

Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing: Findings from Tenant Think Tanks

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Introduction

This two part report contains:

1. findings from a Community Think Tank on Overcoming Stigma in Social Housing run in October 2017. This think tank was commissioned by the Benefit to Society Campaign.
2. headline findings from 353 experience sheets completed by attendees of LSE Tenant Think Tanks over a period of three years.

1. Findings from Community Think Tank survey on Overcoming Stigma in Social Housing, 3rd-4th October 2017

Introduction

Fifty four tenants came together at Trafford Hall for two days in October 2017 to discuss the ways that social housing works for them – the good things and the bad things they experience as tenants and the things they value or would want to change. The overwhelmingly strong message to come out from the Think Tank is that tenants like being social housing tenants, they value their landlord and their local community. This does not mean that where they live is trouble-free or that they live trouble-free lives. But it does mean that their experience of where and how they live and who they are, does not match the negative image and stereotypes of either newspapers or television programmes.

Section I

During the Think Tanks, we asked participants six questions, with forms for them to fill in and gave them time to write in their responses:

1. What are the good things about being a social housing tenant?
2. What are the bad things about being a social housing tenant?
3. What are the things that make you feel proud about your life and where you live?
4. What things make you feel bad about where you live?
5. Has anyone (official/professional) ever made you or someone you know feel uncomfortable about being a social housing tenant?
6. A) Have you come across any negative media stories (newspaper, TV) about social housing? Give examples
B) Have you come across any positive media stories about social housing? Give examples

Not all participants replied to all questions. Sometimes tenants gave more than one reason for their answer. The replies were very revealing.

- The first question – *“What are the good things about being a social housing tenant?”* provoked 91 different responses from 41 respondents. Security of tenure was top, closely followed by the repairs services and sense of community.
- The second question – *“What are the bad things about being a social housing tenant?”* provoked less than half the responses of the first question (43 total). By far the worst feature is what other people think of them, giving them a negative image of themselves – 22 tenants mentioned this as a bad thing. 8 mentioned poor housing management; 5 the level of crime and anti-social behaviour and weak community spirit (4). It is striking that tenants were less conscious of, or affected by, problems than positive experiences, even though they had plenty of negative points to make.
- *The things that made tenants feel proud about their life and where they live* are equally revealing. Of 63 responses, 31 refer to being involved, community spirit, and neighbourliness as the greatest source of pride. 14 responses praised the quality of the estate, local environment and local services. Other points included feeling safe, working, running their own business, and bringing up a family.
- *The things that tenants feel bad about* are less dominant than the good things, with a third less responses, but significant nonetheless with 42 answers. Most important is the neglect of the area and private landlords (ex-Right to Buy) not keeping property in good condition – 22 responses. Next comes the stigma attached to social housing (9). Other points include lack of community and high poverty levels.
- We asked tenants *whether anyone in an official position had made them feel uncomfortable about who they are*. 19 said yes, and 11 no.

- Our final question, in two parts, is about *negative and positive media coverage of social housing*. 50 of the 54 tenants had come across negative stories. Only four said they hadn't. On the positive side, 25 had come across positive stories, half the number who reported negative stories. Tenants are far more aware of negative stories than positive ones.

The following tables summarise our findings:

Table 1: Table showing responses of the good things about living in social housing

What are the good things about being a social housing tenant? (91 responses)	
Landlord services and quality	61
Security of tenure	19
Repairs service	15
Support and help from landlord	12
Affordability	11
General satisfaction	5

What are the good things about being a social housing tenant? Quotes

Provided me with a home when I needed one. The private sector failed me (landlord sold my bungalow – 15 year tenant). CGA got involved in the organisation as a volunteer as we are a tenant led organisation. Now I am a Board Member and get to be involved in many community events both local and national (Belfast twice). I feel 10 feet tall; when does the private sector do that for you

Affordable rent. Being able to get help when it is needed (not just with rent). Meeting other tenants and discussing what we as tenants can do to improve not only our housing but the area as well. Not having to pay out huge sums of money on repairs when you didn't have the money

Table 2: Table showing responses of the bad things about living in social housing

What are the bad things about being a social housing tenant? (43 responses)	
Negative opinions of others	22
Inadequate service from landlord	8
Crime and anti-social behaviour	5
Government policy / impact	4
Weak community spirit	4

What are the bad things about being a social housing tenant? Quotes

People immediately form an opinion of me (negatively). An estate of houses, one bad person and everyone is tarred with the same brush. Once an estate has a bad reputation the press wide mention it every time there is a problem.

