I was wholly unsupported in my view that using the website could increase our response and engage people in a way that suited them. The head of resident involvement said: "most of our tenants probably don't have a computer, and if they did…they wouldn't know how to use it." This came from a woman who would be hard pressed to tell the difference between a spreadsheet and a document, and who couldn't manage to open email attachments without help. I was fairly irate at this comment – not only did it show her lack of respect for us as modern-day individuals, it thoroughly insulted our intelligence.

We then talked about door-knocking and putting up boxes at community shops in rural areas without post offices (common in these parts nowadays). Although they always love a good idea session and 'blue sky thinking' these suggestions have never once in my experience resulted in the suggestions actually turning into an action, or embracing a new way of trying or doing something. It is merely an exercise to hoodwink us into believing we are being listened to, valued and consulted. They do it all the time. Somewhere in the universe is an abyss full our residents' good ideas. And there they sit, collecting space dust. Perhaps in a parallel universe, these ideas are fuelling a thriving, forward thinking social endeavour to house the unfortunates of society.

So finally, the survey is completed to everyone's satisfaction. In order to complete this, the service improvement research officer was brought in to oversee the operation. This may or may not have been linked to my threat to quit the whole operation after hearing the views above, and making it clear I was not

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impressed with the ability of the person running the project to actually do it. It also became apparent to me that some training on how to do surveys could be useful for residents and staff, since about every two weeks I was being asked to respond to some sort of survey for the landlord. I found out about a course another landlord used and emailed that to the relevant people, never to hear about it again.

Then we moved on to planning the events. This was the fun part for me. All this time, I had been having a good think about how to make this event interesting….something no event the landlord ever puts together actually is. They tend to be informative, have loads of staff and few residents in attendance, and bone dry boring.

So I came up with a few new and different ideas. Instead of normal cold catered food, and to promote the 'healthy living' aspect of the project, I suggested we get a local celebrity chef who is committed to healthy eating and using local foods. They liked this idea – initially. I got him on board to do it, came up with a menu within budget, and at the meeting involving housing managers – it was canned! The housing managers decided their tenants wouldn't want to eat this kind of food – Wiltshire ham, quality sausages, fresh vegetables with dips the kids would help make and homemade bread he demonstrate how to make. 'No, no no…our tenants won't want that.' So instead, we had a hog roast, which almost no one ate, some sandwiches and some crisps. My alternate suggestion was a company that provides Mexican food, fresh buffalo meat they rear in Somerset and fresh sausages and burgers. That was WAY too outrageous – buffalo?

For the crime and community safety part of the project, I suggested instead of having the Police come along to 'chat' to people – who the hell wants to talk to them anyway – we ask them to come along to promote and enrol people in 'Immobilise' which is registering mobile phones and other equipment so if it's stolen, it's on a database nationally. They never heard of it – they made no enquiries to the police about the programme, just decided it was a no-go. So we had our local police officers on hand to walk around and look menacing as usual.

For the home and neighbourhood section, I suggested we invite people from local credit unions and allotment associations to help with money matters and allotments are a hot topic at the moment. No invites were given to credit unions, and a lukewarm invite was given to one allotment association.

For education and learning, I suggested using a local charity that runs 'Wheels to Work' to get rural people working by giving them access to moped transportation. I also suggested a local community based radio station that was providing IT training free of charge and teaching people about broadcasting. This was forgotten about.

I managed to get one thing done for youth, leisure and culture: instead of getting the local council to run a few tried and tired sport activities, I asked for them to use an interactive drumming teacher. I had been to a local fete and thought he was fantastic. They took this on board. But they weren't interested in the Army Cadets I suggested. Why not promote the military to young people who are thinking about future opportunities and employment? For some reason, this was a no-go zone.

Other suggestions to spice up the event included inviting a local and well-known group called the Yokels, line dancing groups looking for people to join, salsa dancing, arts groups, a creativity network, etc. All these groups expressed an interest in participating, most free of charge, but I could not get the buy-in from those running the project to do anything too 'different'. I interpret this as not doing anything too interesting. Maybe they were worried if it was too good, it would make them look bad. Never again will I participate in this sort of project. Normally I like projects that have a specific finish and culmination. This one was so demoralising, I will never do it again.

