



**Tenants  
Leading Change**

Investing in tenant involvement can produce financial, service, social and community benefits. The housing sector needs to do more to identify and publicise these benefits.



Community Gateway Association – a tenant vote

These are the conclusions of recent report “An investment not a cost: the business benefits of tenant involvement”.

Between October and November 2014, evidence was assembled from 160 housing association and local authority landlords (owning just under half of the homes owned in the social housing sector).



Leathermarket JMB – David Hays and young people

Evidence was gathered through an online survey, a more detailed call for evidence and a series of workshops. Detailed case studies were also carried out with five landlords who were chosen for the range of benefits they had identified. These case studies allowed verification of claims made.

This summary sets out the five main findings from the report. For further information, please contact [nic@cch.coop](mailto:nic@cch.coop)

*An investment not a cost* was produced by the National Tenant Organisations working with the University of Birmingham. The TLC programme was funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

The full report is available at [www.nationaltenants.org](http://www.nationaltenants.org)  
For further information, please contact [nic@cch.coop](mailto:nic@cch.coop)

**1** 20 landlords identified cost savings of **£6.64 million** – about **£29** per home. Such savings made across all social housing would save about **£118 million**. The figures suggest that tenant involvement can contribute to delivering significant costs savings.



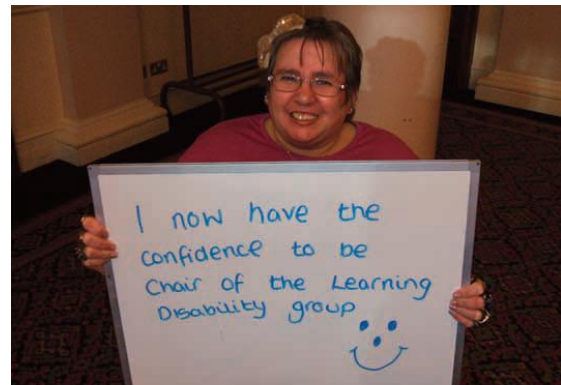
AmicusHorizon – making cost savings

**2** Tenant involvement often produces service improvements. Involvement in scrutiny reviews, in inspections, in communications and in tackling anti-social behaviour, – were all cited as areas where tenants make a difference. Some said that tenants can produce higher quality than consultants and over a longer period of time.



Soha Housing – involving young people

**3** Tenant involvement can produce a social dividend. It can enable community and mutual support networks, tackle isolation and be a good way to involve diverse communities and young people. Amongst those involved, it can build self-esteem, confidence, and employability.



Hull City Council – building confidence

**4** Tenant involvement can help to increase tenant satisfaction. Whilst it is difficult to directly attribute satisfaction changes to involvement, all of the case studies reported satisfaction increases.

**5** Sector understanding and articulation of benefits delivered through tenant involvement was very limited. In a market driven environment, it is important that landlords are able to clearly identify what benefits they get from involvement.



## Tenants Leading Change

### Case study – AmicusHorizon

Owning and/or managing just under 28,000 homes, AmicusHorizon has assets of £1.25 billion and an annual turnover of £157m. It is a member of the G15 which represents London's 15 largest housing associations, and has a significant programme to build new homes across London and the South East.



AmicusHorizon's work since 2009 to involve residents shows not just that it is possible for large housing associations to work together with residents to shape a large scale housing business, but that it gives them a competitive edge.

**1** Back in 2009, AmicusHorizon was an incoherent and inconsistent group of six subsidiary housing associations, loosely structured around a parent Board that struggled to maintain effective control over its subsidiaries. It's Board and Senior Management Team decided to reshape its governance around resident involvement.



**2** Since 2009, residents have contributed significantly to producing over £2million in existing or projected annual costs savings. Whilst it is not easy to attribute cost savings, the outcomes listed on the next page would not have happened in the same way if residents had not been involved. Savings are as follows:

Areas of resident influence	Total annual savings
Formal complaints reduction	117,332
Reduction in second calls	191,129
Gas contracts	1,075,378
Boiler Contractor Give Back Scheme	100,000
Kitchen/bathroom contracts	70,000
Kitchen/bathroom contracts (from 2015)	395,173
Grounds maintenance	100,000
Rent statements	24,000
Newsletters	20,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£2,093,012</b>

NB. annual savings are based on costs in 2013/2014 except where projected in advance.

These savings are indicative. In some cases, residents highlighted key value for money areas that needed to be addressed, and in others, they participated in teams that chose value for money outcomes.

**3** The methodology to assess these cost savings, set out in detail in the full case study, is potentially indicative for other large housing associations.