Provides too much of a safety net when maybe we should be aiming to move to greater independence. No challenge?

Some people assume if your living in social housing you are feckless, lazy, unambitious – the deserving poor! My tenancy does not define who I am!

Police are slow to respond or do not respond at all. Socially unacceptable behaviour spreads like a disease unless a strong neighbourhood officer stands against it.

I do not see any negative factors to social housing. Governments have ideologically sought to attack the poorest section of society and make the rich richer and the poor poorer. That is why they portray social housing in a bad light.

The slight intake of breath when I say where I live in my village. People who know where I live feeling they can voice a negative view of social housing tenants (family and friends) 'but not you'.

Table 3: Table showing what things make tenants feel proud

What are the things that make you feel proud about your life and where you live? (63 responses)	
Being involved, community spirit, neighbourliness	31
Quality of estate, environment, home, services	16
Bringing up their family	4
Gardens	3
Feeling safe, good values, independence, working	9

What are the things that make you feel proud about your life and where you live? Quotes

Brought up 2 children after my divorce, worked until retirement, neighbours helping one another, I'm an involved tenant.

Sense of belonging on the estate. My children have grown up with social values and people stick together.

Table 4: Table showing what things make tenants feel bad about where they live

What things make you feel bad about where you live? (42 responses)	
Neglect of area and impact of private landlords	22
Stigma attached to social housing	9
Lack of community, high poverty	6
Other issues e.g. labelling, fewer police, lack of jobs, not being listened to	5

What things make you feel bad about where you live? Quotes

Lot of poverty, in the area and people struggled to live. Crime maybe up as result, A.S.B maybe higher.

Lament about how things have changed and declined from 'glory days'. Food bank not far from where I live is very busy.

Run down, empty and burnt out shops. Bus stops broken, if repaired broken again. Rubbish left around, vermin to get it, rat infested area.

Youth driving in, sitting in cars at night smoking drugs. Litter and pavements not kept free of weeds. Lack of community, if only I knew a few people.

Our area is left and other areas concentrated upon. Deprived area. Looked at negatively when good people and families live there.

Table 5: Table showing responses to question regarding being made to feel uncomfortable about being a social housing tenant

Has anyone (official/professional) ever made you or someone you know feel uncomfortable about being a social housing tenant? (30 responses)	
Yes	19
No	11
5a. Examples of being made to feel uncomfortable about being a social housing tenant?	
By statutory service providers	4
Being questioned to why they live in social housing	3
Being made to feel like second class citizen/excluded from a group	3
Been patronised	2
Feeling like they can't mention they live in social housing	2
Lack of empathy and support from housing association	2

Has anyone (official/professional) ever made you or someone you know feel uncomfortable about being a social housing tenant? Quotes

Heard members of staff say 'this is very complex and technical' implying that the tenant wouldn't understand an issue.

Yes, being told I would not have thought you lived in Bransholme – a council estate. Being questioned on why not living in own property when both partners are working.

I feel I don't want to disclose where I live to people, as it is a private matter. People sadly sneer. I was lucky to be given social housing for many reasons.

I was often put down as a child in school because of my background.

"Oh it's just Highbridge" The feeling I get from the organisation. Hamp/ Syndham Estate – 'what can you expect'? The local education authority rid to block children from attending our chosen secondary school because 'people from your estate don't do well at our school'.

I have been lucky and never made to feel uncomfortable about where I live.

My folks were talking to people who they knew, talking about social housing and they said negative stuff and my folks said we live in social housing, but they said you're different.

24 years ago when I first moved. Housing worker tried to put me off taking the tenancy. There were drugs and other issues in the area. I took the tenancy and got involved in participation (tenants).