Summer of 2008 saw the five events delivered to the communities. I don't know about the rest, but ours was boring as hell – as usual. I can't honestly remember any 'results' or information based on what they gathered from the surveys being presented. It looked to me like an information gathering event, not a feedback to those you just surveyed event. What I do remember is the food ran out – no one wanted the hog. There were some crafty things to do for kids which few wanted to do for very long, the drumming was a hit, and the staff

offered face painting for the kids. One of the staff members was so rude to my child, I made sure a few people, a few notches above her, knew about it. I pissed myself laughing when I heard the air in her tires had been let out. She is the debt and benefit advisor – and after the many horror stories I had heard about tenant encounters with her (not being helpful so much as insulting) and the backlash of staff who didn't care for her….I couldn't help but think of one word: karma. I made a mental note to never, ever go to that woman for help or money advice.

As a result of the event run in our neighbourhood, kids wanted to rename the neighbourhood, and put up a youth shelter in the park. The housing manager liked both ideas. It fell on deaf ears with the community development manager and went no further. There was interest from certain board members in youth shelters, but their interest soon dried up when the credit crunch hit in summer of 2007– a few weeks after these events took place.

Moving on to the Residents Panel, I joined at the AGM in September of 2007. I had been apprised of the difficulties by staff and reminded to keep my expectations low by other staff – and my husband. The AGM was my first real Panel meeting, and it took about 3 minutes to size up the Chair: not very bright, very full of himself and completely clueless about how to chair a meeting. One of the Panel members walked out – in fact this happened a few times with him as Chair over the coming months.

It seemed the issue of constituting the group was one they could not resolve or move on from. The Chair asked to meet with me and several other members to tell me all about the constitution. It was clear this was the sacred and coveted object in a game of power for him and the others. He had effectively held the staff and the Panel hostage while this was being debated and redrafted and discussed endlessly. I couldn't understand what the big deal was. He hated the Tenant Board Members. In hindsight, I surmise this stemmed from the Chair being unsuccessful in his bid to join the Board. At the time, I challenged him and stood my ground – they were needed on the Panel.

They also explained their frustration at being there to 'tick boxes' for the landlord's resident involvement compliance. They felt like 'bums on seats' and after a couple of meetings I agreed with them. We were there to receive information. Things were presented in the guise of 'consultation' but the consulting usually took place after a final draft was completed or after a decision had been made. They did not set the agenda for their meetings, and the agenda amounted to a parade of various staff members and managers brought in to explain something or another to the Panel, without context or any need or opportunity to make a decision. The points we raised to be followed up or investigated – many of them quite worthy – were not followed up or investigated. This was a little more challenging than they had in mind. And when brought to account for not following up on things….oh my, were they cross! By 'they' I mean the Resident Involvement Manager at the time. We were discouraged from doing anything other than placidly receiving information – hence why the issue of the constitution became so monumentally important to the Chair and his cronies.

In the meantime, I was struggling to make sense of this. I am not one to willingly reinvent the wheel. So I took it upon myself to contact other landlords anonymously (not randomly, but those who were like in size or recognised for good resident involvement practice) and ask their resident involvement people a few questions: Is your Panel constituted, why, what do they do, and do they inform their own agendas? Everyone I asked was willing to answer, and I formed some alliances with people to help me understand resident involvement at this level. One of those alliances was with a Chair at a nearby Association who guessed straightaway who my landlord was. She insisted the problem was the Chair firstly, and secondly too much control by the staff.

After a few months the Chair eventually resigned and I honestly can't remember why. I recall there was a vote of confidence taken, and apart from the Tenant Board Members I was the only one who voted not to keep him. Which was odd – because nearly everyone on the Panel complained about him and identified him as 'the problem' but threw away the opportunity to do something about it! The Panel then insisted they could move on now he was gone. To help the group identify what they wanted to achieve and how, a consultant was brought in to work with us in April of 2007.

