

A new regulatory framework for social housing in England

Summary

November 2009

Tenant Services Authority – Our standards

Since our launch on 1 December 2008 we have worked with tenants and providers from housing associations, co-ops, ALMOs and local authorities to explain our purpose, identify what matters most to tenants and decide how best to use our new powers. We want to make a difference to the four million households who live in social rented homes in England.

The reasons why have been set up are:

1. **A consumer regulator** - tenants have limited 'market' power, due to the shortage of supply of affordable homes they cannot hand back their keys, walk away and move into another home at the same rent and size. We ensure tenants are able to be involved in decisions that affect them, their homes and neighbourhoods and to protect tenants if their landlord performs poorly.
2. **Security and protection for private investors** -Our powers to intervene and protect private investment are critical to the continued flow of funding at competitive rates, so providers can build new homes and improve their services. For housing association tenants this protection is worth about £250 a year per home.
3. **Safeguarding public investment** – there has been £120bn past public investment in social housing – £90bn from local authorities and £30bn into housing associations. We ensure the taxpayer continues to enjoy returns in the public interest e.g. by ensuring homes and services are of a good quality and through the promotion of value for money.
4. The provision of social housing affects the wider **quality of life in communities** – housing providers are well-placed to help other agencies to deliver effective neighbourhood services. We help ensure providers play their part in supporting local authorities in the areas they operate.

Our standards are at the centre of our approach to regulation. We have published our full statutory consultation paper which is available at:
www.tenantservicesauthority.org

This document summarises the proposed principles for the new regulatory system and sets out each of the six standards in full. We want to make things better for the eight million tenants in England.

Our aims are to:

Improve standards of service delivery for tenants. We will set standards for those landlord services that tenants care about the most, such as repairs and maintenance. Our framework protects tenants from poor performance by their landlord. Providers that involve their tenants to deliver good services and have sound governance and finances will experience much less regulation leaving them freer to innovate and benefit from our de-regulatory approach. We will encourage those in the middle to improve by requiring open and transparent reporting of their performance, and by enabling them over time to compare themselves against other landlords.

Support decent homes and neighbourhoods. We will ensure all homes meet the Decent Homes Standard (subject to funding being available for local authority homes). We are proposing standards on anti-social behaviour and management of the neighbourhood because we know that the safety and security of places matter to tenants.

Promote effective tenant involvement and empowerment. Our latest survey showed that only one in two tenants are satisfied with opportunities for involvement and only one in six tenants feel their landlord takes a lot of notice of their views. We want to work with both landlords and tenants – we call this co-regulation. To make it really work for tenants, our standards place involvement and empowerment at their core with local deals, improved accountability, public reporting and tenant scrutiny.

Ensure providers are well run and deliver value for money. We know great service delivery starts with effective governance and sound financial viability. Our standard on value for money requires providers to be open about how they prioritise spending (on new supply, existing homes, community work) and how they constantly strive to improve.

Promote and protect public and private investment. We want to maintain the confidence of private sector lenders and investors to finance improvements in neighbourhoods and the building of more homes. Private sector investors look to the TSA, as an independent regulator, to safeguard their interests through our regulation of the governance and financial viability of housing associations. A modern risk-based regulatory framework makes access to private finance cheaper than it would otherwise be. We estimate that this benefit is worth about £250 per year per home – a benefit that helps reduce the cost of social housing to the taxpayer and to tenants.

Encourage and support a supply of well-managed social housing. We know how important it is for potential tenants and those living in overcrowded homes that providers help increase the supply of affordable homes. Our value for money standard will help promote a more efficient sector and our allocations standard will help to ensure that the process is fair and flexible.

Our six standards

The six new standards set out in this document for social housing providers are the centrepiece of our new regulatory framework. They describe the outcomes we want to see delivered and the specific requirements we expect all providers to comply with in meeting these outcomes. We believe the best place for the quality of services to be discussed, agreed and scrutinised is locally between providers and their tenants. So our standards require providers to set out what they offer to tenants and set local standards that reflect the priorities of local communities.