With help managed to clean up the area forming a tenants group and putting neighbourhood watch in place

Table 6: Table showing if tenants have seen negative media stories of social housing

Have you come across any negative media stories (newspaper, TV) about social housing? (54 responses)	
Yes	50
No	4

Have you come across any negative media stories (newspaper, TV) about social housing? Quotes

TV programmes regarding benefits. Tenants who don't want to work and just claim as much as they can.

Large families being criticised for wanting larger homes. Even if the Father in full time work, but entitled to some benefits

Too many to mention – aimed at stigmatising social tenants and social housing.

Benefits Porn. Unfair to show this and not focus on why people came to be in this situation. Nothing positive about social housing or ordinary average families. Portraying romantic ideas of housing for workers, such as Port Sunlight – definitely in the past.

Table 7: Table showing if tenants have seen positive media stories of social housing

Have you come across any positive media stories about social housing? (28 responses)	
Yes	25
No	3

Have you come across any positive media stories about social housing? Quotes

Celebrities telling their stories – brought up on social housing estates and finding success. Responsible members of community likewise.

Communities of social housing offered rooms and support moral and practical to Grenfell victims.

Lots of positives. Decent homes gained when people in bad circumstance. Young women asking for my help for cooking classes. Changes I've made to myself by being engaged is massive.

People getting together to do community gardens. Community fun days and days out or trips – encourage involvement.

Below are three boxes, showing examples of negative and positive media representations of social housing tenants that tenants reported from the experience sheets:

Box A: Examples of TV programmes seen by tenants portraying a negative image of social housing:

Benefits Street	15
Negative views of politicians in question time	3
Jeremy Kyle Show	3
Benefits by the sea: Jaywick	2
Benefit Cheats	1
Tenants on Benefits	1
Tenant and Slum Landlords	1
Neighbours From Hell	1
Bread	1
Coronation street	1
The Bill	1
Can't pay take it away	1
Shameless	1
How to get a council House	1

Boxes B and C show some of the topics covered in media stories seen by tenants that portray a positive (B) or negative (C) image of social housing.

Box B: Examples cited by participants of stories of positive topics and reports:

Community action	8
Support for Grenfell victims	4
Good landlords	2
Celebrities who have grown up in social housing	2
Local stories	1
Press bringing problems with buildings to attention	1
Garden in Bloom competition	1
Adapted properties for disabled	1
Support for refugees	1
Local Authority investing in independent living scheme	1

Box C: Examples of topics tenants listed as portraying a negative image of social housing:

Portraying people as scroungers	13
Drugs and alcohol abuse	4
Antisocial Behaviour	2
Gun and knife crime	2
Grenfell Tower	2
Local residents opposing building of private houses	1
Single parent families	1
An individual being victimised by community	1
Negative portrayal of minority tenants	1
Problem estates	1
Poverty	1
Illegal sub-letting	1

Conclusion

The responses to the questionnaire show that:

- Tenants across the country value their landlords and the communities where they live;
- Tenants are highly sensitive to the negative portrayal of both social housing and its occupants;
- Tenants are most proud of being able to get involved and be treated with respect, and they also attach great importance to their local environments;
- Conversely, neglect of the local environment and general conditions bothers them greatly. They are also troubled by the way officials sometimes treat them;
- Almost all tenants have picked up negative media coverage, whereas only half had picked up on positive stories.

Overall, the Think Tank gave a strong message of support from tenants for their landlords, their communities and their local areas; and a strong rejection of the negative media portrayal of who they are and how they live.

2. Overcoming the Stigma of Social Housing

A Summary Report to Benefit to Society based on 350 experience sheets

Introduction

In the three years since 2014, LSE Housing & Communities has organised Think Tanks for social housing tenants around the theme of Housing Plus. Housing Plus is the added value that social landlords can bring to low income neighbourhoods beyond simple bricks and mortar.

Around 400 tenants have attended these Think Tanks, which focus on the impact of welfare reform, how to manage with less resources, how to build community resilience, how to develop community enterprises and support small- scale community projects, and how to save energy and improve local environments. Tenants want to share their ideas and experiences, which we collect on Experience Sheets that they complete during the Think Tank.

Section 1: Analysis

We have collected 353 Experience Sheets from tenants over the past three years (2014-2017) and have analysed their content to glean how tenants feel about where they live, their landlord, their financial situation, their community, social issues, government policy, etc. Tenants freely record any experience they want to share that is relevant to how social housing works and the factors that add to or detract from their living conditions and community.