She soon figured out that we had accomplished nothing. She also figured out that some people had been on this Panel for more than 10 years! Most had been on it more than 5 years! We discussed the money and time involved to run the Panel – somewhere around £30,000 per year. They all agreed to some new terms: the Panel would be a scrutiny group reviewing performance indicators of all service areas, review policies and Board reports and our comments and concerns would be fed to the Board, to ensure we were not overburdened with involvement all Panellists should not participate in more than one other Forum, and there should be an annual review individually of skills, training and time on the Panel so new members could join and existing skills built on. Everyone agreed to this – all who could be bothered to attend anyway. Also, we should buddy up with new and old members to 'mentor' one another and individually attend Board meetings to see what they get up to and how that fit in with the Panel's role. Lastly, there would be no Chair, it would be a revolving role for those who did the training on how to Chair. Most important, this marked the end of the Panel being a group of resident 'representatives' who felt they were speaking on behalf of or 'looking out for' all the residents. Because they weren't – they were there to look after themselves. This was tantamount in the group's new identity and remit of being a 'scrutiny panel' and training would be offered to help achieve that.

Subsequent to this, the new Resident Involvement Manager resigned, so the only two things that actually happened in this restructure of the Panel were to review Board reports, performance indicators and policies and use a revolving Chair. This lasted a few months.

In November 2007, I Chaired the meeting, and all were happy. The meetings had been quite unstructured previously and prone to individual complaints and grievances. Gradually we were getting away from individual concerns and discussing wider issues, debating and commenting on policies and performance. However, it was still mostly receiving information for the purpose of receiving it rather than any real influence or decision making.

After a few months of this, the revolving Chair for the day didn't turn up. So in February 2008, I was nominated and confirmed as the new Chair. This was not a role I wanted. There was tension brewing in this Panel – again. Even though we got rid of 'the problem' in the old Chair, things were still much the same. We now had a new Resident Involvement Manager, and she too was struggling to understand this group's purpose. We met along with the Vice Chair to discuss the history and future of the Panel. This had been done many times and could take hours…..rehashing the past over and over again…..yawn. This new manager knew what the problem was: the Panel was made up almost completely of elderly individuals and couples, all White British, most of who had been on it for years. The skill level was low, the capacity was low. I was the only person under 40 and the only 'BME' person. I had several times been questioned by my fellow Panellists how I 'got into social housing' and was frequently interrogated on why I got to live in one of these homes. I was not like them, and they did not like it one bit. One even asked 'why do you get to live here?'

I explained with the Vice Chair that actually, the Panel wasn't that keen on 'scrutiny' and that is not what they wanted to do. She really wanted it to work on paper, and that is what it would take – to have the most senior formal group doing 'scrutiny'. But this was just not realistic.

The problem now was, our new Resident Involvement Manager didn't know how to fix it. Nor was she inclined to listen much, or approach things as a 'partnership'. There was a strong feeling of 'them and us' in this Panel. She decided that anyone on the Panel could not be on any other formal involvement group. It was a drastic measure, and one that would fix the problem of all these dinosaurs lurking about on the Panel solely for the purpose of getting a free lunch. But it would never work. Everyone was immediately furious. I suggested making this a transition over time – no joy. I suggested limits of some sort – since the last ones were ignored – but not so restrictive. No joy there either. Also, the Panel had to once again discuss their 'role' since they didn't really like what they agreed to with scrutiny. Plus, no one wanted to give up their place on the Panel. They couldn't see why since no one was knocking on the door to join. What they didn't know is despite much effort from resident involvement staff to get some new blood from involved residents in other groups – no one wanted to join the Panel. My own conversations with people indicated they didn't understand what the Panel did, but it seemed to take up a lot of time. They knew about the years of bickering and wanted nothing to do with it.

I had a mandate from management that there were options – the only option not on the table was to remain as they were – accomplishing nothing. So I suggested we do some away days, and see if we could come up with a new role. I also negotiated to have the Housing Director responsible for the Panel. One of the ongoing problems was the inability to get the right information from staff. They were pretty good about discussing the Agenda with me as the Chair, but often items on the Agenda were tabled because the staff member responsible forgot, or they didn't have it in time, etc. I felt we needed someone who could and would give us the right information for any task we were set to do – whatever that would be.