We know that the majority of tenants are satisfied with their landlord and there are many excellent providers who already meet much of what we are requiring in these standards. We also know that where performance is poor or involvement is weak this can have a significant effect on tenants' lives.

These proposals balance new demands on providers to be transparent and report on performance to their tenants, and hold themselves to account – with a significant reduction in red tape, with no TSA Codes of Practice, the removal of thousands of individual regulatory consents, and the passing of over 50 detailed Housing Corporation circulars and guidance notes.

Registered providers must meet our standards. Where they don't, we will expect speedy self-improvement and where this is insufficient we have a new graduated range of enforcement powers to ensure that tenants get the service they deserve.

Figure 1 – Proposals for national standards

| Proposed Standard | Containing requirements relating to the following areas |
|--|---|
| 1. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement and empowerment • Customer service and choice • Equalities and diversity • Tenants with additional support needs • Complaints |
| 2. Home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repairs and maintenance • Quality of accommodation |
| 3. Tenancy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocations • Rent • Tenure |
| 4. Neighbourhood and Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbourhood management • Local area cooperation • Anti-social behaviour |
| 5. Value for Money | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value for money |
| 6. Governance and Financial Viability* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance • Financial viability |

* This standard does not apply to local authorities.

Our new approach to regulation

We want to develop a new relationship between landlords and their regulator. We want the main relationship being between landlord and tenant – one where tenants help shape, influence, and monitor the service provided. This is what we call co-regulation. This is not a top-down way of regulating. In a clear shift from regulation in the past, there will be less red tape and a clear focus on de-regulation and reducing burdens where appropriate. We will withdraw the Regulatory Code, 54 circulars and all good practice notes that were the previous requirements of our predecessor body, the Housing Corporation. In addition, greater use of a general consent will mean a reduction of over 1000 applications annually from providers to us for individual consents.

In return, landlords will be expected to make themselves more accountable and to work more closely with their tenants.

We have proposed ten principles that define this approach:

- our national standards will be established based on clear criteria
- our national standards will be clear, succinct, based on outcomes and avoid prescribing detailed processes
- we will require providers to agree local standards with their tenants for the areas of service that are relevant to them locally
- as every tenant matters, we expect providers to understand and respond to the particular needs of their tenants and to demonstrate how they have taken into account the needs of tenants across the six diversity groups
- we will promote transparency in reporting performance by providers for tenants and local authorities (in their strategic role) in the areas they operate
- good governance is a universal principle and is essential to the quality of service delivery, financial robustness and value for money
- we want to promote effective forms of independent validation, audit and benchmarking of performance to encourage providers to improve continually and free the best from unnecessary red tape
- for the national service delivery standards, we will focus our resources in 2010-11 on identifying and addressing the worst performing providers, where tenants are being let down by their landlord's performance
- the standards framework must support the principle of sector led improvement. Where problems are identified the provider will usually be offered an opportunity for speedy self-improvement
- registration criteria should encourage new landlords into the social housing sector, consistent with our objectives in the 2008 Act

Tenant involvement and empowerment standard

This standard will apply to all registered providers.

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; and
- 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; and
- 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; and
- 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; and
- 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; and
- 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; and
- 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; and
- 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; and
- how they have changed the way they do things to improve services as a result of feedback.

Home standard

This standard will apply to all registered providers.

The required outcomes

- 1 Quality of accommodation**
Registered providers must ensure that all homes are warm, weatherproof and have modern facilities.
- 2 Repairs and maintenance**
Registered providers must provide a cost effective repairs and maintenance service that responds to the needs of, and offers choices to, tenants. They must meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of tenants in their homes.

