



COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT
STRATEGY
2014-2017

Housing
Executive

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Copies of this document are available in other formats upon request

This Strategy has undergone Equality Screening, a copy of which is available upon request

FOREWORD



Over the last 40 years the Housing Executive has played a significant role in the physical and social development of our local communities. There has always been the recognition that housing strategies and policies are more than bricks and mortar; tenant involvement has been described as “one of the jewels in the Housing Executive’s crown” by the Customer Service Excellence Assessor in 2013. This is complemented by the Organisation’s ability to rise to new challenges and adapt to political, social and economic changes to deliver a top class service that will make a positive difference in people’s lives.

Community involvement is a cornerstone of the Housing Executive service. Just over £4 million was spent in 2013; this is a considerable investment and it is important that maximum benefit is delivered to the local communities. Although the Organisation is going through some fundamental changes, the commitment and enthusiasm to involve local people in local services remains constant and this strategy is designed to take us to a much more participative and empowering relationship with our customers.

This 2014-2017 strategic plan presents our vision of giving residents a real say in making their neighbourhoods good places in which to live and help build stronger communities. The broad customer base comprises anyone with a stake in neighbourhoods, including Housing Executive and private tenants, owner occupiers and leaseholders.

We would like to thank all those who responded to the draft strategy document and provided valuable critique and direction. We would particularly like to thank the Housing Community Network and Supporting Communities Northern Ireland for the benefit of their considerable experience and continued support.

Donald Hoodless
Chairman

Mags Lightbody
Acting Chief Executive

1. INTRODUCTION

Community involvement is about working with tenants, residents and others in order to ensure improvements to the neighbourhoods that we work in. It requires long term commitment to partnership working and is recognised by many in the social housing sector for the benefits it can deliver.

The Minister for Social Development at the NIFHA conference in October 2013 said:

“I want to see the building of communities at the core as we move into a new phase for housing.”

The Placeshapers’ publication “Practical Ways to Build More Homes and Thriving Communities” advises that the ethos and principles that bind its members together are:

- A commitment to putting local people at the centre of everything - giving residents and service users’ real influence over how we work and evolve;
- A passionate belief in providing more than just homes and simple “landlord” services - investing real care and value in the people and communities we serve;
- A recognition that we don’t work alone - Central Government, local authority strategic housing and planning teams, funders developers consultants and a host of other partners all play a vital role in helping us achieve our vision;

It is about harnessing the community based housing organisations accumulated and growing knowledge, relationship, influences and resources to breathe vitality growth and confidence into communities and local communities. “



Women in the Brandywell who came together to craft a mural depicting the history of women in the community.

Finally the Scottish Housing Regulator on the 10th Sept 2013 said “... and no business can operate to a high standard if it does not properly understand and engage with its customer. Meaningful engagement with tenants by both the Scottish Housing regulator and the tenant’s landlord are essential prerequisites of good governance and good service and in my view engagement must be a formative stage, where the tenant can shape policy and outcomes.”

The Housing Executive has a statutory duty to consult tenants on matters affecting their tenancies. Since the mid 1980s we have expanded our activities to encourage a more active and participative involvement of tenants and community groups in the delivery of housing services. The Housing Executive is committed to involving tenants and their local community associations in discussing and developing their local services and addressing housing issues generally.



Comghal McQuillan, Area Manager; Mags Lightbody, Acting Chief Executive and Colm McDaid, Chief Officer, SCNI with the Housing Executive's Customer Service Excellence Certificate.

Many significant outcomes have been delivered as part of the Community Involvement Strategy 2011-2013 but it is important that this review takes account of the significant internal and external change planned.

The Housing Executive recognises the significant benefits it has derived from working with communities in the delivery of its services.

It is important that we reflect on the success to date as we plan for the future.

An independent evaluation by the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) assessor in 2013 made the following observation:

“The most important work in the Assessor’s opinion is that which is undertaken, often with little or no fanfare, in helping communities in your estates to rise above sectarian issues, poverty and crime, and start to believe that they can be better. Your staff in many areas provide all kinds of support, from the practical to the advisory.

This area remains one of the jewels in the Housing Executive’s crown. In many cases residents are improving their estates with the help of your staff who are engaged in Community Safety Partnerships with other agencies and bodies, who often describe your work as pivotal in providing support in this vital area. Much of this work goes unheard and unsung.”

The Housing Executive is now looking to refocus these partnerships around tenants, leaseholders and residents and to ensure that this new strategy will prepare all parties for the transition period and longer term future.

The core aim of this strategy is that effective active and meaningful partnership with our communities, to give residents a real say in making their neighbourhoods better places in which to live, will be developed and built upon.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Engaging the local communities over the years has led to many positive benefits across social, economic and environmental spheres and it is important as we move on to make plans for the future that we pay tribute to the past.

The Housing Executive partnership in the development of social economy projects and the introduction of Community Service Agreements has created employment opportunities in some of the areas of highest deprivation. There has also been extensive capacity building among the communities as extensive training was, and continues to be provided to help people to have the skills to engage effectively on the issues that are important to them. These skills are transferable and along with digital inclusion initiatives enhance employment opportunities of tenants and residents in areas of social housing.

The importance of interagency working with the various community groups has been essential in improving the physical appearance of previously run down areas through the engagement of other statutory agencies to address their specific areas of responsibility. This inter group working approach is also instrumental in the success of a range of community cohesion and community safety projects in creating safer environments for people to live in.

Working with a number of representative forums e.g. Disability Forum and Rural Forums has also ensured the service can take into account the needs of all within our society and this will continue into the future.