The Resident Involvement Manager was off sick – something we were used to. All of resident involvement functioned in chaos at all times, and it was a common recurring theme that they couldn't do whatever they needed to do – organise paperwork, meetings, training, etc because they didn't have time and they were overworked. The staff didn't get on with their new manager and were quite deliberately not doing their jobs because of this. However I had heard this song and dance before – they didn't like the previous manager, and the one before that was off sick more than she was at work. Plus, she was queen of the resident involvement empire and would not allow anything to happen without her direct involvement – so not much happened. Basically, this group was accountable to no one, hated being managed, and liked calling their own shots. And they couldn't care less that their budgets, jobs and activities were entirely funded by OUR rent money, and we were getting fed up with cancelled meetings, cancelled training and a treadmill of constantly reviewing things that never amounted to any sort of outcome or action.

So once again, we hired a consultant to come in and sort out the Panel. Once again, they all amiably agreed to a new role, and what they wanted to achieve. We agreed to monitor resident involvement because it was such a mess. We came up with some ways to do that, and how to structure real feedback from all the other little groups and forums to the Panel. I also struck a deal with the Panel – the resident involvement staff felt embattled by residents, and was not happy with their methods of communicating and complaining. So to make us more accountable the same way their resident involvement team were going to have to be more accountable, we all agreed on some communication protocols for involved residents. We also agreed a new Code of Conduct was needed, so I began drafting that for us to review. The Vice Chair quit because it was too much work! Thanks…

I felt very positive after our away days to redefine our purpose, and some standards to make us more accountable just like the staff we were asking to be more accountable. But it turned out all those smiley happy faces who agreed to this were not so happy and did not agree. Plus, we still had the problem of a completely imbalanced and nearly skill-less group of people on this Panel. Truth be told, part of this strategy was to give the Panel a specific task which involved 'work' and specific 'rules' and hopefully, some of them would drop out. But no, not this lot. No, instead after we changed the rules – again – they pretty much decided they didn't like the rules anymore. The whole idea with changing the rules was to also change the players by their own volition. But this didn't work. Every time the rules changed, the group managed to reinterpret them, ignore them, or ultimately reject them, and do the whole exercise again – why are we here, what are we supposed to do, etc.
In the meantime, something excited and different had happened with resident involvement. In January of 2008, we hired a consultant to lead our first group of tenant inspectors. We were rigorously interviewed and selected for the team. I was really happy to be selected for this. Our initial team had nearly 50% attrition so we ended up with a small team of 5. We did a lot of practical training for the job, and also training around communication and teamwork, time management and stress management.

We achieved 3 service reviews our first year: a desk top audit, complaints review and response repairs. The landlord was very slow to respond to the recommendations, but they did eventually. However slow it was – it was the only evidence I had that anything I had done in the resident involvement arena resulted in an improved service and a real outcome for all our residents. I couldn't evidence a single thing I had done in all the focus groups, consultations, events, training or forums that really 'made a difference' which ironically is the strap line for resident involvement with our landlord! But this inspection team worked – we did make a difference, and we were even thanked by the Managing Director in a letter for our work on the complaints review! I was thrilled to bits!

We worked well as a team for the most part. But once again, I was put in the position of 'leader of the pack' which I did not want. I wanted to be on a team, where we all worked together. In January 2008, our new resident involvement manager stopped all activity for the inspection team, plus we had no clear lead from a staff member to project manage us. Over the next 6 months, the team disintegrated. It became clear to me the reason I was held up as the 'leader' was because I did most of the work! When we regrouped in July of to do a survey it was very difficult to work together as a team, and we had no real management of the team at all. I dug my heels in and decided I was not going to do all the work – nor was I prepared for the team to be ordered around and not do things properly like we had been trained to do. So I opted out of this assignment.

The inspectors known as the 'Smarties' got another assignment in August 2008. A teammate was selected to lead the project – good I thought. It will give her a chance to really shine. But still, she looked to me to do most of the work and the leading. Meanwhile, one of our teammates was becoming quite insufferable. I decided as much as I loved the inspection work, I would not participate in this team any longer until the group got bigger with new recruits, there was a clear staff leader to manage the group, and other people did some work. This teammate I loathed to be around had made some very damaging decisions in how she chose to interact with other residents – mostly as my expense. So the personal cost to me to try and work with her was too much, and I decided I didn't want to try and do it anymore. Plus, she was a wholly unproductive member of the team. I decided the only way the team would value themselves and the work each of us did, was for me to remove myself from it entirely. Then maybe they could appreciate doing some work themselves!

