

Housing Rights

when everyone has a **home**



Involving Everyone

Including 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland

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Author biographies

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We have drawn on many existing sources to review current research and practice. In particular, we have made use of the human rights approach to participation and service access, as developed and applied in Northern Ireland by the organisation Participation and Practice of Rights. We have also used material from the Glasgow Homelessness Network's Shared Solutions model. In each case we wish to acknowledge the source of the ideas and to thank these organisations for their previous work.

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Abbreviations

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
DSD	Department for Social Development
GHN	Glasgow Homelessness Network
HRS	Housing Rights Service
HSC	Health and Social Care Services
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
PHA	Public Health Agency
PPI	Personal and Public Involvement
PPR	Participation and Practice of Rights Project
PRS	Private Rented Sector
SCNI	Supporting Communities Northern Ireland
SHRP	Social Housing Reform Programme
TPAS	Tenant Participation Advisory Service

Executive summary

At a time of great change for housing policy and practice in Northern Ireland, it is important that the widest possible range of current and potential service users are involved in discussion about the planning and delivery of housing services. It has long been recognised that some groups have been excluded, either through discrimination, lack of opportunity, or because the opportunities available are unsuitable. These groups have become known to often well-meaning service providers as ‘hard to reach’. Recently it has become better understood that such groups are not actually ‘hard to reach’ if organisations make appropriate efforts to include them; therefore in this report we have chosen to use the alternative term ‘easy to ignore’.

The aim of this research was to assess and make recommendations for the greater involvement of ‘easy to ignore’ groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland, with particular emphasis on engagement with the Social Housing Reform Programme.

The research objectives were:

- To review the relevant academic literature, policy documents and good practice guidance, in Northern Ireland and elsewhere
- To identify specific good practice case studies in Northern Ireland and elsewhere and to examine them in greater depth
- To gather expert opinion from a selection of service users, practitioners and policy-makers from housing and other service areas
- To assess the data and to make recommendations for change, to include addressing the research questions.

Organisations contacted included a government department, housing and homelessness umbrella organisations, and voluntary organisations involved in the areas of supported housing, homelessness, mental health, learning disability, education, ex-offenders, and minority ethnic groups. We included organisations from outside the housing field in order to get a wider idea of current good practice.

The most common ‘easy to ignore’ groups were identified as:

- **‘Equality’ groups:** Black and minority ethnic groups including Roma and Travellers; young people; asylum seekers; refugees; children; people with mental ill-health; people with learning difficulties.
- **Where people live:** homeless people; private rented sector tenants. Many of these groups have other needs and belong to equality groups.
- **Communication issues:** poor literacy and numeracy; poor social and interpersonal skills; lack of internet access; English as a second language.
- **The nature of impairments and ‘unwanted voices’:** exclusion of emotionally vulnerable people and those with complex needs; ex-offenders.

Poverty was also a unifying factor in all these groups.

The main barriers to involvement included:

- **Methodological barriers** – how participation is organised: lack of information provision, lack of definition of the scope of the involvement;
- **Physical barriers** – access issues: location of meetings for dispersed groups;
- **Attitudinal barriers** – the way organisers respond to service users' needs: regarded as the most serious obstacle, centred around power imbalances and lack of trust;
- **Financial and resource problems** – providing practical support: lack of provision of practical help such as travel costs and lunch, plus staff shortages;
- **Timing** – planning events around users' ability to attend: failing to acknowledge the chaotic lives lived by some service users
- **Consultation/ participation fatigue** – respect everyone's time and energy.

Many good ideas were put forward about how to 'make it work', which we divided into 5 categories:

- **Values and rights:** establishing a philosophical basis for working together;
- **Co-production and capacity release:** a methodological framework for working together;
- **Creating an appropriate environment and use of involvement techniques:** a process for working together;
- **The role of advocacy groups:** working with allies; and
- **Making an impact:** achieving outcomes. The priorities for achieving impact were identified as continuity, visible benefits, good working relationships and responding to incentives.

Specific suggestions to improve participation included:

- Above all – LISTEN (this was said by almost everyone);
- Honesty and transparency – don't give people the run around;
- Demonstrate the value of the process and provide feedback;
- Include participation in everyone's work, not an optional extra;
- Involve, consult and empower – people should be involved in both the design and delivery of services;
- Talk about barriers, be flexible, adapt and change when needed;
- Try to seek a positive outcome; be open to new participation techniques;
- Ask why do you want to do this? What will be the impact?
- 'Take the pain out of meetings';
- Include user involvement in regulation, or make it a statutory requirement.

Involvement in policy and strategy was acknowledged to be particularly difficult. Avoiding jargon was important, but connecting lived experience to policy change was considered to be the best way to make policy and strategy relevant to service users.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research findings identified a promising environment for building on existing good practice and positive attitudes. However, we also ask why current structures seem unable to accommodate a wider variety of service users, whether to contribute to policy and strategy or to service delivery.

We suggest this could be because there is no systematic approach to improving practice. Therefore the research concludes by recommending an integrated model for service user involvement in housing, for all participants including 'easy to ignore' groups. The model is in three parts: Philosophy, Process and Resources:

Philosophy:

The recommended philosophy of service user involvement is based on the rights of the service user and a co-production approach to the development of policy and strategy, which values lived experience alongside professional expertise. Together these factors are intended to instigate a culture of mutual respect and partnership.

Process:

Good intentions are meaningless without a process that works. We propose three stages: finding the right structures; facilitating engagement; and promoting capacity release.

Resources:

At a time of public sector cuts it is important to re-state that good quality service user involvement costs money, and involving easy to ignore groups can cost more. It is important to share and develop good practice, therefore the establishment of a small regional centre to promote excellence in user involvement in housing services is proposed.

We have uncovered a great commitment to service user involvement on the ground, including elements of good practice and a general wish to establish a culture that respects lived experience. A new approach to involvement will benefit everyone, whether or not they are currently considered to be 'easy to ignore'.

Introduction

1. Background

It is a time of change for housing policy and practice in Northern Ireland. Public sector budgets are restricted and likely to become more so, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The crisis has also affected housing markets and caused insecurity in employment. Housing need remains high; in addition, demographic change and social pressures are leading to substantial demand for housing-related support services. Policy-makers must respond, and should not do so without the involvement of everyone who is likely to be affected. Many services user groups are currently excluded from involvement in the planning and delivery of housing services. This report explores how that could be different.

Northern Ireland's housing system is currently experiencing a number of pressures. The Housing Executive estimates that 2,000 new units of social housing a year are needed to address housing need adequately. Due to funding constraints, the Programme for Government 2011-15 committed to 6,000 units, and 6,101 were completed by March 2015 (NIHE, 2015), thus meeting the Northern Ireland Executive's targets but falling short of the Housing Executive's equivalent figure of 8,000 homes. There is also a loss of units through the House Sales Scheme.

In contrast, there is a steady stream of applications from people in housing need. In 2013-14, 18,862 households applied to the Housing Executive to be rehoused due to homelessness and 9,649 (51%) were accepted. This figure has remained broadly constant for the past ten years, within the range 8,470 – 10,444. In other words, a rough average of *9,000 households a year* are accepted as statutorily homeless in Northern Ireland. There has also been a 45% increase in the social housing waiting list from 2004 to 2014, from 27,515 to 39,967. Of these, a consistent proportion of just over half are considered to be in severe housing need although not homeless, known as 'housing stress' (NISRA and DSD, 2014). It is harder to anticipate future need for housing with support, but in 2012 the Supporting People programme was funding assistance for 17,000 people (NIHE, 2012a).

Owner occupiers and people living in the private rented sector (PRS) have also faced issues. Home owners have suffered house price volatility over the past decade which has led to an estimated 40% being in negative equity; furthermore, the economic situation continues to place others at risk of repossession and in need of advice and assistance (DSD, 2015a). Over the past ten years, the percentage of households renting privately has almost doubled, from 8.4% to 16.4% of all households, and from 2012-13 has exceeded the proportion of social renting (NISRA and DSD, 2014; figures exclude vacant stock). The increase in private renting gives

greater urgency to the need to consider how private tenants might have more of a voice to protest against poor conditions.

The policy response

Housing policy is a devolved function under the direction of the Minister for Social Development. Relevant policies and strategies over the past few years have included: a private rented sector strategy (DSD, 2010); a housing related support strategy (NIHE, 2012a), currently under review; a homelessness strategy (NIHE, 2012b); and a community involvement strategy for Housing Executive tenants (NIHE, 2014). Other policy changes with an impact on housing include the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability in 2007 and Transforming Your Care (Health and Social Care Board, 2011), both of which encouraged living independently in the community rather than in institutional settings, whenever possible. And of course, the long-delayed Welfare Reform Bill plans to introduce the spare room subsidy/ bedroom tax in a modified form, along with other benefits changes more or less in line with the changes introduced to the rest of the United Kingdom in 2012.

Northern Ireland's first overarching Housing Strategy was issued for consultation in 2012 and a final Action Plan in 2013 (DSD, 2012; DSD, 2013). The Housing Strategy has five themes:

- Ensuring access to decent, affordable, sustainable homes across all tenures
- Meeting housing needs and supporting the most vulnerable
- Housing and Welfare Reform
- Driving regeneration and sustaining communities through housing
- Getting the structures right

Under the fifth heading, 'getting the structures right', a review of the Housing Executive was undertaken in 2011 (DSD, 2011). It set out a number of options for the future delivery of social housing and also includes the potential relocation of work on housing policy and strategy for all tenures. These options are being explored and developed by the Social Housing Reform Programme (SHRP), which has the following aims:

- To improve housing structures, making the system financially sustainable for tenants and the Northern Ireland Executive;
- To ensure delivery of well-maintained housing stock and increased investment in social housing more generally;
- To improve the focus on strategy and regional delivery of services; and

- To create space and freedom for social landlords to play a more proactive role in the communities they serve.

Programme delivery is divided into two parts:

- **Structural reform** of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), including its landlord functions (the management of NIHE properties) and regional functions (the strategic roles covering all housing in Northern Ireland, whether private or social)
- **Policy reform** of social housing rent, tenant participation, local government engagement, the regulation and inspection of social housing and the housing functions of DSD.

The most recent SHRP activities have been consultation on *A Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015 – 2020* (DSD, 2015b) and on *Proposals for a New Regulatory Framework for Social Housing Providers in Northern Ireland* (DSD, 2015c).

2. Service user involvement and ‘easy to ignore’ groups in housing policy and strategy

It has long been recognised in assessments of ‘traditional’ tenant participation that some groups have been excluded from the opportunity to get involved, either because they are from groups that have been discriminated against, or because they are accessing services other than mainstream social housing, for example supported housing, homelessness services, or the private rented sector. These groups have become known as ‘hard to reach’:

‘Hard to Reach’ and ‘Hard to Hear’ groups are most often those people who are perceived as difficult to consult with and engage – due to barriers encountered when accessing traditional participation methods and structures. In some circumstances people may also become labelled as “expensive to reach or hear” as *organisations may not have the skills, knowledge and resources to hand to ensure that these participation methods and structures are appropriate for people from a diverse range of backgrounds.* (Oliver et al, 2009: 9). [emphasis added]

Recently it has become better understood that the term ‘hard to reach’ says more about the housing organisation than it does about excluded groups: ‘many of these communities are not actually that hard-to-reach and do not consider themselves as such. It is simply that organisations have not put enough effort into seeking their

views' (Bolton Council, 2007: 25). Therefore we have chosen to use the term '**easy to ignore**' instead.

At a time of austerity and uncertainty it is important for the voices of services users to be heard. The Housing Strategy (DSD, 2012) does not have much to say about this, which is surprising given the long-standing existence and success of the Housing Executive's Housing Community Network. The review of the Housing Executive and the SHRP has included consultation, although the focus has been on social housing tenants. The strongest commitments to service user involvement in recent policy are to be found in three documents:

(i) *The Housing Related Support Strategy 2012-2015:*

'The NIHE will ensure client involvement is maintained at the heart of the programme and that clients have the opportunity to engage at any level of the programme (individual, service, organisational or strategic). We will develop a range of measures to enable hard to reach and excluded groups to effectively contribute to the development and delivery of the programme' (NIHE, 2012a: 37).

The Strategy states that there are significant benefits to client involvement and that existing good practice should be built on to ensure this happens.

(ii) *The Community Involvement Strategy 2014-2017:*

'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' (NIHE, 2014: 17).

(iii) *And in the recent draft Tenant Participation Strategy 2015-2020:*

'Effective tenant participation methods, developed by landlords who have asked and listened to their tenants' needs, particularly where tenants are living with disabilities, will remove barriers arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability' (NIHE, 2015b: 20).

We regard the commitments in these documents as a useful starting point for the development of a more comprehensive policy approach to 'easy to ignore' groups.