Ever mindful of the need for continuous improvement the Housing Executive has regularly collected feedback on performance through the various community network groups, the annual Continuous Tenants Omnibus Survey (CTOS) and Mystery Shopping. The ability to extract meaningful performance reports from our various systems has provided figures by which to benchmark performance



UK Housing Awards.



Celebrating the launch of the Welcome Pack.



Cookstown Youth and Sports Club.



against other similar organisations. This will be continued into the future and used to target and tailor the services to the needs of the customer and form an integral part of the customer excellence strategy (see Drivers for Change page 8).

There have been many people who gave freely of their time and skills to develop the partnership between the Housing Executive and the communities it serves - from the early days of consumer panels to the well developed and regarded Housing Community Network (HCN).

It is important to recognise that the voluntary contribution of community representatives has provided significant value for money for the Community Development and Involvement process. Particular regard should be given to the services provided by Supporting Communities Northern Ireland (SCNI) as a facilitator and enabler for community development and involvement.

A more detailed tribute to the past is contained in Appendix 1.



Fivemiletown Estates Group with their Empowering Communities Award.



Caw/Nelson Drive Action Group hand over a cheque to McMillan Cancer Support.

3. THE DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

3.1 Journey to Excellence

The Housing Executive is currently in the process of internal reorganisation to deal with new challenges. The Journey to Excellence programme aims to ensure consistent approaches to business, customer and people excellence - the “golden threads” that should run through the whole Housing Executive, whilst still allowing a distinct focus on our strategic Regional Service enabling and Landlord Service delivery roles. The four main strategies within this are:

Business

We will develop and implement our first Business Excellence Strategy to ensure best use of available resources, keeping services and rents affordable and creating capacity to reinvest savings to improve services.

Customer

We will produce a Customer Excellence Strategy that will apply across all of our services, committing to excellence for every customer, every time and however they contact us.

People

We will produce a new People Strategy which will outline how an increasingly diverse and innovative organisation will recruit, develop, support and retain the best people to achieve our ambitions.

Technology

We will develop a Technology Strategy to set out how we will use modern technology to drive a modernisation programme which puts customers’ needs at the heart of all we do through enabling technologies such as improved workflows and customer insight.

The first main change in April 2014 was a separation internally into a regional housing services body and a landlord body which includes asset management and housing services. This internal separation provides the opportunity for a clear focus on both regional and landlord functions. Separate business plans will be developed under the corporate plan from April 2014.

There has been a realignment of the directorate structure to facilitate this and the introduction of a new directorate of Business Transformation to oversee business change and to ensure that this is in line with the direction envisaged by the Social Housing Reform programme.

In addition there has been a rationalisation of the management structure within the local office network around twelve areas and three regions. This may require some further amendment as the details of RPA are finalised.



Mags Lightbody, Acting Chief Executive with Housing Executive staff.

3.2 Social Housing Reform Programme

Complementary to the Journey to Excellence is the Social Housing Reform Programme announced by the Social Development Minister, Nelson McCausland In his statement to the Assembly on the 26 February 2013.

The main objectives of the reform programme are:

- To ensure we can continue to deliver well maintained housing stock;
- To improve the focus on strategy;
- To ensure value for money for taxpayers in the future;
- To provide an opportunity to become more efficient and innovative in delivering and maintaining social housing to tax payers and tenants alike.

4. STRATEGIC REVIEW PROCESS

4.1 Introduction

A Strategic Review was conducted from January 2013 until June 2013.

This built on previous initiatives undertaken with SCNI and the HCN in assessing the appetite and/or capacity for involvement. These initiatives produced a matrix for involvement and training needs analysis. The latter mirrors work done by the Scottish regulator and Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland in their “Stepping up to Scrutiny” programme.

During this review extensive consultation took place with key stakeholders, both internally and externally. Appendix 2 shows the organisations that provided a written response.

4.2 Process

Internal Stakeholders consulted:

- Director of Housing and Regeneration
- Assistant Directors of Housing and Regeneration
- Regional Managers
- Area Managers
- Local Outlet Managers
- Project Evaluation Teams
- Community Cohesion Manager
- Equality Unit

External Stakeholders Consulted:

- Central Housing Community Network
- Area Housing Community Networks
- Rural Forum
- Disability Forum
- Two District Housing Community Networks
- Community Development Workers
- Supporting Communities Northern Ireland (SCNI)
- UK Public Housing Providers

4.3 Outcomes

The outcomes from the consultative reviews carried out with the key stakeholders above are presented in a SWOT analysis, a copy of which is available on request.

During the course of the strategic review it was recognised that the key output was to be a strategic plan for the delivery of community participation for Landlord Services within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.



The SWOT analysis identified existing weaknesses requiring change, including:

- The Housing Executive is unclear as to its role and the role of other service providers in delivering community expectations e.g. community development.
- Current community participation structures do not fit into the new Housing Executive structures.
- Community funding spend is not proportionately spread across all areas.
- Housing Executive staff are unclear as to whether they should only be looking after the interests of their own tenants or also that of other residents such as private/housing association tenants and owner occupiers.
- The Housing Executive has limited tenant representation throughout the HCN.
- Housing Executive tenants have limited representation on the Housing Executive Board and hence in policy making, leaving the organisation open to accusations of tokenism.
- In future tenants may be paying for all community participation from their rents even though others may benefit.
- “The wrong people are in the wrong places”.
- Lack of equitable representation for all geographical areas in the Housing Community Network.

