

6. Proposals for a Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

The scope of the proposed standard

- 6.1 This standard covers customer service and choice, tenant involvement and empowerment, and complaints. It also includes direct requirements in relation to the two areas that were identified as possible cross-cutting themes in our June document: equality and diversity, and tenants with additional support needs.
- 6.2 This standard will apply to all providers from 1 April 2010. It will apply where all or part of the management of service delivery has been contracted to another organisation.
- 6.3 We are not proposing a Code of Practice to amplify this standard.

Rationale for the standard

- 6.4 The feedback from tenants through the National Conversation made clear their expectation is that providers should offer a quality customer service where they are treated with respect and courtesy. The standards on customer service and on complaints relate directly to one of the TSA's fundamental objectives to ensure that actual and potential tenants have an appropriate degree of choice and protection.
- 6.5 The specified outcomes and requirements for customer service apply to the approach which landlords adopt in meeting other national and local standards for housing services. This approach is intended to meet the objective of firmly establishing good customer service and the need for providers to embed their approach to meeting diverse needs of their tenants as cross-cutting requirements for services covered by other standards in these proposals.
- 6.6 Our National Conversation also clearly indicated that many tenants want to be involved in decisions about their homes. This standard also relates directly to one of the TSA's fundamental statutory objectives to ensure that tenants of social housing have the opportunity to be involved in its management.
- 6.7 The TSA has been directed by the Government to set a standard in relation to tenant involvement and empowerment. Government's rationale for the terms of the direction is to ensure that not only do providers offer opportunities for involvement in the management of their homes, but that it is necessary to support tenants and build their capacity to make meaningful use of those opportunities.
- 6.8 Involvement and empowerment are not the same thing:
 - Empowerment requires information, the ability to be heard, to hold providers to account, to influence service delivery and the decisions that providers take. Tenant empowerment needs to be both individual and collective and requires a proactive approach by providers

- Tenant involvement is a technique by which tenant empowerment is enabled. Tenants have a right to have their voice heard and to be consulted on issues that effect them and to know how their landlord will have regard to their views. Effective involvement must take into account equality and diversity issues and avoid discriminatory processes to ensure all tenants have an opportunity to contribute and to be heard

6.9 There are many different ways in which providers can meet these objectives and we would not want to be overly prescriptive about how each provider should achieve them. However, there are certain requirements we would expect providers to demonstrate in achieving the desired outcomes. This is especially the case for our requirements on how providers should engage locally with tenants about their priorities.

6.10 Complaints and customer feedback are an essential part of the relationship between providers and their tenants and should be valued and acted upon to improve services.

6.11 We propose that the standard should apply to all registered providers of social housing and that occupants of LCHO and intermediate rent as well as other types of low-cost rented housing should have the same opportunities to be involved in developing, and to benefit from, their provider's local standards, especially where their homes are part of mixed tenure estates. We also encourage providers to include leaseholders and other residents in their involvement strategies.

Proposed text for the standard

6.12 The text of the standard comprises the required outcomes and specific requirements in the box below.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard

The required outcomes

1. Customer service and choice

Registered providers must design and deliver housing services that tenants can easily access. Tenants must be offered choices over the services they receive, and be treated with fairness and respect. In relation to all the standards, registered providers must consider equality issues and the diversity of their tenants, including tenants with additional support needs.

Registered providers must understand their tenants' needs and use this information to:

- design and deliver housing services
- communicate with tenants

2. Involvement and empowerment

Registered providers will offer all tenants opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing. This must include opportunities:

- to influence housing related policies and how housing related services are delivered

- to be involved in scrutiny of performance in delivery of housing related services

Registered providers must offer tenants support so they are more able to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered.

3. Responding to complaints

Registered providers must have a clear and accessible policy. They must deal with tenants' complaints and any other feedback promptly, politely and fairly. The policy must include how they use complaints and other feedback to:

- change how they do things
- improve services

Specific requirements

1. Customer service and choice

1.1 Registered providers will be able to show they have arrangements for understanding their tenants, their views and needs so that in all the standards, they can use this information to:

- improve services
- offer choices in the services provided

1.2 For all the standards, registered providers must consider equality issues and the diversity of their tenants, including tenants with additional support needs and incorporate choices that are designed to meet the diverse needs of their tenants.

1.3 Registered providers will provide tenants with accessible, comprehensive and timely information about:

- how tenants can access services
- the standards of housing services their tenants can expect
- how they are performing against those standards
- the service choices available to tenants
- any additional costs that are relevant to specific choices
- how tenants can communicate with them

2. Involvement and empowerment

2.1 Registered providers, having consulted their tenants, must have arrangements in place that support and enable tenants to be involved and empowered. Tenants must have the opportunity to:

- be involved in the management of their homes (including, for example, in relation to the repairs programme and choice of main contractors)
- influence their registered provider's strategic priorities
- measure and scrutinise how effective their registered provider's involvement and empowerment policy is

2.2 Registered providers must say how they will provide support to build tenants' capacity to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered.

- 2.3 Arrangements for involvement and empowerment must be clearly published and accessible for tenants.
- 2.4 Following consultation with their tenants, registered providers will establish by no later than 1 April 2011 local standards in those service areas where the TSA has indicated that its national standards should be tailored with local standards where tenants want them. Local standards should include commitments on:
- local standards for performance
 - how performance will be monitored and reported to tenants
 - how tenants can be involved in scrutinising performance
 - what happens if local standards are not met
 - arrangements for reviewing the local standards on an annual basis
- 2.5 Registered providers will consult their tenants about how many tenant members there should be on their governing bodies or service delivery committees. Registered providers will do this at least once every three years.
- 2.6 Registered providers will offer tenants a range of opportunities to scrutinise their performance. This applies to all standards.
- 2.7 When registered providers are required by law to consult tenants about changes to their constitution (for example, where there will be a change of registered provider), they should clearly and objectively set out the options, and the costs and benefits of the options.
- 2.8 Where registered providers intend to make a significant change in the arrangements for the management of their stock, they must consult their tenants.
- 2.9 Where registered providers have consulted tenants about the standards, they should feed back to tenants about how they have taken their views into account.
- 3. Responding to complaints**
- 3.1 Registered providers will have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible to tenants and potential tenants. The approach should include:
- a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint
 - details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint
- 3.2 Registered providers will develop, agree and monitor service standards for complaints with tenants. Registered providers will make sure that complaints and any other feedback are managed and resolved promptly, politely and fairly.
- 3.3 Each year registered providers will publish information about:
- the number of complaints received
 - the nature of the complaints
 - the business area the complaints relate to
 - the outcome of the complaints
 - how they have changed the way they do things to improve services as a result of feedback