3. Research aim, objectives and research questions

An initial literature and policy review and scoping discussions with the client led to the development of the research aim, objectives and research questions. The research aim was:

To assess and make recommendations for the greater involvement of 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland, with particular emphasis on engagement with the Social Housing Reform Programme.

The research objectives were:

1. To review the relevant academic literature, policy documents and good practice guidance, in Northern Ireland and elsewhere
2. To identify specific good practice case studies in Northern Ireland and elsewhere and to examine them in greater depth
3. To gather expert opinion from a selection of service users, practitioners and policy-makers from housing and other service areas
4. To assess the data and to make recommendations for change, to include addressing the research questions.

And the research questions were:

- i. How can the vision and purpose of service user engagement in the SHRP be developed? And can this vision and purpose be extended to involvement in housing policy and strategy development on a longer term basis?
- ii. What is the most effective way of grouping service users for meaningful engagement?
- iii. What is the most effective way of grouping the SHRP issues for meaningful service user engagement?
- iv. How might structures be developed to bring together service users groups and SHRP issues?
- v. Which participation techniques would be the most appropriate and effective to involve the widest range of service users?
- vi. How might effective engagement be measured?

4. Research methodology

The research design was qualitative and informed by the literature and policy review. The primary research method was semi-structured interviews, which involves the following of an interview schedule but also allows the interviewer to vary the order of the questions and to ask supplementary questions to gain additional information (Bryman, 2004). Semi-structured interviews are ideal for obtaining the most appropriate information from a wide variety of participants who may have different areas of knowledge and expertise, as was the case in this research.

Sixteen interviews were carried out, involving a total of nineteen people including representatives from a government department, housing and homelessness umbrella organisations, and voluntary organisations involved in the areas of supported housing, homelessness, mental health, learning disability, education, ex-offenders, and minority ethnic groups. We included organisations from outside the housing field in order to get a wider idea of current good practice. Details of the interview schedule and the organisations involved are provided in Appendix One.

Interviews were supplemented by one project visit and attendance at one user group in Northern Ireland, and a study trip to Glasgow hosted by the Glasgow GoWell project, in which five projects were visited as listed in Appendix One. The research was carried out in line with the Queen's University Code of Conduct and Integrity in Research, with particular emphasis on informed consent and confidentiality. The majority of individuals interviewed did not want to be identified, therefore for reasons of consistency we have not named anyone.

Report structure

This report continues with Chapter Two, which reviews current published debates and practices relating to user involvement in housing services, along with consideration of lessons that can be learned from other service areas such as health and social care. Chapter Three presents the research findings thematically and also presents a number of case studies from fieldwork. Chapter Four returns to the research questions to draw conclusions and make recommendations for change. There are three appendices, covering more information about the interviews, a detailed proposal for a Regional Centre of Excellence for User Involvement in Housing Services, and a list of useful web sites. Efforts have been made to include published information that is available on the internet and URLs have been provided wherever possible.

Involvement, power and exclusion

1. Introduction

This chapter reviews current published debates and practices relating to user involvement in housing services, along with consideration of lessons that can be learned from other service areas such as health and social care. We begin with consideration of definitions and typologies of participation and involvement, followed by reflections on power relationships. We argue that an understanding of power within involvement processes is essential in order to address the exclusion of ‘easy to ignore’ groups. This is followed by a review of the specific issues relating to these groups, not only in housing: Who are they? Why are they excluded? And what can be done to improve the situation? The chapter ends with a brief review of housing policy in relation to service user involvement and easy to ignore groups, and some concluding remarks.

2. Definitions of participation and involvement

Terms such as ‘participation’, ‘involvement’ and ‘empowerment’ are often used interchangeably, both in housing and in other policy areas. A well-known definition of tenant participation is:

‘Tenant participation is about tenants taking part in decision making and influencing decisions about housing policies, housing conditions, and housing (and related) services. *It is a two way process which involves the sharing of information, ideas and power.* Its aim is to improve the standard of housing conditions and service’

Scottish Office (1999) [emphasis added]

This definition depicts tenant participation as a two-way process and relates it to power sharing. The definition could be applied to all service users, not just social housing tenants. Another, more recent, definition suggests a wider range of participants can be included and also makes the point that participation is part of governance and therefore important to policy-makers:

‘Resident involvement in social housing is about how tenants or others living nearby can influence a social landlord’s activity. The remit of such influence may range from contributing to landlord decisions on local service delivery, at one end of the spectrum, to bearing on an organisation’s strategic policy, at the other. Irrespective of whether it incorporates governing body membership,

resident involvement is an aspect of housing and urban governance' (Pawson et al, 2011: 3).

A definition from the health and social care policy area emphasises the range of issues that should be covered, in the context of Northern Ireland's Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) Strategy:

'Personal and Public Involvement means discussing with those who use our services and the public: their ideas, your plans; their experiences, your experiences; why services need to change; what people want from services; how to make the best use of resources; and how to improve the quality and safety of services' (PHA, 2012: 8).


Finally, a definition from urban regeneration, relating to community empowerment, focuses on a collective approach to user involvement: 'a community's capacity to make effective choices, and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes' (GoWell, 2011: 3).

Levels and types of involvement

Conflict between stakeholders can occur if participants are seeking different levels of involvement, or if there is no common understanding about its purpose. Wilcox (1994) has distilled Arnstein's classic 'ladder of citizen participation' (1969) model into five categories: information, consultation, deciding together, acting together and supporting a redistribution of power (Table 1). Providing information is the bedrock of involvement, because without it nothing can be decided. Arguably this level of involvement has been undervalued in the past. Consultation involves supplementing information with the knowledge and opinions of service users. Deciding together involves a more in-depth consideration of options including new ideas; and acting together involves forming a partnership to involve service users in implementation of the preferred option. Finally, supporting a transfer of power to service users through the management of new or existing facilities allows users to take control in a more fundamental way. As the levels progress, the amount of power shared increases.

Arnstein (1969) regarded higher levels of involvement as inherently superior to information provision and consultation, which she described as 'therapy' and 'manipulation'. Wilcox (1994) is not so condemning. It is often the case that, as the levels progress, fewer people are involved. Therefore the provision of information and access to basic consultation processes such as questionnaires remain important to include more service users, albeit in a more superficial way.

Table 1: Levels of service user involvement

<p>Extent power shared: LOW</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>HIGH</p>	<p>Information: Telling people what is planned; sharing knowledge;</p> <p>Consultation: Identifying problems; checking preferences against a number of options; listening to feedback;</p> <p>Deciding together: Encouragement to create additional ideas or options; deciding jointly on the best way forward;</p> <p>Acting together: Forming a partnership to carry out the joint decision;</p> <p>Supporting: Supporting independent community initiatives through funding, advice and other resources. Can include community ownership or management.</p>
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Source: Wilcox (1994)

The service provider may approach involvement in different ways. In relation to tenant participation, Cairncross et al (1997) identified three categories:

- i. *Traditional:* concentrates on immediate issues such as estate improvements; communication via housing managers and local councillors; professionals know best. Does not affect existing power relationships;
- ii. *Consumerist:* the tenant is treated as a customer and individual issues prioritised, such as repairs response times. Communication is with professionals and politicians and also through questionnaires and feedback forms. Again, does not challenge power relationships;
- iii. *Citizenship:* tenants are involved in decision-making on policy as well as services. There is dialogue and negotiation. Communication is via professionals and also in forums such as public meetings. Tenants may choose to campaign and lobby on some topics rather than defer to professionals. This approach challenges existing power relationships.

A more consumerist approach ties in with the idea that services users are 'customers' and that there is a good business case for promoting involvement (Hood, 2010). Through research into social housing provision in England, Belgium and Denmark, Pawson et al (2011) found landlords were moving towards developing a 'menu of involvement' which brought together the consumerist approach and use of 'structured collective forms of involvement more in line with the citizenship model' (p.6). This allowed residents to choose their level of involvement and was particularly useful for supporting new participants. The provision of good quality information was seen as an essential foundation for effective involvement structures.

Reasons for involvement

It is acknowledged by social housing professionals that it is harder to involve tenants in housing policy and strategy than it is to engage on more immediate topics such as repairs and anti-social behaviour. For example, a survey of Scottish social housing tenants found that 23% were interested in the quality of their accommodation and only 5% in being involved in decision-making (Diffley et al, 2009). However, the local example of the Housing Executive's Central Housing Community Network (now the Central Housing Forum) shows that it is possible and productive to include tenants at a strategic level (Muir, 2011). Claims of lack of interest from service users should not be taken at face value: 'street level' professionals play a crucial role in encouraging involvement (McKee, 2008) through facilitating awareness about the degree of control that exists over individual issues and through showing how these issues are connected to policy and strategy. In relation to health and social care, Beresford's research found 'no evidence to suggest that service users from particularly marginalised groups whose voices were seldom heard did not want to be involved, if lack of access and other barriers were overcome' (Beresford, 2013: 26).

A community development approach

Research often finds that power imbalances prevent service users from having an impact and achieving their goals. However, when empowerment works it can lead to greater feelings of control and wellbeing (GoWell, 2011). The reality is likely to be somewhere in between. A review of community engagement in health improvement programmes found generally positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem and better social relationships, although there was also evidence of stress and exhaustion, particularly for people with disabilities (Attree et al, 2011). Facilitators should be trained to ensure that support structures are suitable for vulnerable groups.

Service users benefit from involvement processes as well as outcomes, and can make gains collectively as well as individually. An example from urban regeneration is Glasgow's GoWell project, which suggests that a community development approach is necessary so that the community has the 'capacity to make effective choices, and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes' (GoWell, 2013: 3). GoWell's model for community empowerment involves three stages:

- i. *Capability*: access to knowledge and information; understanding; and the development of critical awareness
- ii. *Deciding*: making choices; influencing decisions; and being democratic and accountable; and

- iii. *Achieving*: instituting actions; engendering actions by others.

GoWell caution that the success of community empowerment depends on: the neighbourhood and community contexts; the organisational context; and the strategic framework for services delivery (i.e. the ability of agencies to meet identified need). Empowerment should be pursued as a principle, but it can be difficult to measure the benefits:

‘Despite the policy focus and the wide-ranging strategies and resources on community empowerment, there is little evidence that such policies make a difference to people’s lives. This is partly to do with the complex nature of community empowerment, and the difficulty in evaluating the processes and measuring the outcomes’ (GoWell, 2013: 4-5).

Key components of service user involvement

To summarise, meaningful service use involvement should be two-way, involve power-sharing, address all aspects of a service provider’s activities, value lived experience as well as professional expertise and allow all participants to express their views and to work together for service improvements. The process should include appropriate participation techniques and provide the opportunity to challenge proposals and suggest alternatives. Involvement should be offered at a level the service user is comfortable with and should be grounded in the provision of good quality information. There should be a recognition that involvement often starts with individual issues, but that these can contribute to policy and strategy in an environment where lived experience is genuinely valued. Although it can be hard to measure the benefits of involvement, service users should gain personally or collectively from the experience, for example through a community development approach, rather than feel that their time and energy has been exploited.

3. Power and involvement

In order to analyse the effectiveness of involvement structures, it is essential to think about power, and in particular the power imbalance between service users and institutional forces:

‘At the heart of any participatory, involvement or inclusion initiative lies power.... It is critical for an understanding of user involvement and who does and does not get involved’ (Beresford, 2013: 62).

‘Spaces in which citizens are invited to participate, as well as those they create for themselves, are never neutral. To make sense of participation in

any given space, then, we need also to make sense of the power relations that permeate and produce these and other spaces' (Cornwell, 2002:8).

Power sets the context and constraints of any involvement initiative. There are many academic analyses of power in public policy (for a good review, see Taylor, 2011). We have chosen one comprehensive approach, the Power Cube (Gaventa, 2006; Figure 1).