When we began to collect Experience Sheets during the Think Tanks, our aim was to ensure that all tenants were heard. As the volume of sometimes sad, sometimes encouraging, stories mounted, we decided to analyse them as part of our research for *Benefit to Society*. It is important to bear in mind that tenants who participate are funded by their landlords to attend, so they tend to be connected and involved in some way. This makes their contributions more engaged than average, but this analysis does reflect why they want to be involved and what they can contribute if landlords and government are supportive.

Negative Experiences

The stories divided broadly into negative and positive categories, with almost equal numbers in each. The findings are striking. Among the 150 negative experiences tenants reported, 81 related to welfare reform; 36 reflected difficult social conditions such as isolation, feeling stuck, or feeling conscious of the negative image tenants have; 17 were about the way the system works and the impact of cuts on services; 13 reflected housing problems. Strikingly, only six negative experiences reflected directly on tenants' experiences with landlords.

The following table summarises this analysis and the findings.

Table 1: Negative experiences reported by tenants during Think Tanks 2014-2017 (147 total)

Welfare reform	81 (55% of the total)
Benefit cuts to people who are struggling	45
Disability reassessments	20
Harsh treatment more generally	10
Sanctions	6

Social conditions	36 (24% of the total)
Feeling stuck, unable to progress	15
Social isolation	8
Being forced to move (often related to welfare reform)	8
Negative image of tenants	5

The way the system works	17 (12% of the total)
Rigidity and inaccessibility of the system	9
Loss of supportive/ useful services	8

Housing issues	13 (9% of the total)
Impact on landlords of current problems, e.g., cuts	7
Attitudes to tackling housing problems/ response of landlords	3
Poor quality housing	3

Positive Experiences

154 tenants recorded their positive experience of where they live, how they deal with their landlords, and how they generate their own actions to improve conditions. By far the largest number of tenants felt that their involvement in community action and their aim to do more locally was their most positive experience; 75 reported this. 59 record positive experiences of direct support from their landlord, local improvements carried out by their landlord, and the landlord listening to and taking on board tenants' views. 18 wrote about special projects to help residents gain employment, and to support young people. The following table summarises these findings.

Table 2: The positive experiences tenants recorded on experience sheets (152 total)

Community action	75 (49% of the total)
Direct involvement in community action	56
Wanting to/ ambition to improve community links	18

Landlord support	59 (39% of the total)
Landlord support over welfare reform & financial difficulty	22
Landlords listening to tenants' views	15
Environmental improvements	12

Landlord support for tenants wellbeing	3
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Social support	18 (12% of the total)
Youth work & facilities	10
Helping tenants back into work	8

These findings, both positive and negative, reflect the experiences of a broad range of social housing tenants from across the country, in relation to the most pressing issues affecting social housing. They offer real insight into what makes things better or worse for tenants.

Conclusion

Several key issues stand out from our analysis. Tenants look for and take up openings to become directly involved and to do things for themselves. They rate this as their most positive experience as social housing tenants. Tenants enjoy and appreciate the support of their landlords and they are ambitious about community activity that helps them to progress.

But social housing tenants also have many negative experiences, especially of policy changes under welfare reform and service cuts. They feel alienated and denigrated by the harsh system that now seems to be in place. They are indignant about how they see vulnerable tenants being treated.

The fact that actively involved tenants report a similar proportion of positive and negative experiences underlines the potential for landlords to help tenants achieve more. The experiences and stories they record have a sense of urgency about them, and tenants are often report how weakened they feel by the system now in place. The following stories from the Experience Sheets illustrate some aspects of what our analysis shows.

Section 2: Samples of some of the 350 experience sheets reflecting the dominant themes

Welfare Reform

A young man (26) who was helping out at Community Radio collapsed. I discovered that he had been sanctioned by the company who run job in my area, because he was late due to having no money for the bus fare and had to walk 4 miles to the Job Club premises. He had not eaten for 2 weeks. He was taken to a food centre but of course had no money – no cooking facilities, no heating or lighting for 6 weeks.

