

SHAL's Community Chat 2023-07

Better Social Housing Review

Lee Martin-Scull led a chat about the [Better Social Housing Review](#) that was published towards the end of 2022. We had a total of 6 tenants (2 in person at Crypton House and 4 online).

It was our first hybrid Community Chat and hopefully it worked well for everyone. As always, people are more than welcome to “listen in” with their microphone and camera turned off if they prefer.

There are a total of 7 recommendations in the review:

1. Every housing association, and the sector as a whole, should refocus on their **core purpose** and deliver against it
2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough **audit of all social housing** in England
3. Housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards defining what an **excellent maintenance and repairs process** looks like
4. The Chartered Institute of Housing should **promote the traditional Housing Officer role** as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development
5. Housing associations should work with all tenants to ensure that they have a **voice and influence at every level of decision making** across the organisation, through both voluntary and paid roles
6. Housing associations should develop a proactive local **community presence** through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working
7. Housing associations should support tenants and frontline staff to undertake an **annual review** of the progress each organisation is making in implementing this review's recommendations

To tackle this, social housing tenants must be front and centre of the sector's thinking. Associations need to go back to basics alongside tenants and staff at all levels, reviewing:

- what to prioritise to deliver core purpose
- reassessing wider ambitions against capacity
- the systems and beliefs at the very heart of their operations

Core purpose

Our core purpose is to provide safe, warm and affordable homes in our community. Our [strategic priorities](#) are to:

- invest well in our homes
- support people who are struggling financially
- ensure that SHAL is a finally robust business

Our commitments are to:

- create a strong community
- build strong relationships
- provide quality homes and services
- include, listen and understand
- be transparent and accountable

Audit of all social housing

We've started this process and we're now completing [stock condition surveys](#) we talked about at a previous Community Chat. It was agreed we need to know what's what and where's where so we can plan and work effectively and efficiently.

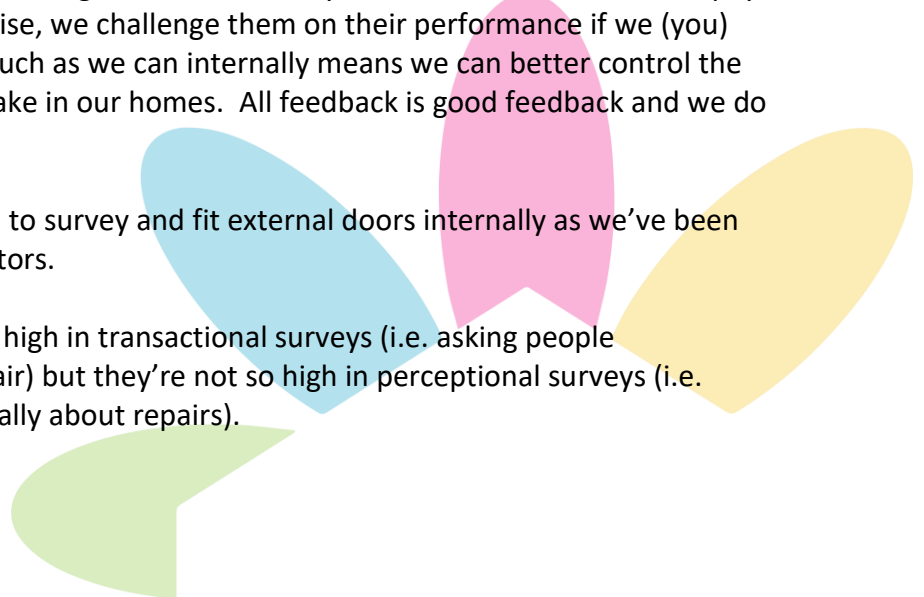
Excellent maintenance and repair process

We talked about SHAL's repairs service and the feedback was positive, noting it had improved enormously in recent years. One tenant asked how we audit subcontractors and had some feedback about how they worked.

We scrutinise their invoicing to ensure we get value for money and we sometimes refuse to pay if something's not quite right. Likewise, we challenge them on their performance if we (you) aren't happy with them. Doing as much as we can internally means we can better control the quality and cost of the repairs we make in our homes. All feedback is good feedback and we do challenge them when needed.

For example, we've recently decided to survey and fit external doors internally as we've been let down by a number of subcontractors.

Satisfaction rates are normally quite high in transactional surveys (i.e. asking people immediately after they've had a repair) but they're not so high in perceptual surveys (i.e. asking people what they think generally about repairs).



This is reflected across the sector and similar surveys. As people we tend to remember when things didn't go well or weren't done properly and talk about that even if it may have been years ago. We'll see what the latest survey comes back with.

We talked about having a number of tenant consultations about repairs and maintenance and someone suggested clarifying with tenants who is responsible for what.

Promote the traditional housing officer role

Unlike larger housing associations we have generic housing officer roles (i.e. your housing officer is expected to deal with everything including allocating the home, dealing with anti-social behaviour and your rent account).

Housing officer roles in larger organisations can be "specialist" and tenants can end up speaking to different teams about different issues. They sometimes can't get through to the same person and the different teams don't often communicate with each other.

We have 3 housing officers and they each manage around 250 homes and tenancies. However, they also lead on a specialism and support each other in those areas (anti-social behaviour, income and mental health). The relationships our housing officers build with tenants are important, especially when we're working in a restorative and trauma-informed way.

Voice and influence at every level of decision making

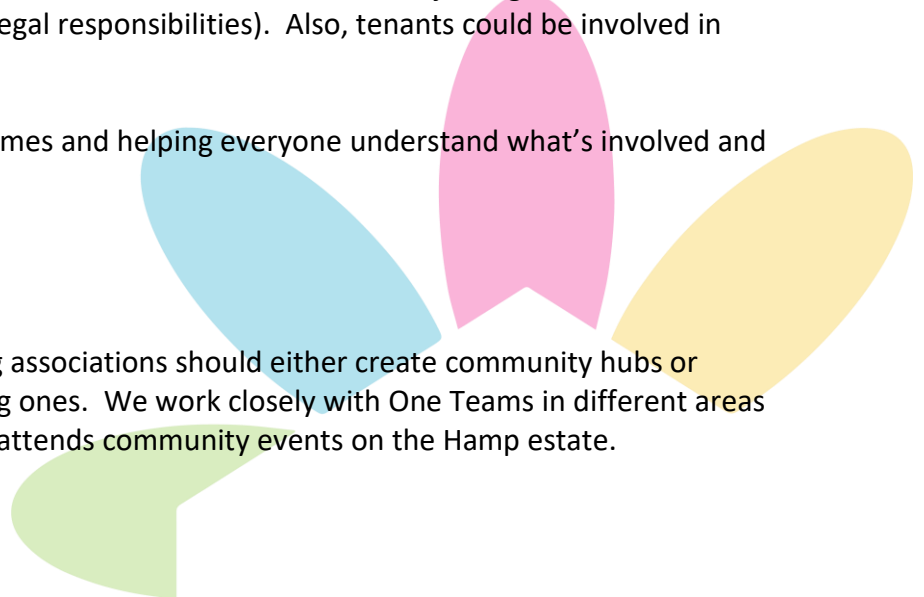
The recommendation is that housing associations should think creatively about a range of forms of engagement from a diverse group of tenants that is representative of the community. Contribution of tenants should be established as the golden thread running through all operations.

There are certainly options to explore here. We talked about tenants joining the Board and what that means (e.g. financial and legal responsibilities). Also, tenants could be involved in recruiting new staff.

We also touched on building new homes and helping everyone understand what's involved and how much it costs.

Community presence

The recommendation is that housing associations should either create community hubs or actively engage/support with existing ones. We work closely with One Teams in different areas in Somerset and our housing officer attends community events on the Hamp estate.



We have a small number of homes in different areas so we don't necessarily have a "strong" community presence but we try and be proactive and engage with other organisations working in our communities. There may be organisations out there our tenants work with that we don't know about. Are there existing networks we can plug into and support/promote?

When we get the results of our tenant satisfaction survey we'll be holding a number of "roadshows" in communities across Somerset to give as many people as possible a chance to meet with us, other organisations and chat about the results.

The work of Villages Together in Puriton and Woolavington is something to celebrate and be proud of. Can this be rolled out in other areas including Bridgwater?

Annual review

Like everything else this all sounds great but what difference will it make? Like our commitments we need to embed these recommendations into what we do and how we do them. Likewise, we need to review and improve continuously. Are the recommendations recognised by those people who provide/receive the services? If not, why not?

Being a small housing association we're often too busy "doing" the work to capture our small successes along the way and the improvements we've made. That's something we need to be better at.

In terms of the recommendations they're being looked at by steering groups at a national level as part of the [Better Social Housing Review](#) that was undertaken.

Also, the [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act](#) will strengthen powers to tackle failing social landlords and tenants living in unsafe homes will be better supported by the Regulator.