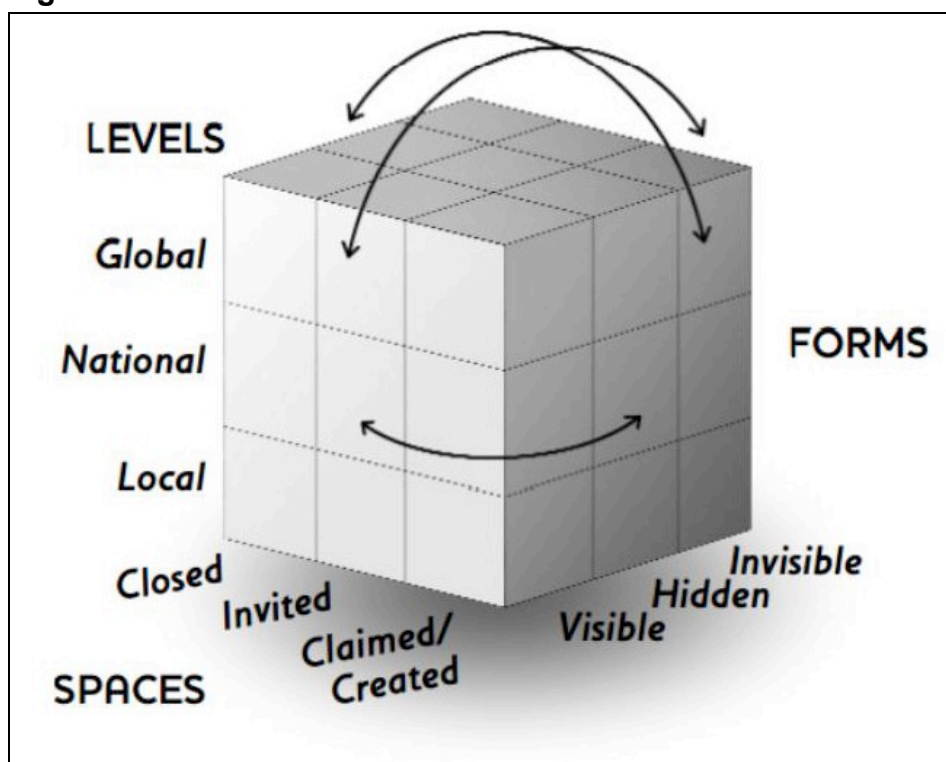
The Power Cube

The Power Cube presents three ways in which power operates to create a dynamic system (very clearly explained with examples by Luttrell et al, 2007, available online). These are:

- i. *Places of power*: the global, national and local levels of interaction and influence. This shows that power relations at several levels may impact on power dynamics. For example, the global economy or national policy decisions may impact on local options.
- ii. *Visibility of power*: the extent to which powerful participants may control an agenda:
 - a. 'Visible power' involves overt domination of a meeting or agenda, which can be challenged and negotiated by others, for example the presentation of a government policy without enough time for questions.
 - b. 'Hidden power' includes setting the agenda to exclude the concerns of the less powerful, also known as the 'mobilisation of bias' (Lukes, 2005). For example, the presentation of a government policy with a set number of options and no opportunity to suggest alternatives.
 - c. 'Invisible power' reinforces a dominant value system or ideology through the content and behaviour of more powerful participants. For example, a government policy could be presented as being the work of experts and not something suitable for comments by service users.
- iii. *Spaces of power*: the arenas in which power operates and in which decisions are made:
 - a. 'Closed spaces' are those controlled by an elite group such as bureaucrats, politicians or nominated experts, and to which most of us do not have access. For example, a board of management that does not meet in public

- b. 'Invited spaces' are those into which the public is invited to participate, for example in a one-off consultation exercise or an ongoing partnership structure. Often agency-led.
- c. Newly created or 'claimed' spaces are those developed organically by the less powerful, standing outside decision-making structures. For example, campaigns or community associations.

Figure 1: The Power Cube



Source: Gaventa (2006)

Challenging power

The structure of the Power Cube allows us to consider ways in which power can be challenged by the less powerful – and everyone has some power. Gaventa (2006) suggests that awareness of power allows citizens to exercise 'countervailing power' by challenging existing power relations in various ways and through multiple, linked strategies. For example:

- Challenging *places of power* through connecting local, national and global issues, for example through campaigning;
- Challenging *(in)visibility of power* through initiating public debate, addressing barriers to participation and putting forward different approaches and solutions;

- Challenging *spaces of power* through:
 - Pressure to *open up closed spaces* through greater involvement or more transparency about decisions made;
 - Improving *access to invited spaces* through better democratic practice (access and participation techniques) and including a wider range of participants;
 - Considering how *claimed spaces may be used to influence* more powerful organisations and individuals. Taylor (2011) reflects on how these spaces provide groups with valuable flexibility to work independently and to scrutinise the operation of closed and invited spaces from outside established involvement structures.

A rights-based approach

A rights-based approach to user involvement is helpful for challenging and rebalancing power relationships, for example through the structure of the Power Cube. By bringing their entitlements out into the open, rights awareness can change the way groups with less power are perceived. In Northern Ireland this approach has been championed by the organisation Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR)¹, who support service users campaigning as ‘rights-holders demanding change, rather than individuals asking for improvements’ (Marshall et al, 2014: 67).

PPR begins with an issue of importance to communities and maps the associated rights, which then form the basis of a campaign. However, when part of an ongoing process (for example, tenants engaging with their landlord), it may be more appropriate to review entitlement in a broader sense as part of establishing working relationships. PPR concentrates on using the rights-based approach to support campaigners in claimed spaces; but there is potential within housing services to widen its application within invited and closed spaces. PPR focus on Human Rights legislation; again, legal rights are evident at other levels. In housing services, users’ rights include: those associated with the tenancy agreement or with home ownership; rights to accommodation and support; s.75 legislation; Freedom of Information legislation; as well as rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25 (1): ‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services....’ and Article 16(1): ‘Men and women of full age, without any

¹ <http://www.pprproject.org/>

limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family....’

- United Nations International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Article 11(1): ‘...the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing...’

In many cases these are not absolute rights. They need to be balanced against the resources available from the state, which affects the ability of the service provider to deliver change. In some situations there are also conflicting rights, for example the rights of various groups of homeless and inadequately housed people. Nevertheless, the explicit recognition of service users’ rights still changes the involvement discourse. Many rights are politically contested; the acknowledgement of rights empowers any group to claim these rights in the political arena and to argue for their implementation.

4. The exclusion of ‘easy to ignore’ groups

Having defined involvement and examined power relations, we now turn to some specific questions about easy to ignore groups: who they are; why they are excluded; and how they might be better included through changing practices.

Who is easy to ignore?

It is easy to make a (probably incomplete) list of easy to ignore groups, but more important to categorise them, in order to find a suitable structure for analysing who is excluded in any specific situation and to prompt ideas to fill the gaps. When researching the exclusion of long term health and social care services users in England, Beresford (2013: 19) identified five categories of exclusion: equality issues; where people live; communication issues; the nature of impairments; and ‘unwanted voices’. His categorisation has been adapted to relate to this project in Table 2 (with assistance from Bolton Council, 2007; Oliver et al, 2009; Pawson et al, 2011). Individuals or groups may of course be included in more than one category. The typology will be revisited in Chapter Three to see how it relates to the groups identified in our empirical research. In Northern Ireland, many of these groups are included in the stipulation for public bodies (including housing associations) not to discriminate, as set out in s.75 (1) of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. The full list is: people with different religious belief; people of different political opinion; people of different racial groups; people of different ages; people of different marital status; people of different sexual orientation; men and women generally; people with a disability and people without; and people with dependents and people without.

Three further issues should be considered. First, tenure is of particular importance when considering service user involvement in housing policy and strategy. This research reviews involvement across all tenures. Much user involvement to date has concentrated on social housing tenants, who have the benefit of a common landlord and a more secure tenancy agreement, making involvement easier to organise and less intimidating.

Table 2: A categorised list of ‘easy to ignore’ groups

- 1. ‘Equality’ groups**
 - Black and minority ethnic groups, including refugees
 - Faith communities
 - Mental and physical disabilities; mental health issues
 - Gender : women usually excluded
 - Sexuality: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people usually excluded
 - Age: both older and younger people usually excluded; children
 - People with caring responsibilities, especially single parents and other lone carers
 - Children leaving care
 - Travellers
 - People with restricted rights e.g. asylum seekers, people regarded as not having the capacity to make decisions for themselves; some mental health service users
- 2. Where people live**
 - Homeless people (statutorily homeless and other)
 - Private rented sector
 - Owner occupiers and shared ownership
 - Some housing association tenants
 - Residents in rural areas
 - People living in residential establishments of various kinds; people receiving housing support services including floating support
 - People in prison and in the criminal justice system
- 3. Communication issues**
 - People who cannot read or write
 - People without access to the internet
 - People who speak English as a second language (without proficiency)
 - Deaf people or those who are hard of hearing
 - Visually impaired or blind people
 - People with speech impairments, aphasia, people who use voice synthesisers
 - People who use interpreters or helpers
- 4. The nature of impairments**
 - Physically disabled people with specific access needs
 - People with multiple and complex needs
 - Drug or alcohol users
- 5. ‘Unwanted voices’**
 - People who are disruptive or who challenge the status quo
 - Unpopular groups such as drug or alcohol users, ex-offenders including sex offenders

Note: An individual may belong to more than one group.

Sources: Categorisation and some groups from Beresford (2013); other groups from Bolton Council, 2007; Oliver et al, 2009; Pawson et al, 2011; the researchers’ experience.

In Northern Ireland, it is acknowledged that some housing associations need to make more progress, although there are also examples of good practice (DSD, 2015b). Those who are homeless, or living in the private rented sector (Shelter, 2013), receiving housing support services, or vulnerable owner occupiers (DSD, 2015a), are less well catered for.

Second, service user involvement may take place in groups, or between individuals and their service provider. In health and social care, the Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) Strategy distinguishes between 'personal' involvement: 'to service users, patients, carers, consumers, customers, relations, advocates or any other term used to describe people who use HSC services as individuals or as part of a group, for example a family'; and 'public' involvement: 'the general population... includes locality, community and voluntary groups and other collective organisations' (PHA, 2012: 9). This is helpful in that it identifies the range of potential 'personal' involvement including carers and advocates, which may particularly apply to housing-related service users with support needs.

Finally, Table 2 does not include economic exclusion, for example the unemployed and economically inactive. Although it is true that these groups can be excluded from involvement in wider citizenship activities, when we look at the case of engagement with housing services then many of the groups listed have poverty as a unifying factor and, indeed, as a substantial barrier to involvement. Therefore we have omitted economic exclusion as a discrete category, although it is a crucial overarching factor.

Why are some groups ignored? – barriers to involvement

There are many barriers to involvement, and we have categorised them with assistance from previous research (Table 3), following the categorisation in Oliver et al (2009: 10): methodological; physical; attitudinal; financial and other resources; timing and consultation fatigue. Methodological barriers can be summarised as expecting service users to fit into existing structures and ways of working, and failing to provide adequate or appropriate information. Physical barriers are the most obvious, which does not mean they are always addressed. The largest category is attitudinal, both from organisations and from individuals. Barriers due to financial and other resources are important to service users but can be disregarded by staff who, for example, are not on a low income. The final two very practical categories are timing, which again can be forgotten about by organisers; and consultation fatigue, which is sometimes the consequence of involvement for service users who *are* involved, but as part of a small number who are expected to represent their group in isolation.

Table 3: Barriers to Involvement

1. **Methodological Barriers:** the methods used in the involvement process can have an impact on the effectiveness of these opportunities. **Examples:** emphasis on formal meetings; reliance on large amounts of written material ; information presented in jargon and inaccessible language; failure to acknowledge lack of confidence and self-esteem in service users; not providing access to translation or interpretation including sign language, and to recorded and Braille versions; inadequate information about the topic under consideration or about practicalities such as how to get to the venue; failure to facilitate meetings in a way that allows everyone to be heard; lack of knowledge of facilitative techniques; bureaucratic approach.
2. **Physical Barriers:** the types of places that organisations choose to use can have an impact on the effectiveness of these opportunities. **Examples:** lack of disabled access e.g. steps, heavy fire doors, no accessible toilets, entry system; lack of accessible transport; lack of appropriate communication aids; background noise; location of meeting difficult for public transport users.
3. **Attitudinal Barriers:** these can consist of how those conducting involvement respond to groups and individuals' needs, and the assumptions which are made about people. **Examples:** generally negative attitudes towards some groups of service users from individuals or from organisations; questioning the legitimacy of group representatives; failure to challenge negative or discriminatory attitudes; assumptions made about people's abilities or lack of ability; discriminatory 'humour'; inability or unwillingness to acknowledge difference; tokenism; stigma; cultural assumptions and failure to recognise cultural difference e.g. through ethnicity, class, gender; attitude of gatekeepers; not acknowledging childcare and other caring responsibilities; failure to understand or make allowances for chaotic lifestyles or challenging behaviour; assuming easy access to the internet and social media, and knowledge of how to use them; using informal networks to spread information and recruit new participants.
4. **Financial and resource problems:** it's important to remember that some people may not have the resources that others have – either financial or other types. **Examples:** not paying travel expenses; not providing lunch; not providing access to information or training; not paying for or providing access to childcare; taking a long time to refund expenses. Lack of resources can also lead to inadequate staff training and support.
5. **Timing:** it is critical to take the timing of any event into consideration, as this may impact upon people who fall into a number of the equality groups for many different reasons. **Examples:** early evening meetings which exclude parents of young children; older people may prefer a meeting during the day; meetings in rural areas and meetings that don't take into account public transport times; meetings held in normal working hours for staff convenience.
6. **Consultation/ participation fatigue:** many groups and individuals can suffer from this, especially where people feel that they are being consulted on everything. **Examples:** individuals representing their user groups on several forums; perhaps particularly an issue for geographically based groups such as tenants' associations.