A lady (40) lived with her 2 children who had severe learning difficulties. Both children were taken by social services after the lady was badly attacked while trying to protect her son from being tripped up by an adult. The lady was left with post-traumatic stress syndrome, and was only allowed to see the older child every 6 weeks. She had no contact with the younger child. She wants to retain her 3-bed house for when her children eventually leave care. She has had an All Work Test and was deemed fit.

We appealed and won. She has now been forced into a Job Club Assessment Centre who are supposed to provide training and courses to enable people into work, but don't. She got herself onto a basic ICT course for 5 weeks. The Job Club attempted to stop her but she argued that this was on advice received and agreed to at a tribunal, so they agreed eventually. The Job Club informed DWP that she had disengaged and missed a specific appointment. This was totally untrue and because we had kept a diary and notes she was able to prove it was untrue and the Job Club had to retract. However they did this by saying she had re-engaged – another lie because she had not disengaged at any time. If she is sanctioned at any time in the future and loses her money then she could lose her home and worse – no place for her children to come back to, through no fault of her own because the Job Club have to get so many sanctioned per month to meet their targets.

My son was 21 at the time of this event. On his way home with friends one evening he was in an unprovoked attack, knocked unconscious and had concussion for over a week after the incident. Due to the concussion he missed one appointment with a back-to-work scheme and one with the Job Centre. He managed to email the work scheme, who accepted his reason as valid. The Job Centre would not accept it and sanctioned him for 13 weeks. He had police and medical evidence. When it went to tribunal he won, as having a valid reason. This has not saved any government money, but has cost them. My son was vulnerable and to me it was a second attack on him. (Housing association in Lincoln)

I have lived in my home for 25 years. I moved into my home with my family – 5 children. I am now living alone in my house and am subject to the bedroom tax. My housing benefit has been reduced by £21 per week (£84 per month). I also had my council tax benefit reduced by £15 a week. This put great strain on me and affected me mentally and in other ways. My family helped me to pay this as I could not afford it. I then applied through my housing association for discretionary housing pay which I received until September. I have since reapplied for discretionary payment and have been awarded around £8.50 per week; therefore I have to find £13.50 per week towards my rent. Throughout this time I have felt pressurised into moving to a small property. I have viewed a couple and realised eventually that the properties I viewed were not what I would have wanted. I have been looking to move since the bedroom tax was introduced but not found anything suitable that I would want to live in.

My daughter is working part-time because she has a family. She is finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. She received Tax Credits but is increasingly becoming financially worse off. Council Tax has gone up, bills are more expensive, Tax Credits have gone down. She is now questioning whether she will have to give her job up which she enjoys. She does not want to go back to benefits but is feeling the strain on her finances.

As a tenant of a small housing associations we held interviews with tenants who were subject to the bedroom tax. We found that the tenants feel isolated and desperate. To make ends meet because of the bedroom tax, some of the tenants were driven to a point of committing suicide. As a result of the tax can the government be made aware of the plight of these tenants and realise the chaos they have made for housing associations and tenants to be able to cope.

Loneliness, isolation, marginalisation and restricted income all have impacted on our lives. Welfare reform and austerity cuts are removing services we depend on and have resulted in adverse health. This winter we lost five residents who passed away. This has shocked us. Our resident support post have been scrapped and the individuals made redundant

Overall in my community fear is at a level I have never seen before. As chair of our RA everyone turns to me for answers and everyone from hard working families to those with chronic disabilities are expressing fear, anxiety, stress and worry at a level likely to cause illness, bad decisions and depression.

Rural community more people finding it hard to live day to day. Youth no buses after 6.30pm, older people do not see others. Families cost too high, many rely on food banks.

Without social housing we like many would on the street or worse. The policies this government has brought in has taken us back to bad days again reducing in help with rent, council tax etc. that means we keep tail chasing to make ends meet even to a point where we have had to choose whether we eat or pay this rent have both out of full time work due to having life changing illnesses. This is making life intolerable just existing for now.

Feeling of lack of control, devastation for older and vulnerable in my area

We now have no neighbourhood officers, anti-social behaviour team, low cost gardening, low cost decorating scheme, handy man service – there were all part of the promises made to tenants when the housing was transferred from the council

I think tenants should be told a lot more than they are at the moment. The Government should live life like the tenants then they would see for themselves just what they are putting the people through.