**4** Cost savings have been achieved alongside improvements in services (such as better and earlier resolution of complaints; improved contracts, services and contributions to the local community).

**5** Service improvements have been mirrored by increasing satisfaction. From 2010 to 2014, satisfaction has gone up from 87% to 97%.

“if there was no dialogue with residents, AmicusHorizon would not build trust with us. It’s about AmicusHorizon having a grown up conversation with residents”  
**Residents’ Council member Linda Scamp**





## Case study – Community Gateway Association

Community Gateway Association is a stock transfer housing association set up in November 2005 to take ownership of the 6,000 homes formerly owned by Preston City Council. It was the first housing organisation based on the membership based Community Gateway model, through which only its tenants and leaseholder members own the organisation and have legal control over its rules and structure.

**1** Community Gateway Association has a Gateway Tenant Committee (GTC) that is integral to its decision-making and scrutiny in the association.

“There is a huge cultural effect of having tenants working closely with staff at all levels in the organisation. It contributes to a *family* culture where everyone sees each others’ point of view.”

**Diane Bellinger, Community Gateway Association CEO**

**2** The GTC participated in decisions to bring CGA’s repairs service in house, resulting in first year savings of £1m. The GTC had long been expressing concern about the performance, flexibility, consistency and VFM of CGA’s former repairs arrangements. GTC tenant scrutiny has also led to the grounds maintenance service being brought in house which will lead to further savings.



3

Scrutiny exercises have particularly led to service improvements. A 2012 VFM scrutiny review recommended reducing the inconvenience and costs of repeat visits. By late 2014, 99.5% of all repairs were completed within timescale and follow on jobs had been reduced. A 2013 Welfare Reform scrutiny review contributed to increasing satisfaction with information and support received regarding benefits.

4

CGA considers that tenants have had an impact on increases in satisfaction. Overall satisfaction has risen from 76.9% in 2006 to 90.0% in 2014. CGA reflected that “we can't prove that satisfaction levels are a result of involvement, but the GTC is integral to our decision making”.

5

CGA tenants have also made many other contributions. They led development of a community minibus service for which a social value return of £6 for each £1 invested was reported in 2014.

They were instrumental in setting up Purple Pathways – training opportunities for tenants, staff, and board members. They promoted the introduction of CGA membership for under 16s, and a Young Gateway Action Group for 16 to 25 year olds.



A joint resident and staff Employment and Skills Action Group has benefitted several hundred people, with several helped into work, and many more building their self worth and confidence. The Overton Road Group participated in a community-led housing development on a derelict garage site in the Larches area of Preston.





## Tenants Leading Change

### Case study – Hull City Council

Hull City Council owns about 25,300 homes in the city of Kingston upon Hull. Hull operates its housing service under a set of 8 involvement principles that include open information, tenants deciding their own depth and degree of involvement, everything in housing open to influence, involvement being everyone's business, early enough influence, getting everyone involved, demonstrating that everyone's views have been taken into account and providing feedback, and planning for successful involvement.

**1** Hull has been on a journey to arrive at its current tenant involvement strategy.

In 2003, Audit Commission inspections into Hull's housing service concluded that services were poor. Tenant involvement mechanisms were weak and overall tenant satisfaction and satisfaction with opportunities to influence the service were both about 50%.



Significant changes needed to be made, and Hull's investment in tenant involvement has been a key part of turning around its housing service.



**2** Hull reports a number of service benefits that have developed in partnership with tenants. In particular voids performance, a service area that the Audit Commission had particularly found weaknesses in, has been turned around. Tenants directly input into the relet standard, leading to relet times falling since 2011 and new tenant satisfaction with their home increasing to 94%. The Multi Storey Living Focus Group has developed monitoring standards for communal cleaning services and this has led to a marked improvement in cleanliness. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has assessed the contact centre, anti-social behaviour and recharges to the Housing Revenue Account during the past two years, leading to many service improvements.

**3** Tenant satisfaction has increased substantially since Hull's 50% low points in 2003. Overall tenant satisfaction is now at 80% and tenant satisfaction with repairs has increased over time to a current 98.1% - which Hull tenants and officers attribute particularly to feedback given to Hull's tenant inspectors.

**4** Staff sickness has reduced substantially – only 3 out of 447 employees have taken time off for stress in the past year. This is partially attributed to the positive working relationship with tenants, where more tenants are participating in Hull than ever before with a strong collective desire for further progress, resulting in happier staff.



**5** Individually, tenants trained through Hull's training academy raise tenant expertise and provides them with back to work options. Generally, Hull's culture has resulted in strengthening of confidence and skills – "it has made me realise I am far more capable than I first thought – I have a new level of confidence".