Sources: Categorisation from Oliver et al (2009: 10); other contributions from Beresford (2013); Foot (2009); IRISS (no date); the researchers' experience.

Many of the factors listed in Table 3 point towards problems with inequalities of power, with service users being expected to adapt to the structures, behaviour and expectations of service providers and policy-makers. This recognition does not discount good practice or fail to acknowledge the important contribution of some

individuals within organisations. However, Tables 2 and 3 illustrate how some groups are easier to ignore than others, and how involvement structures as they stand favour the articulate, the able-bodied and the less 'different'. For more vulnerable people, there is also a fear that speaking up about a service might jeopardise access to it, that working relationships with staff may be damaged, or even that the service may be terminated if serious criticisms are made (Beresford, 2013).

Towards greater inclusion

Once excluded groups and barriers to involvement have been identified, it is possible to move forward to identify actions that can be taken to ensure greater inclusion. Again, rather than simply list activities, we have looked for systematic, categorised examples of how improving involvement might be organised. The Participation Network has produced a set of 'Ask First' participation standards to guide the involvement of children and young people (Participation Network, 2010). The standards translate well to wider use and provide a comprehensive framework for action under eight categories: appropriate methods, support, knowledge, feedback, inclusion, respect, (access to) senior people, and timing (Table 4).

This review has not included detailed descriptions of participation techniques, although some will be described in the case studies. The references used in this section are all available online and are worth consulting. However, to supplement Table 4, Beresford (2013: 55) provides a useful summary of categories to consider:

- Entertainment produced by service users themselves, such as poetry, karaoke, drama;
- Activities which everyone can get involved in, for example role play, games, workshops in art, poetry, drama;
- Activities which encourage networking and making links with other service users: cabaret style meeting layout; small group discussions and activities; long lunch break and other information networking opportunities;
- Activities to help people relax and aid communication: breathing exercises; aromatherapy; reflexology; opportunities to sit in a quiet room for reflection or prayer;
- Supportive and appropriate venues: meeting in an institutionalised setting can be intimidating for people who use the services. Other options such as cafes and community centres should be considered.

Bolton Council (2007) provides a long list of specific engagement techniques and assesses the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Table 4: Improving service user involvement – the ASK FIRST standards

1. **Appropriate methods:** ensure staff understand involvement and are correctly trained and supported in their efforts to engage all groups; build relationships with service users and expect staff to adopt positive attitudes towards user groups; allocate appropriate resources; develop a range of methods to engage users; include having fun – make the process enjoyable; be clear about the purpose of any particular involvement exercise; engage in places where users feel comfortable.
2. **Support:** ensure the support needs of all groups in order to engage effectively are recognised and met, including access to a trusted person who can be asked for assistance; support service users to develop skills to assist with involvement and also help with their personal development (capacity building); ensure all service users are kept safe throughout the process; ensure support is properly funded; provide advocacy or engage via advocates if requested.
3. **Knowledge:** ensure service users are provided with sufficient information to be able to engage with the decision-making process, in a format that is suitable for them; ensure users understand the process - what is being asked of them, who is involved and how decisions will be made; communicate clearly at all times.
4. **Feedback:** ensure service users are told about the progress and outcomes of their involvement and how their views were considered; and that when their ideas have not been included in the solution they are told why; that their contribution is acknowledged; that their opinions of the process are asked for as part of service evaluation and review.
5. **Inclusion:** ensure all groups are facilitated to engage in decision-making, with particular attention to the needs of easy to ignore groups; develop involvement strategies to assist with this; use specialist agencies if necessary; meet the costs of ensuring all groups can get involved; advertise opportunities and do outreach; undertake monitoring to be able to review meaningfully who is involved.
6. **Respect:** treat all participants with respect; ensure they decide the extent of their involvement; respect the option not to participate; allow sufficient time for service users to prepare and express their views; take views seriously and make sure users know their individual contributions are valued; ensure service users have opportunities to set agendas and raise their issues; be honest about what can and can't be changed.
7. **Senior people:** ensure service users have direct contact with senior people in the organisation who have the power to make decisions and take action; also with politicians for policy and strategy issues; encourage senior staff and other influential people to attend consultation exercises; support service users to ensure they are able to contribute to high level forums and occasions such as lobbying events.
8. **Timing:** ensure service users are involved at the earliest possible stage, including contributing to the development of processes and reviews; create service and policy models that show how service users views inform the process; facilitate opportunities for involvement throughout the process; accept that gaining trust and establishing meaningful relationships will take time. Provide some 'quick wins' if possible.

Sources: Categorisation from Participation Network (2010); other contributions from Beresford (2013); Foot (2009); IRISS (no date); Oliver et al (2009); the researchers' experience.

Three other points need to be addressed. First, meaningful attempts to improve involvement require a supportive organisational culture (Pawson et al, 2011). Without this, individual staff members will find that the impact of involvement is limited and service users may become disillusioned. Leadership, guidance and resources from all levels of government are also important, especially for the development of policy and strategy (Foot, 2009). Second, we consider the position of

advocacy. The term is generally used to refer to organisations that provide support to service users and speak for them to service providers and policy-makers, and that was the way the term was understood in our fieldwork. However, Beresford (2013) uses the term more widely in the context of encouraging empowerment, based on the idea that it helps people to speak for themselves. He identifies five different forms of advocacy, not all of which involve others speaking on the service users' behalf:

- Self advocacy: where people learn to speak up for themselves, often with the support of organisations led by service users;
- Legal advocacy: representation in the legal system, which is important for some client groups;
- Professional advocacy: support from specialists in areas such as welfare rights, immigration, social services;
- Lay or citizen advocacy: support from volunteers;
- Peer advocacy: support from others with similar experience.

Finally, we introduce two useful concepts to tie together the measures listed in Table 4: **capacity release**, an approach better known in health and social care. Capacity release adopts an asset-based approach to involvement, by identifying individual or community assets which are already in existence and then looking at the barriers to their expression and use (Morgan and Popay, 2007), rather than a 'deficit model' of assessing gaps in skills and competencies. By starting with what individuals and communities already have, it is then possible to build up expertise within a more equal working relationship between service users and others (Beazley et al, 2004).

Capacity release allows policy-making and service improvements to be achieved through **co-production** between service users and service providers, as explored in Chapters Three and Four. Co-production has been defined as:

.. a new vision for public services which offers a better way to respond to the challenges we face – based on recognising the resources that citizens already have, and delivering services *with* rather than *for* service users, their families and their neighbours. Early evidence suggests that this is an effective way to deliver better outcomes, often for less money' (Boyle and Harris, 2009: 27).

5. Service user involvement: policy and practice

As outlined in Chapter One, a number of relevant housing policies and strategies have been issued over the past few years in Northern Ireland. To summarise, the more recent they are, and the more specific they are, the more likely it is that they include tenant, resident or service user consultation, participation or involvement. In

the rest of the UK there is a stronger push from government to encourage tenant participation than in Northern Ireland, which does not have a regional level Tenant Participation Strategy. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced a statutory right to tenant participation, followed by registration of tenants' groups and subsequent guidance and research (Scottish Executive, 2002; ODS Consulting, 2008; Diffley et al, 2009). Wales has also had a Tenant Participation Strategy since 2007 (updated in 2009) and has recently reviewed its practice in this area (Campbell Tickell Ltd, 2014). Practice in Scotland and Wales appears to be concentrated on day to day housing management issues and also says very little about diversity (with one very important exception in Wales: Oliver et al, 2009). However, services to homeless people are included in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (Scottish Government, 2012).

After the Localism Act 2011, England's Tenant Empowerment Programme includes encouragement to set up Tenant Panels, which a good practice guide suggests can include involvement in decision-making, shaping services, monitoring and scrutiny, and involvement in complaints (Bliss and Lambert, 2012). The greater importance of co-regulation in England may be a reason why there seems to be a wider tenant involvement agenda, which also includes some recognition of the need for diversity (see the SHRP's draft Tenant Participation Strategy, DSD 2015b, for further details).

Although the exclusion of easy to ignore groups is recognised widely, there appears to be little detailed advice on how to improve matters. One exception is the Tai Pawb/ TPAS Cymru publication 'Are You Being Equal?' (Oliver et al, 2009) which includes a good analysis of the issues and some practical suggestions. However, much of the good practice listed involves examples of inputs (such as setting up a forum or conducting a survey) rather than outputs or outcomes. Two other useful publications are *Building a Private Tenants' Movement in Wales* (Shelter Cymru, 2013) and the very practical *Client Involvement Toolkit* from St Mungo's in London, which sets out principles of client involvement, peer mentoring, use of resident representatives and how to organise client led activities. We have also benefitted from a number of studies from other policy areas in addition to those cited earlier in the chapter, including:

- All Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010), especially the use of peer researchers to access a 'difficult to survey' group;
- A study of consultation in interface areas for the Community Relations Council (Bell and Young, 2013);
- Another community relations-based study, this time set in Bradford (Phillips et al, 2010);
- A co-production manual for citizen-led change in public services (Bennett et al, 2012);

- A review of the potential of co-production (Boyle and Harris, 2009); and
- Evaluation of an asset mapping exercise (Inglis, 2013).

6. Conclusions

This chapter has considered definitions of tenant, resident and service user involvement; the reasons why user involvement is important for service providers and policy-makers; power and involvement; why some groups are excluded, and how matters might be improved. We have noted that housing policy does not pay much attention to these issues, but that it is possible to learn from other policy areas. The fundamental importance of power relations has been recognised and the potential for use of the power cube analysis will be returned to in Chapter Four, after the report of the research findings and analysis in the next chapter.

Findings and analysis

1. Introduction

This chapter presents and examines the research findings from the interviews and project visits in Northern Ireland and the study visit to Glasgow. It begins by looking at how our research participants defined service user involvement and why it was considered to be important. Then there is a discussion of factors contributing to exclusion and an assessment of barriers to involvement. These sections set the scene for a longer review of participants' views on 'making it work', covering both improved access to involvement structures and sustaining involvement once contact has been made. Several case study examples are provided. The final two sections cover specific issues with involvement in policy and strategy, and provide some general reflections to conclude the chapter.

2. Attitudes to service user involvement

Definitions of service user involvement and participation centred around users being able to 'help design services in a way that meets their needs' (government), as part of 'individual or group involvement at the heart of the decision-making process' (voluntary sector). Involvement structures allowed people to be informed about services, to express their concerns, to have 'meaningful say and input' (umbrella organisation) and to be taken seriously and to influence outcomes in some way, even if their views couldn't be acted upon in totality. Participation holds an organization to account and, for social housing providers, could be linked to regulation criteria, although it should also be done in any case, as a matter of principle. Some took a more comprehensive approach, mentioning the importance of empowerment through co-production rather than treating people as 'consultation fodder' (voluntary sector). Another organization was aware that service user involvement in Northern Ireland at the present time falls short of the ideal, in that it allowed service users to shape services but did not offer the option to control them, for example as social enterprise businesses.

It was understood that there is a financial cost to involvement, but without contact with service users service providers and policy-makers can become detached from their customers and run the risk of arriving at the wrong answers to difficult questions. There is also the danger that service users would oppose proposals because they haven't been involved in their development. Some participants were realistic about the limits of involvement, pointing out that people need to know what can be achieved, and that although the process should always be two way, there came a time when government had the responsibility to make decisions.

We found very few example of organisations adopting a structured approach to involvement. Supporting Communities Northern Ireland (SCNI) used a ‘spectrum of involvement’ similar to Table 1 (page 21):

- Inform: provide stakeholders with information to assist them in understanding issues;
- Consult: obtain feedback on options and decisions;
- Involve: work directly with stakeholders throughout the process;
- Collaborate: partner with stakeholders in each aspect of decisions; and:
- Empower: the final decision is with stakeholders.

SCNI’s work was also informed by the Housing Executive’s Community Involvement Strategy (NIHE, 2014).

Triangle Housing Association used the ‘Stepping Stone Involvement Model’, which categorized various initiatives as low, medium and high levels of involvement. Triangle aimed to provide a structure in which their supported housing tenants could be involved in both operational and strategic issues. Examples included:

- Low: satisfaction surveys, complaints process, newsletter, customer services standard, customer journey maps, tenant conference;
- Medium: mystery shoppers, service improvement teams, choice checkers (see Case Study 3.3, page 47), help recruit new staff, members of newsletter editorial board, service user representation at Board committee level, advocacy training;
- High: Board membership, shareholder membership, tenant associations.