Overall in my community fear it at a level I have never seen before. As chair of our RA everyone turns to me for answers and everyone from hard working families to those with chronic disabilities are expressing fear, anxiety, stress and worry at a level likely to cause illness, bad decisions and depression.

They are in a tiny bungalow with one proper bedroom and a tiny box room which the council determined was a two bedroomed bungalow despite the tenancy agreement saying it was a one bedroom bungalow. The husband has severe and life threatening disabilities which meant he needed many adaptations. Because of the dispute over 1 or 2 bedroomed it has taken two years and a tribunal hearing to get things settled. Only now are the much needed lifts, wet room and door widening being arranged. The stress has been unimaginable and certainly not helped his health. This was all a result of so called Bedroom Tax.

There is a whole community of single people living hidden in tents in woods along the river. All of whom have no hope of getting any kind of housing, due to being low priority. These people are not being supported by government or local authority. Only by homeless charities.

A London tenant was in serious debt, her husband developed cancer and she gave up her job in a local hospital as a cleaner to look after him. When he died she was diagnosed with cancer. She became deeply depressed with this combination of misfortune, she didn't open any letters or pay any bills. She was asked to go back to work by her employer – they'd kept her job open for her as she was so highly valued. She said no she couldn't cope. Not long after the Council evicted her for arrears – she was literally evicted by the Council for her Council tax arrears of about £800. She had been a council tenant for around 30 years. She was taken in as a vulnerable and homeless. We managed to raise this case with the Council and they accepted responsibility – 'we should have picked up her case and helped'

Systems and Services

My housing association has just closed our local Housing Office. There was consultation but it was not a very good consultation as we got a letter explaining the closure, they did not consider the tenants views. We have a good majority of old people in the area and their care was not considered. Very bad communication.

Housing

'Vibrancy' of London market some of the most problematic aspect of regen in London, HAs must keep eye on social mission.

Effects of regen on residents is typically negative and time it takes – 10 years means residents rarely benefit adequately from the improvements. Social problems need to be addressed but not confined with built environment (poverty, employment, health etc)

On moving to my house, the décor in some areas quite damaged. I was given a £250 decorating voucher to spend in B&Q on paint, brushes etc. The damages were repaired by the housing association. So I was educated on the initial handover that it was now my house but it ultimately belonged to Y.H.A and they would monitor the house periodically by Housing Officer Inspections

My Housing Association has several projects on-going; new builds and updates of their older buildings. They are not perfect but they are working very hard to make big changes, including tenants as much as possible. I'm lucky to be in one of their new builds which has really cut down all my bills as we have solar power, our own internal generator, smart meters and better layout with larger space. The grounds are really nice too and tenants can grow part of the gardens for themselves. We have planted communal herb beds and some flowers. They also mixed-up the types of flats so we have a nice mix of different houses for families, singles, old and young people which make for better communities. I'm very happy with my housing organisation

Positive experiences of tenants

Landlord Support

At the request of tenants during a partnership working session, the local authority landlord agreed to give over window space in a city centre CSC to be utilised as huge noticeboards. These promote useful information, give basic advice and signpost people to relevant help and advice providers 24 hours per day, 7 days per week – they are really big windows and hold a massive amount of information. Local authority housing officers have rearranged their working culture to enable them to help and advice more people affected by welfare reforms; this does mean that other aspects of their remit do not get their full attention but it is a question of priorities

My landlord has a benefit advisor to help tenants maximise benefits. Does financial affordability tests on perspective new tenants. Has a credit union sharing the main reception desk. Signposts people to CAB which fortunately is across the street from the office

Our landlord is and has a reputation of working with tenants and households (not known as customers but residents). Developed a not-for-profit and very low rate loan scheme. Have a very valued and active Resident Involvement Officer. Have debt and money help team (not prejudiced). Most people who lose jobs (unless lots of saving) are about 3 wage packets away from extreme hardship. Help at point of contact to help residents who may fall behind with rent – to budget and get back on track

This association has also brought a computer and dedicated a room so that tenants can get help with filing in those forms, as not everybody is computer minded. I do this so as to help other tenants and for people who are more vulnerable.