One of the things that made this relationship breakdown was that she was not selected to do a couple of things I was selected to do. First, she didn't like my being Chair of the Residents Panel of which she was a member. Second, she didn't like that I was asked to participate in an intensive two week project on the subject of Customer Care. And lastly, I was asked to train up so I could deliver some resident training courses to our residents rather than hiring out trainers every time. This was probably the one that she hated the most. So my opportunities to build my own skills and knowledge also ruined my opportunities in my other involvement activities because I had received 'preferential treatment' in her eyes – and many others as it turned out.

So right about the time the Smarties inspection team was falling apart, the Residents Panel was falling apart too. It is tradition with our residents that the only thing they can manage to get together and act on is some sort of complaint. They do not like training. They do not like to read information, they do not like productive debate, and they absolutely loathe decision making. But they love, love, love to complain – especially when it's about one of their fellow involved residents.

In my personal life, resident involvement nearly broke down my family. I was careful not to get involved in too many things – and there were things I chose not to continue with as well. Unlike most of our involved residents, or the 'usual suspects' who volunteer for everything and turn up utterly unprepared for anything, I picked what I wanted to do based on my skills, interest and what was in it for me too. I attended every bit of training I could, I became the Chair of the Panel under condition it was for a short period of time, and I was a Smartie tenant inspector. That was it for me. I would not do anymore events because it was time consuming and meaningless. I would not do estate inspections because there was never any feedback. Although I picked carefully, it still added up to a lot of time in meetings, and a lot of time working from home. My husband did not like this one little bit. He told me three years ago this was all a waste of time, and if it interfered too much with my primary role as wife and mother, he wouldn't be happy about it.

In summer of 2008 I felt like I really enjoyed what I was learning, and I could do something with it – like get a job that might help improve landlord services for lots of people. This was where I was going with all this volunteer time I offered up – I liked it, and I thought I could make a difference and a career from it. My kids got dragged around to events and meetings, and their photos were everywhere – on Annual Reports, the website, leaflets – everywhere. My husband was not happy. Was there any point to all of this, other than supplying our landlord with endless photos for glossy brochures of our happy children? Lots of people he works with are tenants too, and according to them our landlord is useless, always has been and always will be. So he's slightly embarrassed by my naiveté and commitment to service improvement.

I had an opportunity to judge the NHF Awards in September of 2008. It took about 50 hours at home, on the computer to do this. My husband made it clear that if I wanted to spend that kind of time on this, and go to the glitzy gala at the end – the whole family would be going together to atone for the sacrifice of my time. Plus, he didn't want me going to Birmingham on my own, and frankly, he wanted to be there, to see his lovely wife in a beautiful ball gown and share that with me. I made a deal with the landlord we would pay for the extra cost of a room to accommodate our family. Whatever the cost of that was, my husband quite rightly pointed out it would be peanuts, compared to what the landlord would get out of having probably the only tenant in the room under the age of 40 sitting at their table in a size 8 ball gown, making Lorraine Kelly (the event's host) look positively frumpy. My husband is no fool – he didn't want his wife there, looking gorgeous all on her own. I also had to escort our other tenant in attendance that is nearly 90 years old. Thank God I did not have to perform a tracheotomy with my five inch stiletto heel – I really did think he would keel over any minute.

In the summer of 2008 I asked if I could attend the TPAS Conference as we had 6 delegate spaces this year. My husband agreed I could go, but that we should go together as a family because: he had never looked after them on his own for more than one day, in case one of them got sick, and in case one or all of them refused to go to the day care arranged at the conference – one of our children is very small and shy and does not always feel comfortable with strange adults and children. Also, he felt like with all the time I so freely donate to the landlord, it was not fair for me to ask him to take a day off work to look after the kids while I went off for three days on my own. This was something we might be able to enjoy together, and he was interested to see what I found so interesting and fascinating about 'participation'. He spent enough time listening to me harp on about it, so he was curious to see for himself. Plus – we like to be together, and we like to have our kids with us whenever possible. I had been assured this was a great family event and that everyone would love it.