3. The purpose(s) of involvement

Participants were also asked why service user involvement is important and what improvements they would expect to see as a result. Involvement was seen as a *crucial part of service planning*: ‘critical to understanding the impact of change and assessing services’ (government). It led to better use of resources and better service impact; conversely, it was a waste of time and money to plan services without it. Those with experience of using services were seen as best placed to make judgments on what works and what doesn’t. More fundamentally, if an organisation is involved in service provision, it should be talking to its service users and getting feedback as a matter of good practice. This should be a continuous process – a ‘temperature check’ (government) in order to assess the impact of services at the point of delivery, to gather data and to use the data for policy review. Involvement could also contribute to *finding new or better solutions*: it was acknowledged by several respondents that staff don’t always know best. There is potential to find more

sustainable and viable options if service users are involved, and this allows policy-makers to 'change and adjust' sometimes (government).

Involvement was seen as *more important than ever at a time of austerity*, because it provided information about what people need and could generate new ideas on better use of resources and value for money. Service users and providers could assess the impact of what is delivered at the moment, in a co-production model, and analyse possibilities for change. This process may also contribute to awareness raising for service users and keeping their aspirations in focus even if they cannot currently be met. One participant challenged the concept of austerity and pointed out that it is a political decision to cut public sector spending in the areas covered by this report. Others accepted that difficult times lay ahead, which would require 'honest engagement' (umbrella organisation) on evidence and choices, working together to improve outcomes (the review of the Supporting People programme was given as an example). The need to manage expectations and to share information with service users about the restrictions on what can be done were seen as advantages at all times, not only when spending was limited.

It was also pointed out that politicians expect user consultation on policy changes; the Committee for Social Development and the Minister for Social Development were specifically mentioned. The expectation of involvement was well established for social housing tenants but needed to be strengthened for the private rented sector. It was thought that the recent introduction of community planning responsibilities for local councils may help user participation in other housing tenures through comprehensive area-based service planning. The importance of looking at why people don't participate was also acknowledged, and if people don't want to get involved, then they shouldn't be penalised.

The improvements expected from involvement included better ways of working (process) and better outcomes. In relation to process, the basic point was made that some groups and individuals are not used to being asked to get involved, and including them is a big step forward – for example, the Roma community, or private sector tenants. Feelings of inadequacy had to be addressed whether from services users feeling out of their depth in formal meetings, or from 'suits' not used to talking to the public. Everyone had to 'feel the fear and do it anyway' (government). It was important to treat people equally, allow space for them to tell their stories, value their lived experience and ensure two-way communication. Better outcomes were seen as the result of good processes including a co-production approach to problem-solving and the use of peer advocacy to assist individuals. It was considered important to always look for positive results through looking for common interests, whilst acknowledging that no sector has all the answers. As a byproduct, service users

could become active citizens and thus were better positioned to take part in other activities such as campaigning in their communities.

Although benefits from user involvement were identified, some were more cautious, or perhaps realistic. One participant described facilitating involvement as ‘like pulling teeth’: ‘good things are not always easy... that’s the joys of democracy’ (voluntary sector). It was considered essential that staff members and the Board of Management were supportive (as we shown in the Simon Community NI/ PPR Case Study 3.1, page 42). There was also recognition that power was not on the side of the service user: their priorities might not be uppermost on the agenda or their views might not be heard; and users might feel their presence was not making a difference, with the gap between ‘want and what you’ll get’ (voluntary sector) as wide as ever.

4. Who is excluded and why?

Not one person we interviewed challenged the idea that service use involvement was a good thing and should be an important part of policy and service planning. Many were also able to name a number of factors contributing to exclusion; and the term ‘easy to ignore’ was welcomed rather than regarded as a threat. Several additional points were made by many of the people we spoke to: first, that no group is homogenous, and that differences within a group can be as hard to manage as ensuring various groups are heard within a diverse setting. In particular, the ‘loud and noisy’ can dominate and skill is needed to draw out the quieter group members. Second is the obvious point that people can belong to more than one group and therefore have more than one set of interests; third, that most service users will suffer economic exclusion and so that has been omitted from the analysis as a specific category. Lastly, those who are not involved in an organized group can find they are not heard, hence the importance of basic information provision and activities such as questionnaires, to involve a larger number of people.

Factors contributing to exclusion

The analysis below follows the categorisation used in Table 2 (page 28).

- ***Equality groups and issues:*** The two most often identified easy to ignore groups were black and minority ethnic (BME) groups including Roma and Travellers; and young people. BME groups were regarded as difficult to contact as they were geographically dispersed, and sometimes had a lack of confidence in speaking English. There was a long-standing difficulty in engaging with Travellers. Asylum seekers and refugees were also mentioned. Young people, including young families, were seen as more concerned with practical issues such as anti-social behavior or getting housed, rather than wanting to address

policy issues. The exclusion of children was highlighted as a growing problem in the private rented sector because more families were using it as a substitute for social housing. Other groups included people with mental ill-health and people with learning difficulties (and the need for skilled advocates highlighted for the latter group), along with carers and those included in s.75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act; but no-one picked out an imbalance of representation between the Protestant and Catholic communities, or suggested sectarianism was an issue at all.

- ***Where people live:*** Homeless people and tenants in the private rented sector were highlighted here. The homeless population included those with other needs due to mental ill-health, drug or alcohol use, and poor levels of literacy and numeracy. BME homeless people were sidelined. Government officials felt that they relied on advocacy groups to state the needs of homeless people rather than engaging directly but recognized this was not ideal. Similar comments were made about the private rented sector: it includes a disparate population including young people, people with disabilities, ex-offenders, lone parents, and minority ethnic groups. In other words, many equalities groups were also excluded by virtue of their housing status. In the relatively well catered for social rented sector, supported housing residents and people living in isolation were seen as disadvantaged, along with some housing association tenants. The point was made that tenants could be isolated in rural areas but also in towns and cities, for example if they were part of a small or stigmatized group.
- ***Communication issues:*** Many respondents considered poor literacy and numeracy to be important exclusionary factors, along with poor social and interpersonal skills. Lack of internet access and knowledge about how to use computers was also a disadvantage: the consequences of digital exclusion are becoming more severe in society generally. The needs of service users with English as a second language were not always catered for.
- ***The nature of impairments and 'unwanted voices':*** Physical access, for example for people with limited mobility, was not seen as a particular problem. The focus was more on how emotionally vulnerable people and those with complex needs such as severe mental ill-health or drug and alcohol use were unlikely to be involved, along with ex-offenders including women, vulnerable people and sex offenders.

Barriers to involvement

There was much agreement on the barriers. Using the categorisation from Table 3 (page 30), the main ***methodological barrier*** was considered to be lack of information, for example about the service provider's performance and service offered, but also background information such as research commissioned by government departments. The importance of defining the purpose of the involvement

was also important – there needs to be an identifiable end product. The main **physical barrier** discussed was the location of meetings for dispersed groups. One organisation had not found this to be a problem: they met in Belfast by agreement, as it was the easiest destination to reach by public transport and they paid travel costs. Another organisation had found location a difficulty, not least due to the cost of travel and the ability of their client group to travel independently. They had at times hired a minibus to assist.

Attitudinal barriers were considered to be the most serious obstacles to involvement. A power imbalance was evident: ‘power is not on the side of the service user’ (voluntary sector) and needs to be shared more. Part of sharing power was allowing people to make mistakes. Patronage and gatekeepers still kept service users away from meaningful decision-making, leading to client dependency: ‘a big problem among vulnerable groups and constitutes a barrier to progress’ (voluntary sector). Paternalism was also recognized by government and voluntary sector respondents alike, for example assumptions about the capacity of services users: ‘they haven’t lost their wits’ (voluntary sector). Other attitudinal barriers included a lack of trust, and a ‘middle class ethos’ including dress, a formal and bureaucratic approach, and lack of understanding of the need for practical help such as paying travel costs and providing lunch. **Financial and resource problems** included lack of staff, or lack of specialist staff; and finding a budget for ‘extras’ such as travel costs. **Timing and frequency of events** were also considered important, but this was less about when meetings were held and more about how involvement structures did not take into account the chaotic lives lived by some service users, which meant they would be unlikely to attend a regular schedule of meetings or appointments (this is also an attitudinal barrier). The point that some may not be excluded but choose to opt out from involvement was also made.

5. Making it work

This section reviews participants’ views on making the service user involvement process work effectively, both in terms of better access to involvement structures and sustaining involvement once engagement has been made. This was a topic on which many of those we interviewed spoke at length and had many ideas. It is clear that there is no shortage of commitment to making change. The section is divided into five themes:

- Values and rights: establishing a philosophical basis for working together
- Co-production and capacity release: a methodological framework for working together
- Creating an appropriate environment and use of involvement techniques: a process for working together

- The role of advocacy groups: working with allies; and
- Making an impact: achieving outcomes.

Values and rights: establishing a philosophical basis for working together

In order to establish a rationale for working together, three key values were identified. Fundamentally, *engagement should be encouraged*: some groups are not used to being asked for their views and will need to be reassured that they are welcome, especially if they have complex needs or have been discriminated against in the past. The message that ‘everyone has something to contribute’ (umbrella group) must be communicated. Involvement should be *people based*: ‘Treat people as human beings not segregated services’ (voluntary sector), starting on the basis of their needs rather than on how they fit into bureaucratic structures. For some, this connected with the importance of developing communities rather than focusing solely on housing services. And everyone involved should be treated with *respect*, including valuing lived experience: ‘disdain can emanate from the top table’ but ‘mutual respect and negotiation are the key’ (both voluntary sector).

Case Study 3.1: Participation and the Practice of Rights - Simon Community Project

The Simon Community provides advice, support and accommodation for homeless people. In 2012, Simon approached PPR and asked them to look at how their service users could have a greater say on service provision and wider homelessness policy. During 2013 the project worker made contact with hostel residents and formed residents’ groups, working hard on relationship building and identifying residents’ concerns. Residents carried out a survey to include those who did not want to come to meetings. Issues identified included better food security in communal kitchens, higher standards of internal maintenance, and easier internet access.

A smaller group of residents then worked on identifying human rights indicators and benchmarks relating to homelessness, based on Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, which recognized that a ‘home’ was a bare necessity for anybody’s dignity and humanity. In September 2014 they launched a Homeless Action Charter with four key action points: individual multi-agency support pathways for every homeless person; a review of how the housing applications of homeless people are assessed; a change in the recording of repeat homelessness and measures taken to address it; and a quota of social housing units for people moving out of homelessness.

The process was challenging and ‘took residents out of their comfort zone’ (PPR worker), which was possible due to the development of trust through a slow process of relationship building. Working at both service provision and policy levels allowed service users to experience more immediate impact, along with contributing to longer term campaigning for policy change. Simon’s Board and senior management responded positively and openly to the findings in relation to their own services, for example introducing secure food lockers. Individuals involved in the Charter development have also seen improvements to their housing position. Web site: <http://www.pprproject.org/homeless-action>

A *rights-based approach* was seen as sitting alongside these values, and not used enough: 'Participation is voluntary but it should be about exercising rights and putting control back with clients' (voluntary sector). Citizens should be involved in the design and delivery of services in a real partnership (see Case Study 3.1). This approach reveals that not everyone has the same rights, for example private tenants have less secure tenancies than in the social housing sector. *Ethical practice* was considered vital. Service users should not be exploited, for example in publicity campaigns or as unsupported Board members 'held responsible for significant decisions e.g. corporate manslaughter, financial matters' (housing association). It was considered important to inform services users fully and not to set them up to fail, again particularly in relation to Board membership.

Co-production and capacity release: a methodological framework for working together

A minority of organizations were familiar with concepts such as co-production and capacity release, however everyone supported working more closely with service users on a more equal basis. This shows there is potential for the introduction of these approaches in Northern Ireland, as set out in more detail in Chapter Two (see also Case Study 3.2 and Table 6; the approach is also used in Case Study 3.1 although not identified as such by the organizations involved). One voluntary organisation praised co-production as a means of sharing power and getting buy-in from service users by involving them from the start of the process, and indeed had used the approach in order to develop policy. Another described how a project had worked:

'Clients had the background support and were properly prepared: they have reviewed, with a fine tooth comb, all policies, procedures and license agreements. Such learning stays with the client' (voluntary sector).

There was less awareness of the need for systematic *asset mapping* as a starting point for co-production and capacity release, although it was acknowledged that capacity is linked to confidence building and being made to feel welcome and supported: 'identify opportunity, facilitate engagement, recognise ability.... capacity release' (voluntary sector) and that the results were beneficial: 'giving clients a voice, exercising their rights, helps the organization to get better. When they leave homelessness they should be better equipped and skilled up to live independently' (voluntary sector). Many interviews emphasized the need for building social capital and trust, and acknowledged the variety of different skills and knowledge which service users bring to the involvement process. There was a wider appreciation and knowledge of *peer support and advocacy*. Several projects were either using this or interested in doing so. One project had been influenced by the work of Improving

Recovery through Organisational Change programme (IMROC) in England, which champions the use of peer support workers in mental health (as does the Scottish Recovery Network, Table 6). IMROC has recently been introduced to Northern Ireland. The importance of service users becoming facilitators in their own right was acknowledged; peer advocacy was regarded as an important way to get service providers to really listen to service users as well as an effective learning tool.