Specific requirements

- 1 Quality of Accommodation**
 - 1.1 Registered providers must ensure tenants' homes either:
 - meet the Decent Homes Standard set out in Section 5 of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance*; or
 - meet the standards of design and quality that applied when the home was first built, and were required as a condition of publicly funded financial assistance**, if these standards are higher than the Decent Homes Standard.
 - 1.2 Registered providers must meet the standard in 1.1 above by 31 December 2010. They must continue to maintain their homes to this standard. The TSA may agree an extension to this date with the registered provider where it is reasonable.
 - 1.3 Registered providers must ensure their tenants have the opportunity to agree a local standard, as set out in 2.4 of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard. The local standard should be higher than the standard set out in 1.1. In developing local standards, registered providers must:
 - have regard to Section 6 of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance; and
 - demonstrate how they have ensured that tenants' views have been taken into account .

* "Decent Homes Guidance" means "A Decent Home: Definition and guidance for implementation" published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in June 2006, and any guidance issued by the Department or its successors, in relation to that document¹.

** Financial assistance is defined in Section 19 (3) of the Housing and Regeneration Act, 2008. For the purpose of this standard it includes financial assistance provided by the Homes and Communities Agency's predecessor bodies.

¹ Available at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/decenthome

2. Repairs and maintenance

2.1 Registered providers must have a repairs and maintenance service that:

- is cost effective;
- has the objective of completing repairs and improvements 'right first time';
- has published standards that have been agreed with tenants for completing repairs and improvements; and
- offers tenants choice (for example about appointment times for carrying out repairs).

2.2 Registered providers must ensure a prudent, planned approach to repairs and maintenance. It should demonstrate an appropriate balance of planned and responsive repairs, and value for money. The approach should include:

- responsive repairs;
- planned and capital work;
- work to empty properties;
- adaptations;
- cyclical works; and
- communal areas as well as individual homes.

2.3 Registered providers must comply with all applicable legislations and regulation that provide for the health and safety of the occupants of their homes.

2.4 Registered providers must ensure their tenants have the opportunity to agree a local standard, as set out in 2.4 of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.

2.5 Registered providers must provide tenants with clear information about:

- each other's responsibilities; and
- the progress of works.

2.6 Registered providers must co-operate with relevant organisations to provide an adaptations service that meets tenants' needs.

Tenancy standard

This standard will apply to all registered providers apart from the rental element which only applies to not-for-profit and for-profit registered providers. Local authority landlords are currently subject to a different rental policy which has been set by the Government.

The required outcomes

1. Allocations

Registered providers must let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way.

They must take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They should demonstrate how their allocations processes:

- make the best use of available housing; and
- contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities.

There should be clear decision making and appeals processes.

2. Rents

Registered providers will charge rents in accordance with the objectives and framework set out in the Government's direction to the TSA of November 2009.

3. Tenure

Registered providers must offer and issue the most secure form of tenure compatible with:

- the purpose of the housing; and
- the sustainability of the community.

They must meet all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the form and use of tenancy agreements.

Specific requirements

1. Allocations

1.1 Registered providers will co-operate with local authorities' strategic housing function, and their duties to meet identified local housing needs. This includes assistance with local authorities' homelessness duties, and through meeting obligations in nominations agreements. Where in exceptional circumstances registered providers choose not to participate in choice based lettings schemes in areas where they own homes, they publicly justify their reasons for doing so.

1.2 Registered providers will develop and deliver services to address under occupation and overcrowding in their homes, within the resources available to them. These services will meet the needs of their tenants, and will offer choices to them.

1.3 Registered providers will provide tenants wishing to move with access to clear and relevant advice about their housing options. They will participate in mobility schemes and mutual exchange schemes where these are available.

1.4 Registered providers will publish their allocations policies and outcomes, how this has made best use of available housing and contributed to sustainable communities. The published policies should include (where it applies) their participation in:

- common housing registers;
- common allocations policies; and
- local lettings policies.

Registered providers will clearly set out, and be able to give reasons for, the criteria they use for excluding actual and potential tenants from consideration for allocations, mobility or mutual exchange schemes.