The landlord (council) has an ongoing policy to improve the means of preventing heat loss in its housing stock (11,500+ homes). It achieves this by the installation of insulation, both in attocs and in wall cavities. There is also a programme to replace double glazed windows and PVC doors. Additionally, it has embarked on a fuel supply system (Yorswitch) whereby suppliers are invited to bid on the supply of low cost fuel, these savings are passed on to member tenants.

Our council very good at including tenants in every aspect of their work. Encourage supported housing to make a community – have scheme coffee mornings – bingo in afternoons – meet and greet to include people out in the community and help ease the loneliness problems

My housing association although small has a loud voice and is proactive in getting tenants and residents into understanding the impacts of the effects of this governments backdoor, whole sale dismantling of social housing, so we have Think Tank groups in how to help. They make better decisions on how to help tenants stay in and create more social housing, decisions on how to best go forward by sending tenants and residents groups, having their say on how they feel, even sending tenants on training courses to bring back to tenants and community groups to inform of changes. Residents have a say about opportunities, to network with other groups, helping to create a more stronger voice, to help cope with effects of government cuts/changes, how best to find a way of coping.

Community lettings policy allows for trained customers to interview all prospective tenants across several tower blocks. This leads to more sustainable communities and to wider understanding of customer involvement opportunities

I'm chair of RSG in doing so we meet often with other tenants. We are the tenants voice, we do always meet with managers and tell them what the tenants would like to see happen. I don't just go to meetings we have discussions to try and get things and see if it was VFM. I can sometimes be in meeting 2 or 3 times a week. I really enjoy doing what I do. I am very proud of being involved with Coast and Country. I can volunteer some weeks 4 to 8 hours a week

I am chairman of the Tenants Services panel. We put the views or the tenant's to the board for them to act upon. We have helped the association to reduce the void time so that the turnaround time has been greatly reduced. We are now in discussion with the association with regards to Universal Credit which from 1st October is being brought out in Sefton. We are looking at ways we can help tenants with this.

My Housing Association were prompt in completing adaptations to my flat to assist me after OT and Physio assessment. Considering using resident's companies for contacts and ask contractors to offer apprenticeships / training to residents. Local community centres having a minibus to enable people with mobility issues to attend some sessions

Social Support

The Community Alliance put me on a first aid and child safeguarding course, so now I am a confident First Aider at the weekly roller disco and I run scout groups as a result of my confidence due to work and courses I have been on, thanks to the Alliance

In our community hall we have youth sports activities twice a week. 2 young men are employed to run them. I support them as volunteer. This has been running for 2 years. We have had to look for funding to continue because the council turned down a funding request. We got funding from the local church charity. Hopefully, but not certainly this will continue. The young men have really grown in the job. However, they are not earning enough to be independent and still live at home, even though one of them has a girlfriend and a baby (she also still lives with her parents). Young people should have proper, full-time, permanent jobs so they can plan their lives

Our housing association is piloting a scheme where they have employed someone to help the 25 and under to sustain their properties. The biggest turnover of properties are the under-25s. By doing this it is not only helping the tenant but the HA is getting the rent in and the property is not being vandalised. They are also buying them some white goods to start them off, i.e. cooker, fridge, washer

We have a block of flats for youngsters coming out of care. There they learn to live alone, budget etc.

With guidance when we are sure they will be good tenants they are given their own home. There is no time limit put on or length of time they stay.

In Leyland we run a youth forum, which is a group of young people who come together and talk about the things that are important for them in the community. The age range is 8 to 16 and their ideas are put forward at all meetings. They are in charge of what's important to them

We successfully persuaded EVERY school to send ALL pupils from age 6-18 to attend The Ben Kinsella Museum on knife crime and its impact which has seen a positive reduction in the number of stabbings or the use of carrying weapons amongst school aged residents

Community Action

I am passionate about Tenant Involvement and realise that in the main. Tenants are primarily interested in their homes and neighbourhoods and not the corporate entity of the housing associations they are tenants of. As things get more individually difficult community is becoming more of a reality. Also tenant run social enterprises could save the housing association funds and empower the local communities that are providing services.