Learning and personal development for both service users and staff was emphasized frequently. For service users:

‘Each individual has different experiences and education levels, informal learning and social skills. Sometimes service users don’t value their own work and taking them outside of their comfort zone is essential to progress. Challenging behaviors are a fact of life’ (voluntary sector)

Case Study 3.2: Glasgow Homelessness Network and SHIEN – Shared Solutions approach

GHN has developed the Shared Solutions approach through its social enterprise organization, the Scottish Homelessness Involvement and Empowerment Network (SHIEN). Shared Solutions is a co-production model that uses the assets of communities to solve social challenges or thematic problems at the local level (see definition of co-production in Chapter Two, page 33).

Shared Solutions works by using participatory methods to increase the representativeness of people participating, including ‘open space technology, a facilitation approach that focuses on a specific task but begins without any formal agenda beyond that. Participants are assigned to round table groups that include a mix of experiences and opinions and they are encouraged to air their views. The process does require multi-agency input and it can be problematic if this does not happen. Priorities are generated from the discussion groups and collated into a single list, from which priorities are determined by anonymous voting. The priorities are then debated in a series of workshops for the rest of the day – including possible solutions. A follow-up event is held after around six months.

GHN and SHIEN claim that the process creates a safe and open space for:

- A range of perspectives to be considered collaboratively rather than individually
- Participants to consider the perspectives and challenges facing others
- Participants to focus on finding solutions rather than on simply identifying problems
- Reality-checking untested assumptions of policies and plans, prior to the resource-intensive implementation phase.

One example of the Shared Solutions approach was an event in 2014 to inform a strategic review of homelessness policy and practice by Glasgow City Council, in order to ensure person-centered services. The event identified issues around choice of accommodation, support for people leaving prison, preferences for a housing-led approach, and the role of social media.

Learning could take place through project based learning, problem solving, general skills-based training, formal classes to support users back into education or employment, and through the involvement processes themselves. Service users could be trained as peer researchers. Different approaches may need to be tried

until the right format is found for a particular learning experience, and creating a safe and secure environment for learning was understood to be important. For staff, a message came across that engagement with service users was part of the business approach and could not be avoided. Staff also needed to work on the basis of capacity release and capacity building, for example when learning how to carry out public consultation exercises effectively: there was a need for 'skilled up facilitators' (voluntary sector). Involvement should be recognised as a two-way process which involves relationship building. A government official described how he had invited a front line voluntary organisation including service users, to talk to his staff, and the impact it had had upon them. Such initiatives are a good basis for considering a co-production approach to policy development as set out in Case Study 3.2.

Creating an appropriate environment and use of involvement techniques: a process for working together

The creation of a safe and secure environment for service user involvement is connected with the values adopted, as discussed earlier and based on mutual respect and communication, trust, and information sharing. Practical issues such as providing time for socialising, providing lunch and paying transport costs were also seen to contribute to a supportive environment, as did a generally relaxed, friendly and non-bureaucratic approach. Good communication included making sure service users were aware of the limits of what could be achieved. The interests of service users needed to be championed within organisations. Events must be relevant, issues presented in plain language, and lived experience must be valued. It was acknowledged that there may be apprehension at first: 'fear on both sides' (voluntary sector) but everyone should 'feel the fear and do it anyway' (government). It is likely that mistakes will be made, enhancing the importance of being open and accountable in order to build good relationships.

Much of what was considered important by our interviewees was included in the ASK FIRST service user involvement standards (Table 4, page 32). However, we did not find organizations were using a wide range of *involvement techniques*, again as discussed in Chapter Two (p. 31). There was a particular lack of arts-based techniques such as music, drama and poetry; but also more conventional prioritization techniques as described in case study 3.2. This does not mean that involvement relationships were inadequate. Almost everyone emphasized the importance of careful listening, the most fundamental of participation techniques. Different approaches were needed depending on the user group, for example use of social media might help to engage younger people (there was a general feeling that there was much unrealized potential for good use of social media and the internet more generally). Simple awareness of group dynamics, focused activity, and a flexible agenda, created good results in one case. Away days could be helpful for

established groups. In another example involving a more formal consultation process, public meetings were held with formal presentations and the opportunity to ask questions, but also breaks when people could visit display stands and ask questions without having to speak in public.

Working at the pace of the service user underpinned many of these approaches. Meaningful feedback should be provided in order to show service users that their involvement has a point, even if what they want cannot be done. Resources were acknowledged to be a challenge, from all sectors. Government worked with restricted budgets, landlords provided services from their rents, and voluntary organizations were dependent on short-term grant funding from statutory or philanthropic sources. Everyone was looking for ways to do more with less, which was one motivation for better use of social media. Table 5 shows the results of a question to all participants, asking for one suggestion to improve service user involvement. Many responses involved process; a few prioritised funding or policy improvements.

Table 5: Priorities to improve service user involvement

We asked everyone to choose one thing that would improve service user involvement. Examples included:

- Above all – LISTEN (almost everyone said this)
- Honesty and transparency – don't give people the run around
- Respect the people you are consulting and allow them to own the process
- Demonstrate the value of the process and provide feedback throughout
- Include participation in everyone's work, it should not be an optional extra and should not be feared
- Involve, consult and empower – people should be involved in the design and delivery of services
- Talk about barriers, be flexible, adapt and change when needed
- Try to seek a positive outcome; be open to new participation techniques
- Ask why do you want to do this? What will be the impact?
- Pick one issue and keep focused on it
- 'Take the pain out of meetings'
- Use peer advocates
- Use skilled facilitators
- Use social media better
- Encourage service users to get beyond their individual issues and be strategic
- Involvement costs money, it's hard when budgets are restricted
- Better data gathering and data analysis
- Include user involvement in regulation/ make it a statutory requirement
- Formal strategies can provide a useful framework

The role of advocacy groups: working with allies

Different types of advocacy were listed in Chapter Two as self advocacy, legal advocacy, professional advocacy, lay or citizen advocacy, and peer advocacy. Interviews revealed a good understanding of both the positive and negative effects of working with advocates, who at best can be important allies and at worst can prevent meaningful contributions from service users. We found advocacy organisations were perceptive about their role and thought it was important to empower clients, for example through developing self advocacy and peer advocacy. Some organisations included careers, family members, or ex-service users as advocates or peer supporters. Our Case Study 3.3 provides an example of Triangle Housing Association's Choice Checkers, where staff and service users worked together to make a peer review scheme work for people with learning difficulties.

Case Study 3.3: Triangle Choice Checkers

Triangle Housing Association provides their supported living tenants with several ways of getting involved, including a Tenant Advisory Group, a representative on the Tenant Services Committee, the opportunity to contribute to staff recruitment, advocacy training, an advisory group for those involved in Triangle's Alternative Angles supported employment social enterprise, and the peer review system Choice Checkers.

Choice Checkers is a good example of how advocates can work to empower service users. The programmer offers a review of support services to service users, carried out by another service user, supported by a staff member. Nine service users are currently involved. Services are measured against 11 service standards based on the REACH Support for Living standards (<http://www.paradigm-uk.org/>). The standards are:

- I choose who I live with
- I choose where I live
- I have my own home
- I choose how I am supported
- I choose who supports me
- I get good support
- I choose my friends and relationships
- I choose how to be healthy and safe.
- I choose how I am part of the community
- I have the same rights and responsibilities as other citizens
- I get help to make changes in my life

Service users had input into the process of devising the standards and have also participated in a training programmer. Triangle says: 'Peer reviews focus on what is important to the individual by enabling structured and open dialogue between service users and their peers. We aim to remove the potential for passive intimidation that is sometimes caused when a service user interacts with a person in a perceived position of authority. By conducting peer reviews we aim to capture the perspective of the service user, their family and/or advocate in relation to both their support to live a full and meaningful life as well as the service provided. The peer review programmer seeks to empower service users to communicate openly and frankly about their involvement in and perceived control over the support and care they receive'.

Government also recognised the difference between talking to service users and to advocacy groups: both are valuable but can have different perspectives. Advocates as facilitators for service users' views were particularly appreciated when dealing with very vulnerable groups. One person spoke highly of organisations in the homeless sector who were able to provide access to service users; conversely, the lack of advocates for some groups such as private tenants and home owners was recognised. The role of politicians as advocates was also reflected upon by a government interviewee. It was noted that it is easier to develop policy in areas where Ministers took an interest, for example visiting organisations and championing policy positions. Finally, some organisations were aware of their contradictory role as supporters and empowering agencies in relation to their clients. One very honestly admitted that funding dependency 'allows organisational self-interest to creep in' (voluntary sector) and this needs to be guarded against in order to remain an effective advocate.

Making an impact: achieving outcomes

The impact of service user involvement initiatives was discussed in terms of both process and tangible outcomes. The references to process reflect its importance in Table 5 above. Many example of project impact were provided to us and we have only been able to select a few for case studies. Key factors for achieving impact included:

- ***Continuity***: initiatives need to have a long life and be reliable; they need to be championed by staff and continuously monitored; listen to feedback from service users;
- ***Visible benefits***: whether these are process or outcomes, people need to see benefits including quick wins at the start of a process;
- ***Good working relationships***: organisations need to value involvement and develop meaningful partnerships endorsed at all levels; the impact of individual project workers can be enormous;
- ***Responding to incentives***: involvement may be rewarded externally e.g. in the regulation process or by improved organisational reputation; or internally, by feeding through to service reviews or Board meetings.

Obstacles to impact were also identified, including the difficulty of joint working between public bodies (including sharing budgets); continuity of individual involvement both from service users and also if staff leave; and the need to guard against creating a dependency culture for service users.

Table 6: Learning points from the Glasgow study trip

The Glasgow study trip included visiting five organisations:

- Ardenglen Housing Association, Castlemilk: community-based housing association. Engagement projects include Youth Committee; Social Committee; community hall; mountain bike track; intergenerational work; job seeking support.
- Glasgow GoWell (worker based at the Glasgow Centre for Population Health): GoWell is a ten-year research and learning programme to investigate the impact of investment in housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal on health and wellbeing.
- Glasgow Homelessness Network: a voluntary sector membership organisation working with and for people affected by homelessness, including use of peer-based advocacy. They have pioneered the Shared Solutions approach to co-production in Scotland, through their social economy company, the Scottish Homelessness Involvement and Empowerment Network (SHIEN). See also Case Study 3.2.
- Scottish Recovery Network: has four goals: raise awareness of recovery from mental health problems; encourage empowerment; develop the evidence base; and influence policy and practice. Instrumental in developing the use of peer support workers in mental health services in Scotland.
- Youth Stress Centre, Castlemilk: provides stress management and personal development services for children, teenagers and young adults. Includes work in schools. Based in a youth drop-in centre.

Learning points included:

- Peer mentoring and support is an important resource for many different ‘easy to ignore’ groups.
- Peer support workers can work well with colleagues without lived experience, but it takes time and cultural change to be effective; working in clusters is best.
- Co-production activities also take a long time to embed in policy development.
- Community empowerment is important for effective engagement.
- Social activities provide a basis for wide engagement including involvement in policy.
- The social environment is as important as the physical environment – or more so on occasions.
- It’s important to talk to decision-makers and keep them informed about what you are doing.
- Multi-agency work is crucial, as is working together across statutory and voluntary sector boundaries. Sharing good practice and making alliances are both necessary.
- Funding can be a struggle. It is damaging to service users if programmes cannot be sustained.
- Fund-raising by service users strengthens project ownership and appreciation of costs.
- Individuals’ emotional and support issues must be addressed if they are to engage effectively – people need time to tell their story and to be understood before they can help others.
- It is not necessary for everyone to agree in order to be able to work together, but everyone involved must be heard and respected.
- Value lived experience, but the service user is not always right.
- Organisations need a strong values framework to guide their operations.
- Regulators do not always understand the involvement of service users in governance.
- Longitudinal research is important for measuring impact and trends.

The organisations’ web sites are listed in Appendix Three.

Two further important factors for achieving impact are ***the policy context and sector organisational culture***. We were able to experience these differently through our study trip to Glasgow including visits to five organisations, as described in Table 6. In Scotland, we found that the principles of peer support and co-production are more firmly established, and this has produced a more enabling attitude towards service users.