1.5 Registered providers will develop and deliver allocations processes in a way which supports their effective use by the full range of actual and potential tenants, including those with support needs, those who do not speak English as a first language, and others who have difficulties with written English.

1.6 Registered providers will work to make sure that the specific needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants with diverse needs are reflected in the choices available to them. This applies particularly to the development of local lettings policies.

1.7 Registered providers must minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting. When doing this, they must take into account the circumstances of the tenants who have been offered the properties.

1.8 Registered providers must record all lettings and sales in the 'Continuous Recording of Lettings' system.

2. Rents

2.1 Registered providers will ensure they meet the following requirements which derive from the Government's direction to the TSA of November 2009 and published within Directions to the Tenant Services Authority – summary of responses and Government response, November 2009, CLG.

2.2 Subject to paragraph 2.3, registered providers will set rents with a view to achieving the following as far as possible:

2.2.1. Rents conform with the pattern produced by the rent formula set out in Rent Influencing Regime Guidance* ('target rents') with a five per cent tolerance in individual rents (ten per cent for supported and sheltered housing) ('rent flexibility level') but subject to the maximum rent levels specified in that guidance ('rent caps').

2.2.2. Weekly rent for accommodation increases each year by an amount which is no more than RPI** + 0.5% + £2 until it reaches the upper limit of the rent flexibility level or the rent cap, whichever is lower

2.2.3. Weekly rent for accommodation which has reached or is above the upper limit of the rent flexibility increases each year by an amount which is no more than the increase to the target rents.

2.2.4. Rent caps increase annually by RPI + one per cent

2.2.5. Target rents increase annually by RPI + 0.5%

2.3 Where the application of the rents standard would cause registered providers to be unable to meet other standards, particularly in respect of financial viability including the risk that a reduction in overall rental income causes them to risk failing to meet existing commitments such as banking or other lending covenants, then the TSA may allow extensions to the period over which the requirements of the rent standard are met.

2.4 Registered providers must provide clear information to tenants that explains how their rent and any service charge is set, and how it is changed, including reference to the RPI benchmark to which annual changes to rents should be linked (except where rents are controlled under different legislation).

* 'Rent Influencing Regime guidance' means the Rent Influencing Regime Guidance published by the Housing Corporation² in October 2001, and any guidance issued by the Housing Corporation or TSA, or its successors, in relation to that document.

** "RPI" means the general index of retail prices (for all items) published by the Office of National Statistics or, if that index is not published for any month, any substituted index or index figures published by that Office.

3. Tenure

- 3.1 Registered providers must publish clear and accessible policies which outline their approach to tenancy management. They must develop and provide services that will support tenants to maintain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions. The approach must set out how registered providers will make sure that the home continues to be occupied by the tenant they let the home to.
- 3.2 Registered providers must provide tenants with accessible, comprehensive and timely information about their responsibilities and tenants' responsibilities.

² Available at: <http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/rentir.pdf>

Neighbourhood and community standard

This standard will apply to all registered providers.

The required outcomes

1. Neighbourhood management

Registered providers will keep the common areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe. To achieve this, they will work in partnership with:

- their tenants; and
- other providers and public bodies, where this is the most effective way of achieving this standard.

2. Local area co-operation

Registered providers will co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic well being in the areas where their properties are.

3. Anti-social behaviour

Registered providers must work in partnership with other public agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.

Specific requirements

1. Neighbourhood management

- 1.1 Registered providers will consult with tenants in developing their policy for maintaining and improving the neighbourhoods associated with their homes. This applies where the registered provider has a responsibility for the condition of that neighbourhood. The policy must include any communal areas associated with the registered provider's homes. The registered provider must publish this policy.
- 1.2 Registered providers must ensure their tenants have the opportunity to agree a local standard, as set out in 2.4 of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.