A matrix of involvement has been produced by SCNI working with the communities. This will be combined with the outcomes from the consultation to update the training needs analysis for communities and staff, essential for the successful delivery of the new Community Involvement Strategy.

The strategic plan for the delivery of community involvement has also been informed by current thinking with relation to both community cohesion and the community asset transfer strategy.

Community cohesion is an integral part of the service to be delivered to the customers on the ground but that it would be addressed, in an iterative manner, as part of the “Building a United Community” Implementation plan.

The Community Asset Transfer Strategy is to be delivered at a date in the future.

It was also clear that a major rebranding and refreshing of both the structure for involvement, the support provided to it and the outcomes were essential part of preparations for the future including:

- community grants rather than funding individual workers,
- scrutiny
- social economy projects rather than community service agreements.

5. STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2017

Community involvement within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (Landlord and Regional Housing Services)

5.1 Vision

To work in active and meaningful partnership with our communities, to give residents a real say in making their neighbourhoods better places in which to live.

5.2 Values

Another way of defining value is the way we work.

The values within this strategy will include the values for the new landlord within Housing Executive but will be agreed with our central tenant forum. They are likely to encompass values such as:

- We focus on our customers
- We work together
- We take personal responsibility
- We value and develop tenants and staff
- We find better ways to do things which improve value we offer

5.3 Objectives/Aims

This strategy is developed to help deliver the Housing Executive's objective of "Building Stronger Communities". The specific aims will be:

- Customer Focus
- Customer Support
- Customer Impact
- Service Improvement

5.3.1 *Customer Focus*

- a) Be accountable to Housing Executive tenants throughout Northern Ireland for the delivery of Housing Executive services.
- b) Continuously seek the customers' views and strive to improve service delivery with the customers.
- c) Train and empower residents and staff in what each expect from the other.
- d) Enhance community development in neighbourhoods to enable scrutiny to take place.

This will be facilitated through our Tenant Scrutiny Panels.

5.3.2 *Customer Support*

- a) Establish a database of tenants and residents who wish to participate in the process, in the areas that they wish, and in the manner that best suits them.
- b) Support and encourage a network of community groups throughout Northern Ireland.
- c) Encourage and promote volunteering.

This will be facilitated through continued investment in support for those who wish to be involved.



5.3.3 Customer Impact

- a) Work pro actively with residents, other agencies and housing providers to deliver improvements in the environment and resident’s quality of life.
- b) Enable difficult to reach groups to be empowered within the process.
- c) Encourage and promote social economy projects.
- d) Promote digital inclusion.

This will be facilitated through resident and inter agency partnerships, including estate inspections, work within specialist forums and continued investment in support for those who wish to be involved.

5.3.4 Service Improvement

- a) Share best practice and continuous improvement.
- b) Ensure customer impact and participation is a mandatory part of policy change and major procedural improvement.

Establish an interdependent relationship between the Board of the Housing Executive and the Housing Community Forum Central Panel.

5.3.5 Strategy Outcomes

Outcomes will be delivered and specified as part of annual business plans;

This will be facilitated though the central housing community forum, changes to strategy policy and major procedural development and the use of task teams;

An independent facilitator should work with Housing Executive to deliver these outcomes.

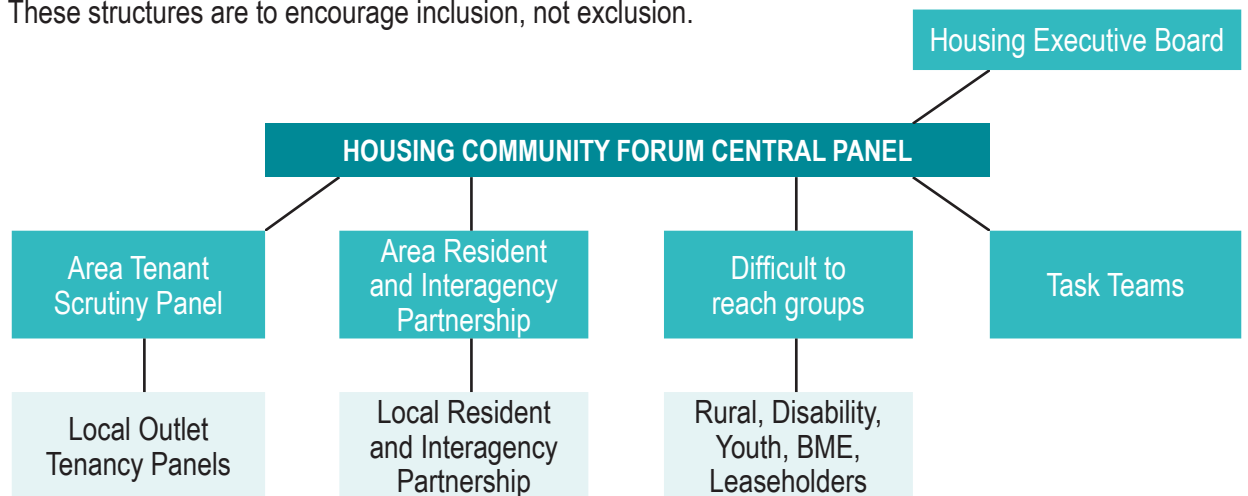
5.4 Delivery Structure and Mechanisms

Our job is engaging with local groups/agencies/community champions, brokering mutually agreed plans and activities to deliver on the ground.

5.4.1 Structure

Housing Community Network

These structures are to encourage inclusion, not exclusion.



Training for Tenant Scrutiny Panels, Resident and Interagency Partnerships, Difficult to Reach Groups and Task Teams will be delivered as part of the process.

Area Managers are expected to become an integral part of new community planning structures within the new councils.

5.4.2 *Tenant Scrutiny Panels*

Tenant Scrutiny is about tenants holding Housing Executive to account on the delivery of services at a local level and also about improving business performance.

Each of the twelve Housing Executive areas will develop Tenant Scrutiny Panel(s) so that Housing Executive tenants will have a voice in ensuring that the local areas and outlets are delivering the services customers require and to the level of quality that customers expect. Area Managers should agree the frequency of meetings with representatives.

It is envisaged that the panels will agree on the services they wish to scrutinise in the year ahead and will be involved in the business planning process at Area level.

Area Managers will ensure that feedback and feed forward mechanisms are in place.

Residents and Inter Agency Partnerships (making our estates better places in which to live)

These partnerships are likely to include: community representatives, statutory agencies, other providers e.g. housing associations. However this is not an exclusive list.

Examples of some good practices are:

- Estate Inspections
- Joint Working Groups
- Community Partnerships

The Housing Executive will enable residents from areas and estates to participate in groups which strive to make their areas and estates better places to live. This will facilitate all residents in estates including owner occupiers and private tenants.

Each Area may develop different working arrangements dependant on the circumstances prevailing in their area at that point in time. Area Managers should agree the frequency of meetings with representatives.

Area Managers will ensure that feedback and feed forward mechanisms are in place.

The annual business plan should reflect the proposals and outcomes for residents and interagency partnerships.



Members of the Tenants Scrutiny Panel in the West.



5.4.4 *Difficult to Reach Groups*

The Housing Executive will proactively engage with the following sectors:

- People with disabilities
- Youth
- The rural community
- The Black, Minority and Ethnic communities

Each body responsible for coordinating activity must ensure feedback and feed forward.

Additional communities may be added to the above groups during the life of this strategic plan. The annual business plan for the landlord should reflect the proposals and outcomes for the involvement of difficult to reach groups.

The Housing Executive will regularly review the make-up of groups to determine representation.

5.4.5 *Task Teams*

Specific teams of residents will be drawn together into working groups to examine in detail matters for consultation and change. These groups will have a limited life and examine only the one off products in question. They will also select services to jointly scrutinise with the objective of delivering a better service for the customers throughout Northern Ireland. Task teams may include specialist input where required.

The Housing Executive will maintain a database of interested participants. We will also maintain a database of tenants outside of the Housing Community Network who are willing to be involved in ad hoc consultation where required.

The annual business plan for the landlord should reflect the proposed strategies/policies and outcomes for the involvement of the task teams. It is envisaged there may also be unplanned policy changes that require involvement.

5.4.6 *Housing Community Forum Central Panel*

One nomination from each of the twelve areas will sit as a member of this group. A nomination from each of the four Housing Forums (Rural, Disability, Youth and BME) will also sit on this group. This group should be consulted regarding all policy and major procedural changes.

Housing Community Forum Central Panel will act as a Quality Assurance group for the Board of the Housing Executive. Terms of reference have been agreed with the Central Forum, whose role will include:

- To act as a Central Consultative Panel to the Housing Executive, particularly where it involves tenant and community development
- To have a 'recognised' and 'meaningful' role in the monitoring and decision making processes of Housing Executive services
- To influence decisions affecting tenants and communities
- To scrutinise policies and procedures relating to Housing Executive services
- To participate in specific working groups/Task groups



The Rural Residents Forum plays a vital role in addressing rural housing issues across Northern Ireland.

- To be the 'voice' of tenants and communities and ensure that proper structures are in place to represent tenants and communities effectively
- To engage, in a meaningful two way process with the Housing Executive Board twice per year
- To have a 'lobbying' role in relation to legislation affecting Housing Executive, tenants and communities
- To continue to develop as a model of Best Practice for tenant and community involvement
- To act as a consultative role in the Housing Executive mystery shopping exercise

The group will formally meet with the Housing Executive Board twice each year. This will allow two way communication on the process to date and expectations for the future.

All new policies should include a Customer Impact Statement as part of the Chief Executive's Business Committee; all new policies should be consulted upon with Central Housing Forum (CHF) before presentation to the Board. The revised structure should facilitate feedback and feed forward mechanisms.

5.4.7 Housing Executive Commitment

The investment made by the Housing Executive in support of community Involvement is £4,024,787 and is outlined on page 32.

The Housing Executive has agreed at Board level to move funding away from year on year funding of individual projects to a community grant scheme and this strategy will reinforce our commitment to investments within communities which deliver social, economic and environmental benefits.

In addition the Housing Executive has had a long standing funding arrangement with Supporting Communities NI who have supported communities across Northern Ireland.

5.5 Conclusion

This strategy forms the basis to enhance the social investment and maximise the impact of community involvement. In order to achieve this there will be a need to clarify responsibilities for this work at a local level. This will necessitate the retention of community compacts (agreements) signed between Housing Executive and the groups with whom they are involved.

This strategy also supports the Customer Excellence Strategy emerging from the Journey to Excellence which puts the customer at the centre of our service delivery.



Achievements to date

1.0 Work

1.1 *Social Enterprise*

The Housing Executive has worked in partnership with communities to develop social economy projects and create jobs. Some of the most striking examples can be seen in the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project in Belfast, the Hanwood Centre in Dundonald and the Strathroy Co-operative in Omagh.

A community grant scheme is currently operating to encourage initial steps in social economy projects to develop throughout Northern Ireland.

1.2 *Community Service Agreements*

Community Service Agreements (CSA) were introduced by the Housing Executive in November 2006. The agreements which are drawn up between a local Housing Executive Manager and a local community group specify the services to be carried out by the association within a given period normally a year.

The services are delivered on behalf of the Housing Executive tenants for agreed fees; the fees payable being dependent on the service(s) to be delivered. Currently there are 4 services which may be carried out under a CSA including inspections of void properties, inspection and cleaning of low rise flats, post scheme satisfaction surveys and leaving out/returning Euro-bins from flats. The fees are paid to the community groups to enhance their outcomes.

These can be considered as embryonic social enterprise projects and the plan this year is to reconsider them in this light.

2.0 Healthy living

2.1 *Community Growing Spaces*

Community Growing spaces have been supported and promoted by the Housing Executive in partnership with local communities. The growing of vegetables and flowers to be used within the local community creates a sense of community and interdependence, promotes education and develops local cohesion. This concept is now sought after by many communities throughout Northern Ireland. Fine examples can be seen in Springvale and Louisville flats in Belfast, Ballybeen estate in Dundonald, Riverside Park in Castledawson and The Fountain in Derry/Londonderry.

3.0 Cohesion

3.1 *Community Cohesion*

The Housing Executive promotes discussion, engagement and leadership throughout the HCN structure and the Inter-Community Network by incorporating “consultation” and “participation” at Area and District HCN on the implementation of Community Safety and Community Cohesion Strategies.

Community Cohesion funding is aimed towards initiatives such as Annual Good Relations Awards, Better Bonfire Initiatives, Estate Based Cohesion Initiatives, the Intercommunity Network, Community Re-imagining and Race Relations Projects.

3.2 *Community Safety Projects*

The Housing Executive plays an integral part in Community Safety projects including Restorative Justice Partnerships, Housing Executive Mediation Services, Night Time Warden Services, ad hoc Community Safety Initiatives and the Good Morning Belfast Initiative.

4.0 Community Hubs

A number of community groups have used premises provided initially by the Housing Executive, to develop a hub for their community and work with other agencies to provide a range of services. Examples include Drumellan and Springfarm.

4.1 *The Housing Community Network*

The Housing Executive has developed the Housing Community Network (HCN) into a very successful sounding board for Housing Executive policy development affecting tenants as well as helping to monitor and improve service delivery across all areas of Housing Executive work. The HCN has been an extremely important cog in the Housing Executive’s machinery with over 400 member groups. It has been seen as an example of best practice among other statutory bodies in Northern Ireland for its structure, strength and commitment. SCNI played an important part in the success of the HCN. The Housing Community Network has representatives, duly elected, from all of its Districts and Regions throughout Northern Ireland. They regularly meet and have representatives in the Central Housing Community Network. The HCNs facilitated consultation on schemes, policy development and major procedural change.



Workers at the Suffolk vegetable garden.



They provided a vehicle for sharing good practice and were important to the delivery of Housing Executive services.

Deidre MacBride Associates' research in August 2008 explored whether there are any direct links between participation in the HCN, the development of bonding, bridging and linking social capital and the capacity of community groups.

“The data suggests involvement in the HCN increases the capacity of community groups by increasing their bonding, linking and bridging social capital.

Bonding Capital: The increase in capacity to complete projects was significantly less (53%) compared to the increase in capacity to share information and resources within own community (67%).

Bridging Social Capital: The analysis of the responses suggests that networking plays a role in increasing groups' capacity. Thus involvement in the HCN increased their capacity to work with organisations outside their community, their capacity to participate in an inter-agency network and to lobby collectively, to identify best practice and new ideas and solutions and implement them for the benefit their communities. The National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work indicate the core practice values of working and learning together and networking promote change processes and community cohesion”

4.2 *Promotion and Community Planning*

The HCN has been promoted to a range of local and regional stakeholders in view of its impact on social capital and community cohesion. It advocates for “privileged” access to community planning structures building on its “bottom up” structure.



Mini World Cup - La Copa del Mendo in Lisburn funded through Race Relations.



Milburn Over 50's Tea Dance funded by our Community Grants.

5.0 Individual skills

5.1 *Capacity Building*

A programme of engagement and local networking in conjunction with the HCN structure to promote the ability of HCNs and community representatives. This complements the policy role of the Central HCN and challenges policies that are not working at local level. It encourages community groups to engage with wider community structures and key policy areas. Extensive training has been, and continues to be, delivered by SCNI in developing community representatives' capacity to engage in the most effective manner.



New computers provided through the Community Grant Scheme for the youth club at the Welcome Church in Cambrai Street, Belfast.

5.2 *Digital Inclusion*

There is a compelling business case for the Housing Executive to promote digital inclusion. For those who are socially excluded show the same characteristics as those who are digitally excluded and are disproportionately represented in the tenant population. The Hills report revealed that those in social housing have lower rates of employment, lower income, higher rates of long term employment and lower mobility than those not living in social housing.

While not a silver bullet for eliminating social exclusion, digital inclusion can be one of a number of pathways for tenants to be upwardly mobile, reduce dependency and improve their standard of living.

The Housing Executive has worked with SCNI and the Department of Finance and Personnel to train digital champions throughout Northern Ireland. This is only the beginning of a much needed commitment to residents in the social housing sector.

Hostel Digital Inclusion Project

This project involves providing internet access to residents of a Housing Executive hostel and is being carried out in partnership with the Government's Digital Inclusion Unit. At a time when more services are being provided on line the project will determine the benefits of widening access to the internet to the Housing Executive Government Departments and tenants.

5.3 *Community Navigator*

The introduction of community navigators was a recommendation arising from the Sustaining Tenancies Strategy. Community Navigators are trained volunteers who will help signpost tenants to the support they require to help them sustain their tenancies. The Navigators can also provide practical assistance such as help in letter writing, completing forms and budgeting. This has been piloted with varying degrees of success throughout Northern Ireland.



6.0 Environment

6.1 Estate Inspection Toolkit

The concept of an Estate Inspection Toolkit was devised to enable agencies and communities to engage with each other. Agencies involved include the Housing Executive, Roads Service, local Councils, and PSNI who, together with local community groups, have undertaken an interagency approach to address issues in our estates through “Estate Inspections”. The objectives of this interagency walkabout are to address the concerns of community groups regarding the physical environment, to build capacity within the community and to develop leadership skills among community leaders.

The estate inspection recording mechanism comprises a toolkit completed on the day of the inspection and is used as a guide, recording document and action plan. Once the assessment is completed, the toolkit is distributed to each agency for action.

Each agency accepts responsibility for progressing a series of actions identified on the day of the walkabout and a reporting and monitoring process is used to enable progress against the actions. Each agency reports back through mutually agreed planned interagency meetings.

This initiative has made a tremendous difference in communities, improving the quality of life for residents, giving them confidence in dealing with statutory agencies and developing their capacity as a community group.

7.0 Services

7.1 Mystery Shopping

Community representatives have been trained in and have developed analytical and process review skills in the mystery shopping process see 11.2 for further details.

Emergency Planning

After the severe winter of 2012 community groups put together emergency planning process to assist vulnerable people in their localities with practical assistance.

8.0 Other agencies

The Housing Executive has worked in partnership with other agencies particularly in developing mechanisms for “hard to reach groups”.

8.1 Disability Forum

As a result of need identified through the Housing Executive’s Community Involvement Strategy, the Disability Forum had its inaugural meeting on 7 June 2011 to agree terms of reference. Comprising community representation in a pan-disability fashion including sensory, physical, learning, hidden, mental health or multiple disabilities, the Forum considers the housing services provided by the Housing Executive for people with disabilities.

The Disability Forum’s aims are to:

- Act as a disability panel highlighting the views and interests of people with disabilities to the Housing Executive without distinction of age, gender, race, political, religious or other opinion;

-
- Focus on disability issues as they relate to housing;
 - Provide pre-consultation assistance to the Housing Executive in the development of policies and procedures;
 - Provide feedback on Housing Executive policies and procedures as they affect people with disabilities;
 - Identify gaps in service provision and provide suggestions for improvements;
 - Provide advice and guidance on publications for people with a disability;
 - Identify issues for Central HCN to be raised at the Housing Executive's Central level;
 - Provide feedback to those residents in the areas they represent through existing community communications channels;
 - Highlight recurrent concerns which need to be addressed by the Housing Executive;
 - Contribute to community based initiatives and programmes where appropriate.

To date the Forum has met and discussed a variety of policy issues including a Tenant Manual for housing applicants with disabilities, local access and facilities and emergency planning for adverse weather conditions. The completed Tenant Manual was formally launched on 30th May.

8.2 *Youth Forum*

Working in partnership with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Simon Community, the first product of the Youth Forum was "A Foot in the Door", a comic strip which was circulated for availability at local office reception areas. This progressed to the production of a "Foot in the Door" DVD, highlighting the pitfalls of getting your own place. The DVD's popularity has seen it develop into a trilogy of DVDs for young people, providing some general guidance in regard to securing a home of their own and beginning the process of integrating into communities.

A further DVD looking at the issue of under 18 homelessness issues was developed with the help of members from the NI Youth Forum Executive Committee. Aimed at a slightly lower age group, this production has gone a little way to filling a gap in information provision regarding homelessness for this particular age group. It is anticipated that the final product is one which may be of use to communities as they engage with the younger generation and the issues that they bring, and also something that may be of use to teachers as part of the lifelong learning programme. This will be investigated further.

The partnership with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF) has worked well; with some creative thinking and input from young people themselves, the idea of a board game looking at how to handle money and learn life skills has been explored. During the year a working model of the game was developed and, with input from NIYF members, progressed through different versions before being passed to various NIYF groups in June 2013 to play and provide feedback before a final version is developed.

During the past year the partnership between the Housing Executive and the NIYF has been formalised with a Service Level Agreement which will see the Youth forum undertake some specific areas of research among the under 25 age group. Areas to be explored focus around attitudes to shared housing, homelessness, and effective communication with young people. It is anticipated that the ensuing reports from this work, which will be carried out during 2013/14 will provide a basis for the further development of the work with the under 25 age group in general and especially younger tenants.

The Housing Executive/NIYF partnership is currently exploring some of the issues around debt with the possibility of a further DVD, following different case studies with different outcomes, being developed.



8.3 *Rural Forum*

The Housing Executive has provided specialist support to “Hard to Reach” groups to fully engage with the organisation. The development of the Rural Residents Forum has encouraged the involvement of rural residents and provided a facility to allow more detailed consideration of policies and proposals affecting rural communities. The forum has considered issues including the Neighbourhood Officer service, community planning, rural homelessness, energy efficiency and rural proofing. The Pilot “Village Voice” initiative has been successful in providing community representation for two isolated rural communities.

The Rural Residents Forum membership, while broadly representative, needs to ensure all Housing Executive “Areas” in Northern Ireland with in rural locations are represented on the forum.

The forum has a key role in highlighting housing issues and concerns affecting rural communities. The Housing Executive will consult with the forum in the implementation of the organisation’s Rural Housing Strategy and in the development of other policies and procedural changes impacting on rural residents.

The Housing Executive will explore and develop opportunities for rural groups within the HCN to develop their understanding of media literacy through digital inclusion training.

9.0 **Community conference**

The Annual Community Conference is the second biggest event in the Housing Executive’s calendar, with 250 delegates including community representatives, housing professionals and volunteers. The aim of the event is to celebrate the exceptional work carried out by communities in our estates, and for communities to share best practice.

10.0 **Investment**

The Housing Executive has invested in community involvement by providing support through SCNI, facilities, funding of workers, staff time and use of facilities. Further details are given below.

10.1 *Supporting Communities Northern Ireland*

Supporting Communities Northern Ireland (SCNI) is a province wide community development organisation with a staff of 21. SCNI liaises with over 600 community groups throughout Northern Ireland and actively works with and supports approximately 150 community associations, providing a wide range of support from assisting in the development of community groups to the provision of training, information and funding advice. Many of the community groups which SCNI has helped to develop now work with the Housing Executive and SCNI, playing a vital role in enabling and facilitating the community sector to actively engage and help deliver the Housing Executive’s Community Involvement Strategy.

The Housing Executive has been working with SCNI since the organisation was formed in 1979, then known as the NI Tenants Action Project (NITAP). From a pilot programme involving 3 housing estates and only 2 staff, the organisation has grown and evolved over the past 30 years. The Housing Executive provides most of SCNI’s funding.

SCNI has assisted the Housing Executive in developing the Housing Community Network into a very successful sounding board for Housing Executive policy development affecting tenants. It has helped to

monitor and improve service delivery across all areas of Housing Executive work. The HCN remains an extremely important cog in the Housing Executive's machinery to this day with over 400 member groups. It is seen as an example of best practice among other statutory bodies in Northern Ireland for its strength and commitment.

Apart from assisting in the development of the HCN, SCNI has been actively involved in many other important projects in partnership with the Housing Executive over the years. A few examples include: coordinating a major Mystery Shopper exercise – now in its 10th year, examining over 360 separate customer interactions; helping to organise an annual Community Conference involving 250 community delegates showcasing best practice, now in its 13th year; developing and implementing pilot projects in relation to tenant scrutiny, digital inclusion and sustaining tenancies; creating opportunities for community economic regeneration and sustainability.

The Housing Executive has many partners on whom it depends to deliver its services to our customers. However, one of our most important partners is SCNI with whom we have developed a close working relationship over the past 30 years. This relationship is very important to us as SCNI provides a vital independent role and ensures that the tenant/community's voice is heard through various channels including the various components of the HCN.

Community buy-in and involvement is crucial for engagement. SCNI has played a vital role in building the capacity of the HCN members and helping to monitor services and ensure consistency across all of Northern Ireland.

10.2 *Community Lettings*

The Housing Executive is keen to encourage real involvement and scrutiny of its services at a local level. A fundamental part of this process has been the provision of community bases within estates to provide a resource for meeting, training and community bonding. Common success stories have included the establishment of learning and resource centres, which have provided a springboard for further education, as well as affordable childcare and after-school homework clubs.

The Housing Executive currently provides approximately 300 properties, of various sizes and to various degrees of usage, which enable community groups to provide an engine for improvement and involvement within their estates. Holding an established community base is a standard prerequisite for potential funders.

10.3 *Community Development Projects*

The Housing Executive has awarded Community Development funding from a number of Groups to continue previously funded projects, including the employment of community development workers.

10.4 *Community Grant Scheme*

The Housing Executive now provides funding for a Community Grants Scheme. The funding is to promote the themes of Volunteering, Social Economy and Inter Agency working throughout all parts of Northern Ireland. The maximum grant is set at £5,000.

10.5 *Use of Facilities*

The Housing Executive has provided a range of facilities eg photocopying mailing etc to community groups especially to those groups in the early stages of formation.



10.6 Budget

The 2013 budget for community involvement in Landlord Services was £4,024,787. Detailed expenditure by region is detailed below:

	Belfast	South	North	Total
Employee Costs				
Central and Regional Management	£25,039	£38,038	£35,289	£98,365
Central Community Involvement	£31,999	£51,651	£42,329	£125,978
Local Office Staff	£280,928	£515,228	£382,001	£1,178,157
	£337,965	£604,917	£459,618	£1,402,500
Direct Non Pay Costs				
Housing News	£12,954	£20,910	£17,136	£51,000
SCNI	£151,016	£243,766	£199,769	£594,550
Youth Forum	£1,770	£2,857	£2,341	£6,968
Area HCN	£1,358	£4,338	£8,970	£14,666
Local HCN	£3,311	£13,617	£9,221	£26,149
Community Service Agreements	£13,345	£5,728	£0	£19,073
Community Project Workers	£219,945	£54,367		£274,312
Community Lettings (Estimate)				£1,000,000
	£403,699	£345,582	£237,437	£1,986,718
Overhead Apportionments				
Office Premises	£60,244	£77,849	£70,714	£208,807
IT	£42,305	£77,774	£65,420	£185,499
Finance	£22,045	£39,907	£34,536	£96,488
Corporate Management/Personnel	£33,663	£62,170	£48,942	£144,775
	£158,257	£257,700	£219,612	£635,569
	£899,921	£1,208,199	£916,667	£4,024,787

11.0 Customer impact

Since the mid 1980s the Housing Executive has encouraged a more active and participative involvement of tenants and community groups in the delivery of housing services, in scrutinising their local services and addressing housing issues generally. Examples of this are given below.