6. Involving service users in policy and strategy

This section addresses the particular problems of involving services users in policy and strategy, which is acknowledged widely to be difficult. The most important point, made by many, is that organisational culture tends towards the use of jargon, formal structures such as long meetings to discuss consultation documents, and a focus on professional expertise and research rather than lived experience:

‘Don’t use the words policy and strategy, they are intimidating. Say we need to ‘plan’ and need some ‘rules’... people understand the need for a plan. Strategy is ‘top of the stairs’ and we need to set aims and objectives for how to get there...’ (voluntary sector)

‘Don’t refer to policy, strategy or legislation’ (umbrella group)

Connecting lived experience to policy change was considered to be the way to make policy and strategy relevant to service users (see Case Study 4.1 in the next chapter). Starting with people’s own stories, facilitators can ask questions to bring out the wider implications of their situation and start to make productive connections, however if there is a need for access to services then this should not be ignored: ‘Don’t ask about recycling when families have nothing to eat’ (voluntary sector). Finding a motivation for involvement should remove the impression that talking about policy is boring and that there is no point because you won’t be listened to:

‘People have already lost homes and dignity but (are) not without wit and intelligence... Listen to what is being said: very often people do not listen. ...It is important to ask the right questions: people can learn about policy through how it impacts on you personally. Policy can be a purely intellectual exercise; for the service user it is about chances of being rehoused, sustaining that and access to other services’ (voluntary sector).

... to them [service users], homelessness translates as ‘get me a house’. There must be a connection between those seeking inputs and those providing it: and the language being used must be simple: plain

English.....Be specific: those seeking the consultation need to be precise and personal approaches help no end... (voluntary sector).

It is important to *explain how change will happen* – which can be difficult if the organisation doesn't know or it is not within its power. In particular, if resources are constrained then faith in the process can be lost:

'[there is] no point in a strategy if there are no resources with it: public bodies should be realistic and transparent'(voluntary sector)

Finally, as with any type of involvement process, confidence needs to be built and capacity released using the approaches discussed in section 5. There is much potential for co-production of policy and strategy (e.g. Case Study 3.2).

Service user involvement and the Social Housing Reform Programme

Again, much of what is required to make involvement work for the SHRP is contained in the previous section or in section 5. This research found that government officials working on the SHRP were acutely aware of the need for engagement with service users; and that the independent organisation Supporting Communities NI (SCNI) had already played a valuable role. But at the same time, there was concern that some 'easy to ignore' groups had not been involved. The basis of the exclusion appears to be tenure status, due to the view that the SHRP was about social housing and therefore of most interest to existing general needs social housing tenants. However, not all of the SHRP pertains solely to social housing and in cases where it does, groups such as homeless people and private sector tenants are potential future service users and should be included in consultation if that is their wish. There was some evidence of DSD officials making contact with homelessness organisations and private tenants, however not in any systematic way. There had also been some difficulties with meeting costs for service users, such as travel and lunch.

SCNI has carried out work to enable service user contributions to the SHDP and in particular on the draft Tenant Participation Strategy (DSD, 2015b). SCNI has produced three factsheets to help tenants to understand the background to the SHRP. The Housing Executive's Central Housing Forum meets twice a year with the Housing Executive Board, and has also attended the Social Development Committee. Housing association tenants were included in one meeting with the Board, which proved to be a good way of improving contacts. SCNI intends to work more with housing associations in future. SCNI and government officials described how the Tenant Participation Strategy was developed from a 'blank sheet' into eight

key areas through consultation meetings, which is an example of co-production albeit with a narrow range of participants compared to the Glasgow model.

7. The future

To conclude, this chapter has reported the results of research findings from interviews and projects visits, and has reflected on them in the light of the secondary data presented in the literature review. We found a high level of commitment to service user involvement although little use of structured approaches such as participation 'ladders'. Involvement was seen as a crucial part of service planning and if anything even more important at times of austerity. A wide range of excluded groups was identified and attitudinal barriers regarded as the most serious obstacle to their inclusion in future. Many good ideas were put forward about how to 'make it work' and the priorities for impact were identified as continuity, visible benefits, good working relationships and responding to incentives. Lack of funding was an issue that could prevent success. The particular issues with involving services users in policy and strategy were well known and often discussed at length. These findings identify a promising environment for building on existing good practice and positive attitudes by adopting a new approach to service user involvement, as outlined in the following chapter.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research aim was:

To assess and make recommendations for the greater involvement of 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland, with particular emphasis on engagement with the Social Housing Reform Programme.

The context for greater inclusion of easy to ignore groups in housing issues in Northern Ireland is promising. There is a readily accessible literature on the subject. Local service providers and policy-makers regard service user involvement as essential for the design of appropriate services to meet need, for service planning more generally, and in some cases for user empowerment more generally. Local policies and strategies emphasise user involvement including mention of 'hard to reach' groups, or similar, and there is easily transferable policy and good practice examples available from elsewhere in the UK. Research participants readily identified who was excluded and why, and had many ideas about how the situation could be improved. They did not have knowledge of or access to a wider range of participation techniques, however their approach of listening carefully and treating service users with respect provides a strong underpinning for further work. The concepts of 'easy to ignore' groups and 'capacity release' were treated with interest. There was a good understanding of the specific difficulties in encouraging involvement in policy and strategic issues.

Therefore it is imperative to ask why current structures seem unable to accommodate a wider variety of service users, whether to contribute to policy and strategy or to service delivery, when there is widespread awareness of the importance of service user involvement and there are isolated examples of good practice. It could be because *there is no systematic approach to improving practice*. This research concludes by recommending an integrated model for service user involvement in housing, for all participants including easy to ignore groups. The model is in three parts: Philosophy, Process and Resources. The example of the Northern Ireland Private Tenants' Forum is used to show how the framework can be used to analyse and progress group activity (Case Study 4.1).

Philosophy

The recommended philosophy of service user involvement is based on the rights of the service user and a co-production approach to the development of policy and

strategy, which values lived experience alongside professional expertise. Together these factors are intended to instigate a culture of mutual respect and partnership.

A rights-based approach to partnership working is based on the rights held by the service user and the ability of the service provider or policy-maker to deliver change, as developed in Northern Ireland by the group Participation and Practice of Rights (e.g. Case Study 3.1). Service user rights include: housing tenancy or ownership; right to apply for accommodation and support; Freedom of Information legislation; rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In many cases these are not absolute rights. They need to be balanced against the resources available from the state and also in some cases there needs to be political debate about competing rights. Nevertheless, the recognition of their rights promotes a discourse of empowerment for the service user, although it is no panacea.

A co-production approach complements the recognition of service user rights by valuing lived experience as well as professional expertise and commits to processes that allow both to be expressed and shared under the motto 'nothing about me, without me'. The process can be challenging but it has been acknowledged to result in better outcomes, for example the Shared Solutions approach of the Glasgow Homelessness Network (Case Study 3.2).

Process

Good intentions are meaningless without a process that works. We propose three stages: finding the right structures; facilitating engagement; and promoting capacity release.

1. Finding the right structures

The report explored power relationships using the 'power cube' (Gaventa, 2006). Gaventa's three 'spaces of involvement' (pages 24-25) provides a framework for finding the most appropriate forum for a particular purpose, and how it can be best used to promote service user rights, respect, and co-production, and thus to increase the power of the relatively powerless. This involves identifying the *potential* of these spaces as well as their limitations, and may include challenging current practice. To recap, 'closed spaces' are those controlled by an elite group such as bureaucrats, politicians or nominated experts, and to which most of us do not have access; 'invited spaces' are those in which the public is encouraged to participate, often led by state agencies; and newly created or 'claimed' spaces are those developed organically by the less powerful, standing outside decision-making structures, such as campaigns or community associations.

The research has looked at how existing spaces may be opened up and new spaces created, for example:

- *Opening up closed spaces* through greater involvement in meetings or more transparency about decisions made;
- *Improving access to invited spaces* through better democratic practice (access and participation techniques) and including a wider range of participants;
- Considering how *claimed spaces may be used to influence* more powerful organisations and individuals, as well as using them to provide safe spaces for service users to support each other. Claimed spaces may also be an important forum for challenging *places of power* and for raising awareness about *visibility of power* through initiating user-led public debate, addressing barriers to participation and putting forward different approaches and solutions.

Efforts need to be made to ensure that practice within these structures does not promote exclusionary networks or restrict access to information.

2. Facilitating engagement

Within the right structures, service users must believe or know that their voices are heard and that they have some power over agenda setting, in order to build trust. This research has provided the tools to assess who is excluded, what are the barriers to involvement, and how might improvements be made, both through the literature review (including Tables 2, 3 and 4) and through reporting the results of local empirical research, the Glasgow study visit, and more detailed case studies.

This is also the stage at which service users' rights can be mapped, as part of a wider exercise to identify the purpose of the involvement forum. Both service user and advocacy interests can be represented in all spaces but the difference between them should be acknowledged and respected. This in no way minimises the importance of working constructively with allies, which has been highlighted both in the literature review and in our interviews.

Facilitating engagement requires much detailed work, involving staff time and perhaps specialist training. However, it is important to bear in mind that the most common response to our 'one thing to improve involvement' question was to really listen to people. As noted by Pawson et al (2011: 47) in relation to social housing tenants: 'the personal approach that gives a large organisation a human face has not been bettered, it seems, when it comes to drawing in people who have not been

involved before'. *It remains crucial, though, that those who are facilitating engagement constantly assess the power dynamics of the process.* As Beresford (2013: 62) comments: 'if you do not recognize that others perceive you to be powerful then you are likely to be exerting that power and unless you recognize this you may be abusing it'.

3. Promoting capacity release

Facilitating engagement can be short-term and relatively superficial without an additional commitment to empowerment through capacity release for all participants in the process. *This third stage of 'process' embeds empowerment into practice over a longer period and can promote more permanent cultural change.* Key steps might include:

- An asset mapping exercise;
- Identification of practical steps to release capacity, such as training courses, peer mentoring, and a community development approach for groups;
- A systemic approach to monitoring good practice and new opportunities for learning.

Good communication and negotiation skills remain at the heart of service user involvement processes throughout the three stages set out here. The role of advocacy organisations as allies can be important for some user groups, including their landlords and support services (Case Study 3.1).

Resources

At a time of austerity it is important to re-state that good quality service user involvement costs money, and involving easy to ignore groups can cost more if their needs are properly met. Although the state should not renege on its responsibilities, other funding sources are available, for example from philanthropic sources. Social housing landlords and support providers should fund routine service user involvement as part of their business plan.

This research shows that in Northern Ireland there are examples of user involvement good practice in social housing (including housing associations), and with private tenants, homeless people, users of housing support, and owner occupiers. However, there is no organisation responsible for collecting, sharing and developing good practice in service user involvement across all tenures. In particular, it is important that tenants in the private rented sector are better supported. This research proposes *the establishment of a small regional centre, to promote excellence in user involvement in housing services.* Such a centre would:

- Be small, enabling and strategic;
- Act as a repository of good practice initiatives and other service user involvement information *from all tenures*, from Northern Ireland and elsewhere;
- Disseminate good practice to housing providers, service users and policy-makers;
- Develop international connections in order to assist with data collection, dissemination and funding opportunities;
- Administer *a new Innovative Involvement Programme fund*;
- Carry out and commission research;
- Be independent from government and from housing providers;
- Include service users on the Board of Management;
- Adopt a co-production approach to its functions;
- Be funded by a mix of public and philanthropic sources, although private sector sponsorship could also be investigated.

It is not considered appropriate for the centre to have any involvement in the inspection or regulation of social housing providers, as this would compromise its independence from government. *It is not intended that this organisation would compete with or replace the existing work of Supporting Communities NI or substitute for the proposal in DSD's Tenant Participation Strategy for a Tenant Participation Advisory Service.* Its function would not be primarily operational and would not be of the scale necessary to replace these groups, also it would operate across all tenures. Further details are provided in Appendix Two.

The Social Housing Reform Programme

The research was intended to address specifically the requirements of the SHRP. The results of the research will assist service user involvement in the SHRP in many ways, however there are also some specific recommendations to be made:

- Many 'easy to ignore' groups are social housing tenants in either general needs or supported accommodation. Many others are potential users of social housing services, for example homeless people, private sector tenants housed in poor conditions, and owner occupiers in mortgage arrears. They should be incorporated into consultation process if that is their wish;
- There is considerable potential for the SHRP to adopt the values of a rights-based approach and co-production of policy and strategy, for example in relation to whichever new social landlord structure replaces the Northern Ireland Housing Executive;

- The social housing sector in NI has developed unevenly in relation to access to opportunities for service user involvement. The SHRP would benefit from greater sharing of information and good practice through the proposed Centre for Excellence, to supplement the good work already being done by other organisations;
- The SHRP would have the ability to recommend a statutory right to participation for social housing tenants, as in Scotland. We have found that good practice depends more on organisational culture than on legislation, however a regulatory requirement does seem to carry some force. Therefore *we do not recommend a legal right to participation, rather that the regulatory requirement for social housing providers should be explicit about the inclusion of easy to ignore groups in involvement structures*. This may appear to contradict a rights-based approach, however we believe service users have many other rights which contribute to effective involvement processes as outlined above;
- It is difficult to measure effective engagement because it requires both qualitative and quantitative assessments, needs to include outputs and outcomes, and should consider short, medium and long-term impact. A Centre of Excellence could research and devise an effective monitoring and evaluation system for the SHRP.