2. Local area co-operation

- 2.1 Registered providers, having taken account of their presence and impact within the areas where they have properties, will:
 - identify and publish the roles they are able to play within the areas where they have properties; and
 - co-operate with local strategic partnerships and local strategic housing authorities where they are able to assist them in achieving their objectives.

3. Anti-social behaviour

- 3.1 Registered providers will develop and deliver services which are effective in achieving the core commitments of the Respect Standard for Housing Management³.
- 3.2 Registered providers will publish a policy on how they work with relevant partners to tackle anti-social behaviour in areas where they own properties.
- 3.3 Registered providers must ensure their tenants have the opportunity to agree a local standard, as set out in 2.4 of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.

³ Available from: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/landlordtoolkit

Value for money standard

This standard will apply to all registered providers.

The required outcomes

1. **Value for money** – In meeting all national standards and their local standards, registered providers have a comprehensive approach to managing their resources to provide cost-effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' and potential tenants' needs.

Specific requirements

1. **Value for money**
 - 1.1 Registered providers publish, as part of their communications with their tenants, information on at least an annual basis that demonstrates:
 - how they have allocated and prioritised expenditure on different areas of housing services covered by the national standards and their local standards and other priorities such as investment in the supply of new social housing
 - how they have ensured that it has secured value for money in that expenditure, how they have tested this, and the benefits that tenants can expect
 - their expectations for future value for money improvements and how they have taken into account in these expectations improvements arising from asset management, income management, and procurement policies
 - 1.2 Registered providers have arrangements for tenants to influence the services delivered and the cost of those services that result in service charges to tenants. Registered providers must ensure their tenants have the opportunity to agree a local standard (in line with the requirements of 2.4 of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard).
 - 1.3 Registered providers' governing bodies scrutinise the performance of the registered provider at least annually against this standard.

Governance and financial viability standard

This standard will apply to all not-for-profit and for-profit providers. It will not apply to local authority providers as different arrangements exist for regulation of these areas across the wider range of local authority service provision.

The required outcomes

1. Governance

Registered providers have effective governance arrangements that ensure they have structures, systems and processes to deliver their aims, objectives and intended outcomes for tenants and potential tenants in an effective, transparent and accountable manner. Governance arrangements ensure they:

- adhere to all relevant legislation;
- comply with their governing documents and all regulatory requirements;
- are accountable to tenants, the TSA and relevant stakeholders; and;
- safeguard tax payers' interests and the reputation of the sector.

2. Financial viability

Registered providers must manage their resources effectively to ensure their viability is maintained.

Specific requirements

1. Governance

- 1.1 Registered providers adopt and comply with an appropriate code of governance. They will give the reasons for their choice and explain areas of non-compliance with their chosen code.
- 1.2 Registered providers must establish and maintain clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for their board, chair, and chief executive. At least once a year, they must assess how effective these arrangements are in meeting the required outcomes above.
- 1.3 Registered providers submit an annual return, on an accurate and timely basis in a form determined by the TSA. This is currently the Regulatory and Statistical Return (and its successor the National Register of Social Housing).
- 1.4 Where a registered provider is within a wider group structure that is not regulated by the TSA, it will ensure with its parent that nothing in their relationship shall hinder the subsidiary's ability to meet all the national standards, and the TSA's effective regulation of performance against these standards.

2. Financial viability

- 2.1 Registered providers ensure that:
 - effective controls and procedures are in place to ensure security of assets and the proper use of public funds ;
 - effective systems are in place to monitor and accurately report delivery of their plans; and
 - the risks to delivery of financial plans are identified and effectively managed.

- 2.2 Registered providers will ensure that they have a robust and prudent business planning and control framework. Through this framework they will ensure:
- there is access to sufficient liquidity at all times;
 - financial forecasts are based on appropriate and reasonable assumptions;
 - planning sufficiently considers the financial implications of risks to the delivery of plans; and
 - they monitor, report on and comply with their funders' financial covenants.
- 2.3 Registered providers will provide to the TSA:
- accurate and timely statutory and regulatory financial returns; and
 - an annual report on any losses from fraudulent activity.