The response I got initially was 'fine – no problem'. But then, a few weeks later, after all the delegate spaces were full and some people didn't get to go because they were too late to put their name down….there was a massive uprising about me and my family being allowed to go. Rumours were going crazy – some people thought they didn't get to go to the conference because all my children were listed as delegates, they didn't allow as many people to go because my family was going, and why should I be able to bring my family at all? I was then informed that all the spaces were full, and we wouldn't be going. Then I was told actually, the issue was cost. Then I was told actually, the issue was the other tenants were mad at the decision to send me and my family to the Conference. My response was that I would be making a formal complaint because I was going to be excluded from this event because I have a family – if they had said no from the beginning, I could understand that – but the answer was yes and changed when residents complained.

A meeting was arranged with this angry group of tenants, led by the MD and the Housing Director. I was not invited. The spokesperson for the group was a Tenant Board Member. People were furious that we were allowed to go AND that we were driving ourselves (like they would want to be in a bus for several hours with three children age 5 and under?). The issue was that my husband was attending too – that was seen as unnecessary. I would not have been able to handle attending the Conference on my own with three small children, and attend all the training sessions. That is beyond my capability. I needed my husband there. Apparently the response from management was 'it's a one off – it will never happen again.' Which completely sidesteps the issue: I have a family, and this is what I needed in order to attend the event, to be included.

Then it was brought up by the nearly 90 year old tenant that we attended the NHF Awards as a family – so it wasn't a one off – and did we repay the cost of our room? So now, I was under investigation, and the landlord was accused of misappropriation of public funds by this individual. Now I wish he really had keeled over and died at the NHF Awards. Tenants were furious and accused the association of giving me 'preferential treatment' and some even walked out of the meeting, completely disgruntled.

This occurred on the same day as my interview for a position on the Board as a Tenant Board Member. I was gutted that my peers on the Panel and my Smartie inspection team had taken this view. After all the work I had done, all the hours spent doing most of the WORK – they used this as a way to get back at me for the opportunities I had been given. And the response from the landlord was not compliant in my view – instead of

entertaining this group with 'it's a one off' to placate them, they should have said this was in line with equality and diversity and inclusion, and this is about respecting the needs of individual residents to be involved in a way that suits them.

I made a formal complaint about how this was handled – still unresolved. I also made a complaint direct to the lead regulator for our landlord at the Tenant Services Authority. The regulator is satisfied with their paper response to the complaint. However, I believe their commitment to the people they involve and equality and diversity is inadequate.

I was not selected for the position of Tenant Board Member. I was the only female applicant, the only BME applicant, and the only applicant who has undertaken as much training and involvement with my landlord on regional and national issues. Instead we got two, silver haired, and white males – again.

Subsequent to this, I resigned from all resident involvement with my landlord. I endured a personal attack again from people on the Panel – who decided they don't like their new role and it's not fun anymore and there is too much reading to do. I resigned as Chair and from the Panel completely in September 2008. The aftermath of the TPAS Conference made me feel uncomfortable and ruthlessly attacked by my fellow residents. It is worth mentioning we were queried on our activities at the Conference by my fellow delegates – where did we eat, did we go swimming with the children, and did I go to the sessions? One of our children was ill and I was emotionally very upset. I was also one of two people to report back on what I learned at the Conference so we could share the knowledge and learning. I have chosen not to be on the inspection team until it is bigger and the personality issues can be diluted or dealt with…somehow.

In the end, I accomplished very little from all the time I spent in resident involvement. Although the landlord got lots of glossy photos, a token young female mother of a BME background on their involvement books, and countless hours of work for free.

I was so full of anxiety and disappointment and distrust of my peers, I simply could not carry on. It simply does not pay to be different sometimes – in the resident involvement arena, you need to be white, elderly, British, uneducated and have little or no expectations to survive.

I have been able to understand my experience a bit better by reading case studies and research on the subject. The dynamics of the groups, panels and forums can be very complicated, and often run by people who have little if any understanding of the issues, difficulties and barriers involved resident's experience. It nearly cost me my marriage, and adversely affected both my physical and mental health. I am by definition 'hard to reach' as a foreigner and a religious minority. I am now way, way out of reach in the resident involvement arena. Now, I will think strategically about my experience and use it to my advantage. I am proud of myself for knowing when to get out.

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