

## **Tenant Participation Workout in the East Riding of Yorkshire**

The Tenant Participation Workout is a series of 3 accredited tenant training courses. The TP Workout pilot training was developed under the Innovation into Action programme funded by the CLG and administered by the CIH.

AfCE had developed the training, working in partnership with Derby Homes and DACP. AfCE is now a recognised learning provider with the NOCN and is responsible for mainstreaming the TP Workout nationally. The course is aimed at giving tenants who are actively involved in participating the key knowledge and skills to be able to effectively engage. This includes developing the knowledge of what the housing service consists of as well as being aware of the regulatory and participative structures that are in place. Understanding how social housing works is only one side of the picture as the skills required to run an effective, democratic, community-based organisation are also a key part

The East Riding of Yorkshire Council has sponsored an annual programme of accredited courses which offers free places to all tenants living in council properties. Local Housing Associations have been invited to co-sponsor the training in return for places on the courses.

All the course sessions are delivered locally using the Council's own training facilities and are run over a 12 week period. Tenant participants are given travel expenses to attend each session and some home study is required to complete assignments for the accreditation.

AfCE provides free telephone and e-mail support for all learners involved.

All the courses are moderated and checked by the OCN to ensure that the quality of the teaching and the reliability of the assessments are maintained across the programme.

The course consists of 3 units that are accredited at Level 1 or 2. The success rate of participants receiving an accredited certificate is very high.

Courses not only provide an excellent baseline for tenants to improve their effectiveness in engaging with their landlord but can provide a launch pad for further adult learning. Some participants have been inspired to go on to Further Education and have enrolled in University courses, such as the Chartered Institute of Housing Tenant Participation Certificate.

### **Alpha Tenant Management Co-operative Getting Investment in the Housing Stock**

The Alpha Tenant Management Co-operative (TMC) was the first tenant-managed co-operative to be set up in Yorkshire. The idea of starting a Co-op came about as a result of the Government's Estate Action Programme when the Hyde Park Estate in Sheffield was completely refurbished in 1990. As a result of many years hard work from tenants living on the estate, an agreement was made between Sheffield City Council and the Alpha TMC to deliver services from a local, estate-based office. Services taken on by the Co-op include response repairs, caretaking, estate management, letting and tenancy management.

The Alpha TMC has been a success in managing the 151 flats and maisonettes and has made improvements in the response times for routine repairs. The TMC, over the last decade, has made substantial cost savings which have then been reinvested back onto the estate.

Sheffield City Council, alongside other local authority landlords, was required to explore investment options in order to meet the Government's Decent Homes target. Early tenant consultations led to the conclusion that a city-wide solution to meet the Decent Homes Standard would not be practical. Through a process known locally as the Neighbourhood Commissions, the Alpha TMC managed to secure Council support for a Community-Led Stock Transfer.

AfCE having had a long relationship with Alpha TMC since the negotiation and development of their management agreement, acted as the Independent Tenants' Advisor. AfCE worked closely with tenants from the TMC and officers from Sheffield City Council to develop a clear vision for the estate which would bring in a new Registered Social Landlord and capital investment for the housing stock but would also preserve the existing local management arrangements delegated to the Tenant Management Co-operative.

The Registered Social Landlord was selected through a competitive process. The Sanctuary Housing Group emerged as the favoured

partner and went on to develop the stock transfer proposal with the City Council and its tenants. A formal ballot took place at the end of 2006 with a strong vote in favour of the transfer going ahead. This left 6 months in which to develop a new management agreement and sort out future working arrangements with the new landlord. It was a tough target which all parties were committed to delivering. Despite the fact that there were no recognised model management agreements for the housing association sector, a bespoke agreement was ready in time as a result of the hard work put in by the TMC, the landlord and AfCE.

### **English for New Settler (BME) Tenants**

There are new settlers living in social housing throughout the UK and many have difficulty in accessing services because of their limited English language skills. St Leger Homes in Doncaster encouraged the setting up of a BME Tenants Association to enable new settlers to engage with their landlord. The Association is successful and is well attended with translators being provided by the landlord. However, the on-going cost of providing several translators at every meeting for the Group is unsustainable in the longer term and does not provide good value for money.

Government policy is to work towards new settler integration. The landlord is required to fulfil its obligations under its Equality and Diversity Policy and Tenant Participation Compact and ensure Best Value in Housing.

Many members of the BME Tenants' Association want to improve their English skills but the idea of enrolling on a college course is too much of a commitment. The usual barriers in deprived communities apply in this instance - time, care commitments to relatives or children, work, ill health, personal confidence and lack of knowledge of routes into learning.

Agency for Community Empowerment (AfCE) is a recognised tenant training agency with a track record of delivering local, regional and national projects. St. Leger Homes commissioned AfCE to develop and deliver a series of short courses in spoken English development for the BME Tenants Association.

Courses had to be designed to have short, frequent sessions, held on a regular evening alongside a normal Association meeting. The course content was to teach practical, spoken English, build confidence and active participation skills and develop life skills which included interacting with public services.

St Leger & AfCE ran short courses each lasting approximately six weeks with a review at the end of each course.

In the absence of other available solutions, the project has addressed immediate needs by being locally delivered, relevant, accessible, timely and fun. The course content had a tight focus and utilised a range of engaging teaching methods. Games, poems, songs, role play exercises and study visits all worked towards increasing participants' independence in the practical use of English.

It is envisaged that, as participant confidence builds, some participants will progress to enrolling in college courses. Developing good links with local colleges that provide progression routes to further learning are currently underway and St Leger is carrying out its own research which will result in the production of a local training directory.

These issues and barriers to learning and participation will be common to many new settler communities and social landlords. The materials, methods and lessons learned from this work will be invaluable to others with similar needs.

The absence of any readily identifiable programme or provision for the practical application of spoken English language development in the housing and English cultural context was the driver for this project.

For participants, the course acts as a stepping stone to greater things - more learning, better access to services, access to employment and increased confidence.

### **Family Finance Courses for Social Housing Tenants**

Social landlords have become increasingly aware of the importance of effective, family, financial management. For families on a tight budget, poor management of money can fuel a cycle of debt which impacts on social landlords in the form of rent arrears, bad debts and demands on staff time resolving tenants' debt problems.

The Government has recognised this problem and allocated resources under the Financial Inclusion Fund to help the worst off families understand the principles of money management and how to make informed choices about how they use and allocate their money.

Many landlords have had partnering arrangements with agencies like the Citizens' Advice Bureau that can help tenants with debt problems. Combining this type of agency support with free training has proved to be a successful combination that is capable of helping many tenants who have made the decision to take control of their own finances.

AfCE has developed a training course and workbook that demonstrate simple techniques and tools that can help individuals put their finances in order by working out a family budget.

The course has been so successful that AfCE has been asked to run it time and time again.

The workbook course covers:

- Identify how much money is coming in
- How much is going out and where
- How much money is left over or is short
- How to decide what bills must be paid first
- How to manage debt