Case Study 4.1: Turning issues into strategy - the Northern Ireland Private Tenants' Forum

The NI Private Tenants' Forum is a group of 'easy to ignore' tenants in the private rented sector (PRS) who have come together to campaign for better conditions. This is becoming increasingly important as the PRS overtakes social housing as the second most common tenure after owner occupation. The Forum was set up in 2012 as a partnership with Housing Rights Service and has about 20 members, recruited from the HRS database and from partner organisations' user groups. The motivation for joining the group is often that members have encountered difficulties in accessing and sustaining tenancies and therefore they wish to see an improvement in how tenants are treated in the PRS. The Forum's objectives are: to support and encourage consumer driven improvement of the PRS; to help create a culture that is committed to the principles of tenant involvement in the future development of the PRS; to provide a supportive environment for PRS tenants to voice and share views; and to actively influence legislation, policy and practice in areas relevant to private tenants. The Forum won the 'More Than Bricks and Mortar' award at the CIHNI 2015 Housing Awards.

Work has included research into the practices of lettings agents; a 3-minute video providing basic information about looking for a PRS tenancy; and the manifesto Agenda for Action, consisting of eight priority themes for improvements in the PRS, generated from around 40 priorities formulated through a co-production approach.

The Forum's progress provides an example of the framework set out in Chapter 4:

- **Philosophy:** A rights-based approach has been adopted, based on the enforcement and extension of tenancy rights. The group is grounded in the value of lived experience and has adopted a co-production approach to their manifesto and video.
- **Process:** The *right structure* was to create a 'claimed' space within a host organisation, to assist the process because there is very little history of PRS tenants organising in NI. *Engagement was facilitated* by a skilled worker who provided training and support, and carried out research into participation techniques and policy, which was a labour intensive process. *Capacity release* has been achieved through the production of the manifesto and video, however there has been turnover in the group and not all have chosen to remain involved.
- **Resources:** A dedicated worker and other costs were funded by the Oak Foundation for two years. The Forum is now considering its future after a very positive evaluation.

More information is available at: <http://housingrights.org.uk/private-tenants-forum>

Final comments

This report has assessed and made recommendations for the greater involvement of 'easy to ignore' groups in housing policy and strategy development in Northern Ireland. We have uncovered a great commitment to service user involvement on the ground, including elements of good practice and a general wish to establish a culture that respects lived experience. We have proposed a new participation framework to pull together existing goodwill and good practice, and to try to even up the power imbalance between service users and providers, which is inevitable without intervention. A new approach to involvement will benefit all service users, whether or not they are currently considered to be 'easy to ignore'.

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Appendix One: Further details about the research interviews

The Northern Ireland interviews were semi-structured and covered the following areas:

- Current role and previous experience
- Definition of user involvement/ participation
- Who gets excluded and why?
- Barriers to involvement/ participation
- Examples of good practice
- Examples of impact of good practice
- How to make participation/ involvement more relevant and accessible to service users – including one stand out contribution
- How to involve service users in policy and strategy; examples of good practice
- The impact of austerity
- Comments on service user involvement in the Social Housing Reform Programme (not always relevant)
- Any other comments or questions

The Glasgow study trip was based around obtaining information about the work of the organisation but also included questions about: the impact of the project; funding; practical examples of improving user involvement; and the impact of austerity

In Northern Ireland, the following sixteen interviews were carried out, involving a total of nineteen people:

Government

- Department for Social Development (3 interviews)

Umbrella organisations

- Chartered Institute of Housing
- Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations

Voluntary sector

- Action Mental Health
- Bryson Intercultural
- Housing Rights Service (Private Tenants' Forum)
- Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
- Participation and the Practice of Rights

- Simon Community
- Supporting Communities NI (2 people)
- Trademark
- The Welcome Organisation
- Triangle Housing Association (3 people)

The Glasgow study trip involved meeting one representative from each of these five organisations:

- Ardenglen Housing Association
- Glasgow GoWell worker based at the Glasgow Centre for Population Health
- Glasgow Homelessness Network
- Scottish Recovery Network
- Youth Stress Centre, Castlemilk

Appendix Two: A Regional Centre of Excellence for User Involvement in Housing Services

This appendix provides a more detailed proposal for a Regional Centre of Excellence for User Involvement in Housing Services. In Northern Ireland, there are examples of good practice in social housing (including housing associations), and with private tenants, homeless people, users of housing support, and owner occupiers. However, there is no organisation responsible for collecting, sharing and developing good practice in service user involvement across all tenures. In particular, it is important that tenants in the private rented sector are better supported.

To summarise, the Centre would:

- Be small, enabling and strategic;
- Act as a repository of good practice initiatives and other service user involvement information *from all tenures*, from Northern Ireland and elsewhere;
- Disseminate good practice to housing providers, service users and policy-makers;
- Develop international connections in order to assist with data collection, dissemination and funding opportunities;
- Administer an Innovative Involvement Programme fund;
- Carry out and commission research;
- Be independent from government and from housing providers;
- Include service users on the Board of Management;
- Adopt a co-production approach to its functions;
- Be funded by a mix of public and philanthropic sources, although private sector sponsorship could also be investigated.

Further details

Functions

The Centre would have a remit to address service user involvement in all tenures and including housing with support. It would adopt a strategic approach to the promotion of user involvement, for example using the three-stage model proposed in this report and a co-production approach to policy and strategy development. Any operational matters would relate back to the strategy, for example the promotion of innovative practice or assistance with policy development. Although independent from government and from housing providers, the Centre would be able to contribute as a 'critical friend' to the Housing Strategy and the Social Housing Development Programme.

The Centre's two core functions would be to develop a collection of good practice and other knowledge on service user involvement in housing and related areas, and to ensure it is effectively shared. All housing tenures would be covered. Information would be gathered from Northern Ireland and wider afield, with the assistance of international connections. Information sharing could include events such as conferences and seminars, study trips, and of course individual access to the collection.

Another key function would be the identification of knowledge gaps, leading to the carrying out of small research projects and perhaps the commissioning of larger ones. In particular, a longitudinal study of the wellbeing effects of service user involvement would be beneficial. Northern Ireland lacks longitudinal research of the kind we found in Glasgow (such as GoWell). A further purpose could be to inspire new initiatives through networking events and through the administration of an Innovative Involvement Programme fund and perhaps a series of good practice awards. The Centre would maintain a register of skilled practitioners in engagement techniques, from Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

It is not considered appropriate for the Centre to have any involvement in the inspection or regulation of social housing providers, as this would compromise its independence from government. This is particularly important if the new body were to offer an evaluation service to housing providers on a consultancy basis, or to accept government funding to train and support members of tenant evaluation panels.

Organisation

The purpose of the Centre would be the promotion of excellence in user involvement in housing services. It would be small, perhaps around five staff although it is not possible to be categorical at this stage. It is essential that the Centre would be independent of government and service providers (i.e. it would not be a membership organisation), in order to ensure the trust of all its users. The Centre would operate on a non-profit basis and would consist of staff experienced in areas such as information management, research and evaluation, and policy analysis, along with an extensive knowledge of housing and related services. It would offer services across Northern Ireland. The Centre could register as a charity, as long as its purpose was not defined as political by the Charity Commission.

Staff at the Centre would be accountable to its Board of Management, and the Board to its funders. It would be imperative that the Board of Management should include service users as well as other stakeholders. It would be advantageous to set up a

separate good practice review board including international members and access to international policy networks. This may open doors to funding, for example from the European Union for multi-national projects. The Centre would be committed to operating in an open and transparent manner and would include a conflict of interest policy for both Board members and staff.

It is not intended that this organisation would compete with or replace the existing work of Supporting Communities NI or substitute for the proposal in DSD's Tenant Participation Strategy for a Tenant Participation Advisory Service. The Centre's function would not be primarily operational and would not be of the scale necessary to replace these groups, also it would operate across all tenures.

Funding

It is not proposed that the Centre should be funded entirely from public sector sources, although part funding may be appropriate. In the course of this research we have contacted many organisations which benefit from philanthropic sources. Private sector sponsorship may also be a possibility for some functions. It may be possible to access funding from European Union programmes. The Centre may also wish to carry out some consultancy although this is envisaged to be a minor function. All funding would be considered in the context of the Centre's conflict of interest policy.

Other similar organisations in Northern Ireland

The organisation ***Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC)*** works with young people on advocacy and capacity release. It is funded by health and social care sources but has total operational independence and is well regarded. VOYPIC runs a volunteering programme and also a mentoring scheme, both of which could be interesting possibilities for a user participation organisation in housing. It is somewhat larger in scale than our proposal: <http://www.voypic.org/>

The ***Participation Network*** is part of Children in Northern Ireland, the regional umbrella organisation for the children's sector in Northern Ireland. The Participation Network's work has included: creating the 'Ask First' principles referred to earlier as an example of good practice (Participation Network, 2010); developing an engagement strategy for children and young people; producing child-friendly versions of government policies and facilitating consultations; organising seminars and training; and creating a directory of organisations who have committed to engaging with decision makers. <http://www.ci-ni.org.uk/participation>

Trademark is a trade union based education, training and research organisation which has worked with over 20 organisations with an emphasis on community

relations (including new communities). They are part funded by the Community Relations Council but also attract funds from other sources e.g. Lottery. Trademark would be more of the size we envisage. <http://www.trademarkbelfast.com/>

Appendix Three: Useful web sites

All web site last accessed in April or May 2015.

Northern Ireland

All Ireland Traveller Health Study resources: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/all-ireland-traveller-health-study>

DSD Housing Strategy: <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hdiv-housing/hdiv-publications/hdiv-facing-the-future.htm>

DSD Social Housing Reform Programme: <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hdiv-housing/shrp.htm>

Housing Rights Service: <http://housingrights.org.uk/>

Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations: <http://www.nifha.org/> (including housing associations directory under 'membership' tab)

Northern Ireland Housing Executive - community cohesion: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/community/community_cohesion.htm

Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Housing Community Network: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/yn_home/getting_involved/housing_community_network.htm

Northern Ireland Private Tenants' Forum: <http://housingrights.org.uk/private-tenants-forum>

Participation and Practice of Rights: <http://www.pprproject.org/>

Participation and Practice of Rights Simon Community project page: <http://www.pprproject.org/homeless-action>

Participation Network: <http://www.ci-ni.org.uk/participation>

Public Health Agency's Personal and Public Involvement web page: <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-nursing-and-allied-health-professions/allied-health-professions-and-personal-and-publi-5>

Supporting Communities NI: <http://www.supportingcommunitiesni.org/>

Simon Community NI: <http://simoncommunity.org/>

Triangle Housing Association: <http://www.trianglehousing.org.uk/>

Scotland

Glasgow

Ardenglen Housing Association: <http://www.ardenglen.co.uk/>

Glasgow Centre for Population Health: <http://www.gcph.co.uk/>

Glasgow GoWell: <http://www.gowellonline.com/>

Glasgow Homelessness Network: <http://www.ghn.org.uk/>

Scottish Homelessness Involvement and Empowerment Network (SHIEN):
<http://www.ghn.org.uk/shien/>

Shared Solutions information: <http://www.ghn.org.uk/shien/node/126>

Scottish Recovery Network: <http://www.scottishrecovery.net/>

SRN 'Experts by Experience' Values Framework for Peer Working:
http://www.scottishrecovery.net/images/stories/downloads/srn_peer_values_framework_publication.pdf

Youth Stress Centre, Castlemilk: no web site, but news item here:
<http://news.stv.tv/west-central/211701-young-start-project-to-be-launched-at-the-castlemilk-youth-stress-centre/>

Other

Institute for Innovation and Research in Social Services (IRISS):
<http://www.iriss.org.uk/>

Scottish Government housing policy front page: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing>

Scottish Government tenant participation pages:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Housing/16342/tp>

TPAS Scotland: <http://www.tpasscotland.org.uk/>

Tenant Participation Regional Networks (Scotland):
<http://www.regionalnetworks.org.uk/>

England or UK-wide

Communities and Local Government summary of social and private rented housing policies 2010-2015: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-rented-housing-sector/2010-to-2015-government-policy-rented-housing-sector>

Implementing Recovery through Organisational Change (IMROC):
<http://www.imroc.org/>

Nesta: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/>

new economics foundation: <http://www.neweconomics.org/>

Tenant Empowerment Programme (England):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-rented-housing-sector/2010-to-2015-government-policy-rented-housing-sector#appendix-6-tenant-empowerment-programme>

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (England): <http://www.tpas.org.uk/>

Wales

National Tenant Participation Strategy for Wales: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-regeneration/publications/national-tenant-participation-strategy-for-wales/?lang=en>

Tenant Advisory Panel Wales: <http://www.tapwales.org.uk/>

TPAS Cymru: <http://www.tpascymru.org.uk>

Welsh Government housing and regeneration front page:
<http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/?lang=en>

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