Making a difference on the ground

So what will this new approach look like on the ground? Some social landlords are already embracing the opportunity to engage their tenants more fully in challenging what they do. Others have started work as part of our pilot programme to develop local standards with their tenants. There are lots of different ways of working effectively with residents to deliver better services. Here we outline some examples. These are not the only ways of engaging tenants effectively – but all share a commitment to real influence and choice.

Accord Housing Group: Finding new ways to reach out

Imagine you get a text message from your landlord telling you how well it's doing at getting its empty homes back into use. But suppose you know that actually the organisation's performance isn't all it's cracked up to be – because you've seen two of its properties lying vacant for weeks just around the corner. That's just how text messaging could be used by residents to hold their landlords to account, says Accord Housing Group Chief Executive Chris Handy. "We need creative ways to engage people," he says. "These things can help residents to influence the way we deliver services, in what way and in what place. It's not just imposing our ideas on them, it's so they can influence and challenge and hold us to account. If we send a text message to say we've cut our void costs and they see that's not the case in their own experience, they can challenge us."

Text messaging, social networking groups and video and photo diaries for tenants are just some of the innovative methods Accord is planning to develop as one of the pilots on local standards.

Tenant Louise Jones is already very involved in ensuring the group's performance is kept up to scratch, going out and about checking services against the standards they are supposed to meet. She's also helped train other tenants to ask the right questions. "People could say 'Oh yes, we do that,'" she says, "but we have got to see the proof."

"I do feel that I have real clout," she adds. "They haven't got residents involved just because they think it's what you do, they are listening to us and keeping in contact with us."

Bristol Housing Partnership: Fair access for all

If you're a social tenant with disabilities in Bristol, getting your home adapted to your needs can be a postcode lottery. Some landlords in the city aim to fit adaptations within a couple of weeks, others might take months. Some might put in up to £2,000 of their own money, others might apply for grant for even the most minor work.

Now that's set to change, thanks to a project by Bristol Housing Partnership to transform the way aids and adaptations services are delivered in the city.

The partnership, which involves Bristol Council and housing associations in the city, is one of the successful bidders for the TSA's local standards pilot programme.

Its project involves the city's landlords working with a steering group of tenants to produce clear service standards for everyone. "At present, tenants get different levels of service depending on which part of the city they live in and who their landlord is," says Oona Goldsworthy, Chief Executive of Bristol Community Housing

Foundation, one of the associations involved in the project. "We want to do something which is meaningful and makes a real difference to tenants' lives. There will be more transparency, it might speed things up and we can be clearer about what we spend and what tenants should expect."

Salix Homes: Involving tenants on the ground

Salix Homes's tenants knew what they wanted when they were asked to come up with a plan to monitor their landlord's services. Real bite. "If your scrutiny doesn't have teeth, then it's just pointless," says Salix tenant Colin Marchbank-Smith.

Colin is now chair of Salix's customer senate, a pioneering group of tenants tasked with holding the ALMO to account on its performance. The 13 'senators' have unfettered access to information from across the organisation, plus the right to mediation from the local council if the board does not agree with their recommendations. The senate, set up last year, has already reviewed Salix's contact centre service, making a number of recommendations that have resulted in positive change for tenants. It has also secured a new deal for minor adaptations for disabled tenants' homes.

"People can actually see outcomes for themselves," says Colin. "We have got people who have never been involved with their landlord before."

Alison Hill, Salix's Director of Improvement and Customer Service, says, "Our customers were given a blank sheet of paper. They wanted to move away from the traditional tenants' associations. Those are all well and good but we all wanted something which could really hold us to account. They are really proud as we are of what they have been able to achieve."

Wakefield & District Housing: Listening to local priorities

Wakefield & District Housing tenant Colleen Adamson is an ambassador, tenants' advocate and watchdog all rolled into one. She's a tenant board member and she's been heavily involved in Wakefield's tenants' champions programme, which encourages residents to act as the eyes and ears of the association in their patch. She's also often out and about at the association's community activities, speaking to other tenants.

"It's talking to other tenants that encourages them," she says. "You can say: 'I helped to get that changed.'" The tenants' champions scheme, she says, has really lifted community morale, because tenants can see issues they have raised are being acted on.

Tenants at Wakefield have a number of different ways of helping to improve their landlords' performance, including acting as tenant inspectors and getting involved in the 'community talkback' scheme. That scheme encourages residents to set their own priorities for action each month, which the association will then follow up. "We are actively going to them and saying, 'What are your priorities?'" says Juliet Craven, Wakefield's Corporate Services Director. "We feed those through to the frontline, chase for answers and publish what we are doing locally. It makes people see that we are listening and that they have a direct route in."

All of this has contributed to a consistent rise in tenant satisfaction levels since Wakefield's homes were transferred from the council more than four years ago.

Colleen Adamson has certainly seen a big shift. "When I first got involved, we couldn't get our repairs done – nobody was listening," she says. "It's been a real change."

West Kent Housing Association: Tenants shaping services

When West Kent Housing Association asked its tenants about how often their grass should be cut, it was a bit surprised by the answer it received. Tenants wanted a better service – even though they knew full well it might cost them more. "It wasn't what we expected when we started," says Will Campbell-Wroe, Managing Director of the association's community development charity.

Thanks to the tenant feedback, West Kent introduced an enhanced grounds maintenance service, which is being tried out for a year at no extra cost before residents will be asked again whether they want to pay a little bit more for the service.

That's just one example of how West Kent is opening itself up to the views of tenants.

The association, which was the first in the country to receive the top three-star rating from the housing inspectors, organises a whole host of community events through West Kent Extra. It sees these activities as a vital way of engaging those tenants who might be put off by more traditional forms of tenant involvement. "People who won't come to formal meetings will happily give their feedback when you are doing something positive in the community," says Will. "What you end up getting is a much broader spectrum of opinion and you start to pick up the key issues. On grounds maintenance for example we went through the formal route, but we also got feedback at play days."

Jim Fisher, chair of the Association of West Kent Tenants and Residents, says tenant activists and the association have worked hard to reach out to tenants. "There is a lot of youth work, which gives young people the chance to put their views. The people growing up now don't want to get involved in meetings and committees, but they will tell you what they think."

On the more formal side, Jim says West Kent is involving tenants in scrutinising its policies and performance as it moves into the new regulatory era. "They are listening," he says.

Working with landlords and tenants

Improving the standard of service for tenants in England

What can tenants expect in the future?

- A greater focus on the issues that matter most to them, such as repairs, tackling anti-social behaviour and affordable rents
- More opportunities to have their say, to get involved and to hold their landlord to account
- A greater emphasis on their own priorities, through new local standards agreed by tenants and landlords
- More feedback from their landlord, including an annual report setting out just how well they are doing against local standards and the TSA's national standards

What can landlords expect in the future?

- More responsibility to work closely with their tenants to drive improvements
- More flexibility about how they deliver their housing services in return for more accountability to their tenants and partners
- A new, more mature relationship with their tenants and the regulator
- A fair and proportionate approach if their performance needs to improve

This publication provides a summary of some of the key messages of our full statutory consultation document. We have set out each of the TSA standards in full in this publication but more information on our approach, the use of our powers and the questions we are asking as part of this consultation can be found in the full document which is available on www.tenantservicesauthority.org or by telephoning our Customer Services team on 0845 230 7000 (option 1).

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A new regulatory framework for social housing in England

Summary

This publication provides a summary of the key messages of our full statutory consultation document on the new regulatory system for social housing. It sets out each of the TSA standards in full.