11.1 Continuous Tenants' Omnibus Survey CTOS

The Continuous Tenants' Omnibus Survey (CTOS) is an assessment of the attitudes of Housing Executive tenants. The CTOS is a cornerstone of our service delivery in terms of the Northern Ireland Act (1998), "Modernising local government - in touch with the people" (1998), targeting social need and best practice. It is also linked to our strategic objective, "Delivering better public services".

The annual reporting of results from the CTOS allows us to measure the effect of action taken as a result of government directives; The CTOS monitors the level of customer satisfaction with our services and identifies areas where we need to improve the quality of our services.

11.2 *Mystery Shopping*

Since 2002 the Housing Executive has used Mystery Shopping in assessing service provision. The process has been independently managed by Supporting Communities NI.

The purpose of Mystery Shopping is to examine how organisational policies and procedures are translated into actual customer service provision. In other words, it focuses on the customer's experience of housing management. Members of the Housing Community Network (HCN) pose as customers and test a number of key areas of service. Mystery Shopping is not used to 'catch people out'; queries are not obscure or complicated. The scenarios used relate to everyday issues and the Mystery Shoppers are provided with the necessary training to ensure that they are objective in their approach.

The results provide an opportunity for the Housing Executive to view themselves as their customers do. The analysis provides the Housing Executive with an opportunity to consider potential organisational improvements.

The framework used includes Local Offices, Customer Service Units, Accounts Units, Housing Benefit Units and Area based Land and Property Offices.

The process is independently managed by Supporting Communities NI (SCNI) and this report relates to the tenth Mystery Shopping exercise which has been conducted on behalf of the Housing Executive. The last full Mystery Shopping exercise was completed in 2009/2010, however, SCNI has managed two supplementary customer focused exercises in the form of a Tenant Led Inspection of Community Safety in 2010/11 and a more focused Mystery Shopping Exercise of the Emergency Repair service in 2011/2012.

Mystery Shopping is a powerful way to assess service standards and complements other research methods such as the Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey.

The outcomes from this exercise are analysed at both Central and Area levels to determine where the business can be improved and how that might be demonstrated. It then forms a fundamental part of the Business Plan for the coming year.

11.3 *The Business Planning process*

Local Service Outlets commit every year to a business planning process. From customer feedback through their local housing communities, Mystery Shopping and the Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey they indicate in their Business Plan the outcomes they expect during the course of the year and the areas they intend to improve. They regularly report on this to their local communities as an integral part of their tenant scrutiny.

11.4 *Continuous Improvement Reviews*

The Housing Executive has completed two major reviews of service delivery. These were Housing Benefit and Arrears Management. A fundamental review of the processes in all outlets throughout Northern Ireland was conducted using the LEAN methodology. An integral constituent of these reviews was the inclusion of customers in each area to determine which parts of the process were wasteful in their opinion and what outcomes were required by them. Their contributions were then incorporated into the revised solutions.



12.0 Evaluation

12.1 Internal Evaluation

A programme of qualitative evaluations of Housing Executive funded external projects is in operation. The outcomes of the evaluations complement the existing management of risk arrangements. The evaluation reports inform future decisions as regards the funding of Outside Bodies, particularly in relation to issues such as strategic fit, partnership working, best practice, community development, project development and expansion, value for money, and learning and development.

12.2 External Evaluation

The Housing Executive participates in an annual assessment of customer service. This is carried out by an independent assessor from England. We achieved the Customer Service Excellence Standard in 2013. The assessor stated:

“This has again been an excellent assessment, with no areas of partial completion noted”

It is clear that the impact of the community involvement has been that the importance of:

- Customer views
- Understanding impact on the customer
- Customer feedback
- Customer satisfaction and targeting of services is widely accepted

13.0 Benchmarking

The most recent exercise on benchmarking was carried out by the Housemark, Benchmarking group. This exercise was carried out in 2012/2013. The benchmarking group consists of 31 organisations, all with a stock of over 20,000 properties. The outcomes are shown in the table below:

Number Supplying Data	Best Value Performance Indicators	Local Authorities		Housing Executive		
		Top 25% Performance	Median Performance	Performance	Rank	Quartile
23	% respondents satisfied with the overall service provided	89%	84%	88.2%	8th	2nd
20	% respondents satisfied their views listened to and acted upon	71.2%	67.2%	71.6%	5th	1st
27	Total cost per property for resident involvement	£29.62	£38.27	£34.05	9th	2nd
27	Average pay cost for a resident involvement employee	£30.1k	£32.0k	£29.3k	2nd	1st
27	Resident involvement employees per 1,000 dwellings	0.47	0.57	0.54	12th	2nd
27	Non pay cost per property	£3.56	£7.10	£11.11	20th	3rd

APPENDIX 2

Consultation feedback

Consultation Respondents

Written responses to the Community Involvement Draft Strategy were received from the following:

Groups/Individuals affiliated to the Housing Community Network

Central Housing Forum
Coolessan Community Association
Des Meredith
Disability Forum
Fermanagh Housing Community Network
Moneydig Rural Network
Rural Forum (Housing Executive)

Councils

Ballymena Council
Limavady Council

Voluntary/External Organisations

Age Well
Disability Action
Housing Rights
NICEM (NI Council for Ethnic Minorities)
Rural Community Network
Supporting Communities NI (SCNI)

Statutory

NILGA (NI Local Government Association)

Housing Executive

Linda Hutchinson, Race Relations Officer
Rural Policy Unit

Housing Executive

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