## Case study – Leathermarket Joint Management Board

Leathermarket Joint Management Board (JMB) is a Tenant Management Organisation that has managed 1,419 of Southwark Council's homes in London since 1996. About two thirds of the homes are tenanted, with the other third leased. The JMB is a strong example of what can be achieved where residents take responsibility for the delivery of services.

**1** Set up following local discontent with housing services, tenant involvement in the JMB has led to improved repairs, rent arrears, communal cleaning, gardening and other services. Most repairs are now carried out within appropriate timescales and done to high quality. Estate cleaning and gardening is checked with local residents and usually meets their high standards.



**2** Carrying out a backlog of major repairs work has been a priority for the JMB over several years and a commitment was made four years ago to top slice 3% of the JMB's annual budget each year to provide additional funding to carry out this work. Since taking responsibility in 2013 for the Housing Revenue Account for the Leathermarket estate, 3% of the JMB's annual budget (£148,000 in 2013) has been saved each year.





**3**

In the JMB's last five yearly continuation ballot (held in 2011) 68% of tenants and leaseholders voted, with 92% of voters being in favour of ongoing JMB management. Prior to this ballot, the JMB also carried out a sample survey (in which 173 residents voted) which showed that 86% agreed that the estate was well looked after; 73% felt that the JMB's services were better than Southwark's; 82% felt that a tenant managed service is important; and that 79% would recommend to a friend to live on the JMB's estates.

**4**

Personal relationships the JMB has with its residents means that it performs well in areas such as tackling unlawful occupation, fire safety issues, and in supporting vulnerable residents.

The JMB performs well on anti-social behaviour issues, working in partnership with Southwark Council on formal resolutions. Potentially more important to local residents are many incidents that would end up being considered ASB in most housing providers, but which the JMB resolves immediately as part of its day to day operations.

““The JMB knows everyone personally and the residents all know the manager and senior staff. When we are working on something – we know our people and how they will respond to something and we plan our work accordingly”.

**John Paul Maytum –  
Leathermarket JMB Chair**

**5**

The JMB is currently developing 65 new homes on two sites on JMB estates in partnership with the Council. “Getting local residents involved unlocked the sites. It made those people scheme supporters rather than protestors in front of the bulldozers. The homes wouldn't have been built if it hadn't been for the JMB building this support”.



### Case study – Soha Housing

Soha Housing, owning and managing about 6,000 homes in areas around South Oxfordshire, was set up in 2005 with a strong tenant involvement structure. Formed from stock transfer from South Oxfordshire District Council, Soha has been built on a strong tenant dynamic. It lists “empowering and maximising the involvement of residents to make a difference” and having “highly satisfied customers” amongst its aims.

**1** Tenants were involved in procurement decisions for repairs and planned maintenance contracts which led to savings of £655,000. The grounds maintenance contract went through tenant surveying and focus groups at an early stage to ensure tenant views were central to drawing up the specification. Specific tenant oversight of

the process was through one of the Tenants Forum’s Portfolio Holders, and specification and quality assessment of tenders was through a panel with an equal split of tenants and officers.

In general, Soha considers that it could not afford to resource the volunteer time that tenants give to the organisation. Soha has plans to cost these savings in the future.



**2** Tenant involvement has led to considerable service benefits. Tenant involvement during repairs contract tendering and mystery shopping has resulted in a more customer focused service. Tenant inspections have improved post repairs surveys, improved voids and grounds maintenance performance.



Tenant scrutiny halved the number of formal complaints received, and complaints are now dealt with more promptly and feedback consistently captured. An Access for All Group helped tailor services to best match tenant needs. Youth involvement in Berrinsfield village contributed to eliminating reports of street ASB. Tenants have participated closely in Soha's *we're here to help* response to Welfare Reform, resulting in 88% of tenants saying that Soha had done a good job in keeping them informed about benefit changes.

**3**

Soha's overall satisfaction rate has increased from 77% in 2005 to 88% in 2014, and satisfaction that Soha listens from 54% to 76%. Soha considers that a strategic

decision to invest in and focus on involvement, particularly including tenant inspectors and scrutiny, led to satisfaction improvements.

**4**

Tenants have played an important role in Soha communications, particularly producing Soha's Annual Report. Its engaging and informative nature means it is read by tenants, improving accountability to tenants, and resulting in a threefold increase in feedback forms.



**5**

Soha considers that work, volunteering, digital inclusion and tackling isolation are part of its business. Soha refer to tenants who have got into work as a result of their volunteering, as well as growth in self-confidence, friendships and informal networks.