I am an Involved Tenant and on the Communication Group. We produce 4 magazines a year, which go out to every tenant. In my spare time I also run a community bus. I have help from an 88 year old lady that uses the bus, she help also. The bus runs every 2 weeks on a Wednesday. I started to help with this many years ago. It all started from the lack of bus service we have in our area. 1 bus an hour with no service on Sundays or bank holidays, also not many areas too. The bus at the moment is mainly used by the elderly but anyone can use it. It has been said by some of the people that they couldn't manage without it for food shopping, and they also get to meet people. I volunteer 5 hours a week.

I became a social housing tenant just over 3 years ago. Following a secure life with a young son with a wife who became ill through diabetes type 1. I've always considered a house is not just a house, it's a home. I noticed some resistance to improving my home initially, although finally managed to turnaround a 20 + overgrown garden and improve the interior. Some neighbours asked why I would invest time and money as it wasn't my own place, m response is 'it's my home'. After being decanted from our first HMO, we moved above an elderly (young elderly just approaching retirement) gentleman. He was always friendly although seemed very down and eventually told me about his girlfriend. His place was in disrepair, his kitchen let go of, he had no fridge and a very old cooker. With befriending him and with help I've passed on clothing, food and turned around his/our garden with help from the housing association.

Visit and inspect void properties, attend meetings. Decent Homes Inspection, contractor's appointments, staff appointment, repairs maintenance work group, contractors remits and interviews. I enjoy what I do and I my (volunteering) hours for Sept are 56

Volunteers visit elderly people who can't get out of their own homes, I visit an elderly lady. I help with

my church's mother and toddlers group, I mentor for youth group at my church. I volunteer because I want to make a difference.

As a very small unit of tenants we formed a customer panel, which in turn has formed a tenant scrutiny panel. All volunteers, trained by Trafford Hall, TPAS, senior management. We have carried out three major topics with resounding success, our projects were presented to our Board and have all gained 100% backing to which we are now listed as part of our landlord's governance. We have our own budget, which finances our travel, training, internet and out of pocket expenses. Thanks to Trafford Hall, their training and communications we are now an established tool for the success of our landlord.

I myself was a young person in need of help only a year ago. I dropped out of university to try and find a job instead. Being young and in London with no support is daunting but I had managed to find the organisation I now work for. They helped supply me with training and opportunities which developed me as a person. A year later now I do the same thing for other young people as I can relate to their situation of feeling helpless.

Following training with Trafford Hall I have been able to set up an adult craft club inspired by the "Busy Hands, Healthy Minds" course and have recently set up a lifestyle and walking group. This is to help people learn how to have a health/balanced lifestyle – healthy diet, mind, encourage regular exercise, positive thinking and family time. Trafford Hall enabled me to do this after taking part in "Building Confidence" and "Healthy Diets and Nutrition" courses.

Small scale initiatives can be v important ie scheme to provide school uniforms for children. Welfare right advice

Following a think tank on wellbeing and Health in Social Housing I was able to feedback to the Customer Panel, Block TARA and Disability Group on info. With several community room nearby refurbished with a PFI format in scope to host groups and crafts for local residents. One TARA now wants a fellowship group for people supported by MIND. Another has started a sitting down exercise session. A tenant is hoping to offer a breakfast club (Tea and toast).

We have a community green space within one of our local churches. Until a few years ago, this land was unused. A local group called Greenfingers decided to turn this land into something useful. They made raised beds and grew flowers that encouraged butterflies and bees, vegetables and many other flowers. They also built a greenhouse and grow grapes and other hot house fruits. This garden is available for all groups to visit and take vegetables etc away. Any unused veggies get sent to foodbanks. They also make wine with the grapes!

Help especially now on How to Budget so tenants are not set up to fail – provide residents/tenants an alternative to using high cost lenders by setting up a low loan system. Cut out loan sharks and signpost everyone to it so that when and if it would help – the stigma is resolved. Training for community champions. Open dialogue with staff. Money and fuel poverty advisors. Change the name of "in poverty" to "making ends meet". More dialogue given out to everyone so that no one is left out

of the loop.

Getting people to volunteer to use speed guns to see how many people are not keeping to the 20mph limit on the estate. The police are going to train the persons and the police will send a letter warning them

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The Benefit to Society Campaign is supported by:

