



Take Control and Get Involved – Now Let's Make it Happen! New Involvement Structure, the Journey so far.....



Although embedding a customer focus in the way we shape services is not a new concept, the Take Control project has embraced empowerment to a new level in Dudley. The aim is to make services and decisions accountable and contestable by tenants and residents to achieve excellence in housing. This record takes you through the journey to date and highlights the key milestones in the table.

Under the Localism Act 2011 responsibility for regulation of social housing passed to the Homes and Communities Agency and a new regulatory framework was introduced. Registered providers are required to meet the relevant standards.

The tenant involvement and empowerment standard (in place from 1 April 2012) states that: Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- The formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities
- The making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- The scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved

It should be noted that this project has been driven by tenants and residents and all of the decisions have been made by consensus by them (Project Group) unless otherwise stated.

Following some independent research carried out by the Housing Quality Network, the Take Control Conference in September 2012, and a follow up event in January 2013, tenants and residents told us that the following four priorities were very important:

- ☺ Have more involvement in decision making
- ☺ Be able to examine and challenge Housing's performance
- ☺ Have more opportunities to get involved
- ☺ Improve communications between the Council and tenants

From this, the Participation Team worked with Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (DFTRA) to see how we could best meet these. DFTRA looked at lots of different structures and after careful consideration came up with a structure they felt would best meet these priorities. They called a special meeting on 27th June 2013. Tenants, residents, conference attendees, Councillors and Area Panel representatives were all invited along to share their views regarding the new proposals. After a lot of discussion the majority of people who came along agreed it should be looked at in more detail as they could see this was a positive change to build upon the work already undertaken by Area Panels. At the meeting, 20 volunteers wanted to work with DFTRA to develop the proposals further and the Take Control Project Group (TCPG) was formed. As well as volunteers, the Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet members for Housing were part of the group to lend their support, advice and experience.



It was quickly realised that this was going to be a big undertaking, but the Project Group were a determined unit who really wanted to make a difference. The volunteers had different experiences and brought together a wealth of knowledge and insight. They believed that the best regulators of the councils' housing service were fully informed and empowered tenants who receive the service, and could form judgements based upon their own practical experience.

The Take Control Project Group has been committed to reinvigorate tenant empowerment by embracing the revised regulatory Framework introduced in 2012 by the Homes and Communities Agency which gives tenants a clear scrutiny role in monitoring performance of Housing management and the repairs service. (More information around regulation and tenant scrutiny is attached in appendix A at the end of this document)

The following log is not an exhaustive list, but highlights some of the key letters issued, meetings held, documents produced and decisions made to date.

Key Achievements and Milestones

Date	Action
24.05.13	Project mandate agreed by Assistant Director.
04.06.13	Invitations issued to all tenants and residents associations, area panel members and conference attendees to attend DFTRA special meeting on 27.06.14 to present ideas for the new involvement structure.
19.06.13	Briefing note, draft structure and supporting docs emailed to the Director, Assistant Director and Cabinet Member in advance of meeting.
21.06.13	Meeting with Director, Assistant Director, Cabinet member DFTRA Chair and PD Team Manager Proposals agreed. A shadow arrangement was suggested followed by an implementation target date 01.04.14 All Area Panel councillors emailed and invited. (Read:13 Deleted:3 No response:8)
27.06.13	DFTRA Special meeting to present new structure. 31 for, 1 against 2 left prior to vote

	20 volunteers wanted to work with DFTRA to develop the new structure further and the Take Control Project Group formed.
10.07.13	Thank you and update letter issued to attendees plus Area panel reps.
12.07.13	Copy letter to all Area Panel councillors
23.07.13	Some reservations from Shadow Cabinet member discussed
14.08.13	<p>Positive project group meeting which agreed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 groups to concentrate on Board and Challenge elements - 5 volunteers agreed to start research on other organisations who had gone through a similar process. - Prepare brief for independent advisor (consultant). - Ask if Sandwell could come along to give an overview of their experience regarding the process. - Next meeting arranged Thursday 5th September - Procurement process explained to DFTRA reps - Calendar of key dates for project and working group meetings. - Minor amendments to TOR <p>Update issued to Assistant Director and Cabinet member</p>
05.09.13	<p>Project Group Meeting</p> <p>The volunteers provided feedback from the organisations they had contacted. It was very clear the need to have an independent advisor was crucial.</p>
11.10.13	Initial Scope of Impact Assessment
12.11.13	Some Project Group members visited Kirklees (including the Shadow Cabinet member). A set of standard questions had been prepared to learn from their experiences.
02.12.13	Information from Kirklees sent to the Project Group members.
11.12.13	<p>Meeting with Cabinet Member, Shadow Cabinet member, Director, Assistant Director Participation Team Manager and DFTRA Chair and Project Group member.</p> <p>Agreed Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Area Panels will cease once the Board is up and running. ■ The Board will be serviced by Housing. ■ Once up and running the Community Safety and Environment budget will be transferred to the Board to set the rules and allocate funding for projects. ■ Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet member to be the political representation on the Board. (To be agreed with the project group) ■ Assistant Director to draft a letter to all councillors with an update regarding Area Panels. To be signed off by the Director and DFTRA Chair and Cabinet member. To be sent out before Christmas. ■ Assistant Director to draft a letter to all Area Panel members regarding the position with Area Panels and recognising their hard

	<p>work. To be sent out before Christmas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arrange a meeting of this group for an update in early March 2014. ■ Safeguards of Cabinet and decision sheets to remain in place. ■ Cabinet member to be included in all Project Group correspondence. ■ Target date for Shadow Board 01.04.14 ■ The new structure will lead on challenge from the customers' perspective and lead on change and improvement. ■ Project Group to complete the brief for critical friend and get this in place ASAP.
19.12.13	<p>Director and Cabinet member issued letters to councillors and Assistant Director issued letters to area panel reps regarding new structure and position with area panels.</p>
15.01.14	<p>Project Group meeting held – 14 in attendance (inc Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet member) Agreed the following:</p> <p>Board to be made up of 15 people. 2 independents who can vary depending upon the subject matter 5 tenants from each township if possible 5 residents from each township if possible 1 leaseholder 2 councillors (Cabinet member and Shadow for Housing) First appointments to be for 12 months and offered to TRA/recognised forums and Area Panel reps to apply. – Application process not elective process. Consultants brief to be completed by end of January 2014.</p>
25.02.14	<p>Meeting with Project Group 25.02.14 The following was agreed: Working to an agreed timetable of having Board in place April/May with some flexibility. Start procurement process ASAP for independent consultant. (Expressions of interest to be invited) Shortlist by March 2014 Develop a recruitment pack for pilot Board. (Keep it simple) Recruitment Panel to include member of the Project Group with officer support and independent representative.</p> <p>Discussion around criteria and eligibility. Must live with the borough Over 18 years old Not owe rent / council tax No Dudley MB employees Must disclose any criminal convictions</p>

	<p>Although it would be ideal to have representation from across the borough it was recognised that we need to select the best candidates. Need to consider diversity.</p> <p>Agreed the first 12 months would be a learning curve for the Board to develop: Terms of Reference Once up and running the Community Safety and Environment budget will be transferred to the Board to set the rules and allocate funding for projects. Terms and conditions to be agreed. Consultant to develop a formal recruitment procedure, constitution, code of conduct etc. Formal Board in place by 01.04.15</p> <p>Agreed Tenants Conference September/October 2014 to launch.</p> <p>Board will have a strategic overview and not bring local/personal issues to Board. Copy of article for Home Affairs shared. Next meeting 18.03.14</p>
04.03.14	Some concerns raised from a councillor addressed by Cabinet member.
12.03.14	Expressions of interest emailed to potential consultants – closing date is 27.03.14
18.03.14	<p>Project group meeting held:</p> <p>Agreed information pack and application form Updated on consultants expression of interest.</p>
02.04.14	Participation Team Manager attended Housing Management meeting to update senior officers and Team Managers regarding new engagement structure. - Briefing pack provided.
03.04.14	<p>Participation Team manager met with Procurement to discuss tender process.</p> <p>Tender prepared from the brief. Invite firm proposal and method statement plus breakdown of costs inc. hourly rate. 70% quality / 30% cost. Procurement to be done through the Council's online Intend Process.</p>
10.04.14	Updated and agreed minor amendments to Applicants pack with Audit.
15.04.14	Board information and an application form posted to all TRA and Area panel members (200+)
06.05.14	<p>Consultants' interviews Panel: Procurement Manager/Participation Team Manager/Participation Officer/Project Group Members GH/Rev. SO/CJ DWA Phil Morgan Centre for Public Scrutiny HouseMark</p>

09.05.14	Overall winner Phil Morgan Ltd. All info forwarded to Procurement for notification on Intend.
12.05.14	All notices issued by procurement Team
28.05.14	Consultant met with Director, DFTRA Board Project Group and Participation Team
29.05.14	Tenants and Residents updated at DFTRA General meeting
05.06.14	Emails and letters to interviewees containing Interview Criteria
11.06.14	Interviews for Interim Board Panel: Participation Team Manager, DFTRA Chair and Consultant. (Consultant devised scoring criteria and questions)
16.06.14	Assistant Director contacted new Cabinet member with update of project and conference date 01.10.14 Copy of cabinet report and papers issued.
18.06.14	Phil Morgan met with DMG shared draft constitution
19.06.14	Participation Team Manager spoke to new Cabinet member. Some concerns around proportional representation.
24.06.14	Participation Team Manager and DFTRA Chair attended Corporate Board to present an update of the new structure. This was supported and approved. Draft Constitution circulated to Corporate Board. Met with Audit Team Manager to discuss draft Constitution and make suggested amendments. Meeting with Interim Board and Project Group to discuss draft Constitution and Code of Conduct
26.06.14	Training sessions confirmed and also offered to unsuccessful candidates and Project Group members. 24.06.14 – Interim Board and Project Group Meeting to discuss the draft Constitution and Code of Conduct 30.06.14 - Session 1 Introduction and Role of the Housing Board 07.07.14 - Session 2 Understanding Performance, Service Reviews and Positive Challenge 14.07.14 – Session 3 Finance 21.07.14 – Session 4 Understanding Housing Services and Setting the Scene for the first Service Review 28.07.14 – mop up sessions – an opportunity to attend a condensed session in respect of any missed.
30.06.14	Training Session 1 with Interim Board and Project Group Introduction and Role of the Housing Board Interview for Board vacancy
02.07.14	Draft Constitution Version 6 circulated.
03.07.14	Draft Constitution Version 7 produced taking into account amendments suggested from Audit, Interim Board, Project Group, Officers.
04.07.14	Arranged for new Cabinet member to meet Consultant on 07.07.14 - Option to stay for Overview presentation and Training Session with Interim Board and Project Group.

07.07.14	New Cabinet member met with Consultant to bring up to date with project, and stayed for part of training session 2. Training Session 2 for Interim Board and Project Group Understanding Performance, Service Reviews and Positive Challenge
08.07.14	DFTRA highlighted the need for the new Cabinet member's input and support of the new Interim Board to progress.
14.07.14	Training Session 3 for Interim Board and Project Group Finance
21.07.14	Training Session 4 for Interim Board and Project Group Understanding Housing Services and Setting the Scene for the first Service Review First Service Review discussed and set with Assistant Director - Adaptations
28.07.14	Mop up sessions Agreed pre-meeting with Interim Board 02.09.14 Project Group meeting to discuss updated Application process.
31.07.14	New involvement structure presented at Leadership Forum Update given at DFTRA General meeting
08.19.14	Board met with Deputy Leader Cllr. Pete Lowe and Cllr. Gaye Partridge.
10.09.14	Final version of Constitution agreed with Phil Tart and submitted with Cabinet Report
17.09.14	Report to Cabinet
01.10.14	Tenants and Residents Conference to Launch the new structure

This is the Project Group's journey to date. They are very proud of their achievements so far, though there is still a long way to go, as they are only at the start of a very exciting change for tenant and resident empowerment. The Project Group and Interim Board will continue to update this record as things develop and progress.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the Take Control Project Group.

For additional information please contact the Participation Development Team

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