

London Tenants Federation

National Tenant Voice Project Group
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Consultation on proposals for the National Tenants Voice

1. Introduction – information on the London Tenants Federation

- 1.1 The London Tenants Federation (LTF) is an umbrella organisation bringing together borough wide council tenant federations and organisations across London. The organisations that come under the LTF's umbrella represent collectively around 340,000 London local authority households.
- 1.2 The LTF is an independent organisation; build on the basis of consensus. It respects the diversity of its membership; does not aim to supersede any of its member organisations but rather to strengthen them through sharing and exchanging information; responding collectively and individually to national and regional government consultation.
- 1.3 During its 6 years existence, with a small grant from London Councils which provides funding for a part time support worker, it has grown in strength and influence. It has representation at the regional level; on the Mayors Housing Forum. It chairs the Mayor's Housing Forum's Community Engagement Sub-group. It was the only London tenants' organisation and one of only a few voluntary and community sector organisations to be invited to take part in the Examination in Public of the Early and Further Alterations to the London Plan.
- 1.4 The LTF has made positive links with other voluntary and community sector organisations in London and with other tenants' organisations, regionally, nationally and through its membership of Habitat International Coalition, internationally.
- 1.5 The LTF has made links with existing London and borough wide housing association tenants organisations in London.
- 1.6 The LTF operates in a democratic and accountable fashion built on formal local authority tenant structures.

1.7 LTF members have enormous experience relating to housing policy and community issues at the neighbourhood, borough wide, London wide and national level.

2. General points

- 2.1 The London Tenants Federation feels a National Tenants Voice must have legitimacy of structure based on democratic and accountable 'bottom-up working' and enabling input from the local to the national level. We are of the view that there is no one voice for tenants, but many different voices. The tenant movement is diverse, reflecting regional differences in the economy and in housing – as is recognised through government's establishment of regional housing boards.
- 2.2 We believe the NTV must reflect this in terms of vision, values, remit and structure. It must bring together existing voices by consensus, with a clear intention that the collective will not supersede any of its member parts.
- 2.3 Whilst the consultation paper on the NTV sets out proposals to include both national and regional tenants' organisations in the NTV and whilst references are made to the diversity of the tenant movement, proposals currently fail to show how that diversity might be reflected, strengthened and respected within its remit and structure.
- 2.4 The LTF feels that in order for the NTV to gain credibility amongst tenants collectively and to function in a sustainable fashion, these issues must be addressed.
- 2.5 The lack of involvement of the majority of the regional tenants' organisations within the project group has been of concern to the LTF and we understand also to other regional tenants' organisations. We believe this exclusion has resulted in a failure to deliver proposals that positively support and promote the diversity of the tenants' movement.
- 2.6 The proposals would benefit from allocating time for the development of the NTV structure in a bottom up and organic fashion. The LTF finds the proposals set out by the project group relating to structure of the NTV rather top down and thus problematic.
- 2.7 The LTF suggests that it would be beneficial to set out some short and long term aims, in order to assess and evaluate progress in the first two years and to ensure sustainability.

Short term aims should include:

- **The development of positive working relationship between regional and national organisations – through consensus working.**

The London Tenants Federation already operates in this way. It brings together a diverse range of borough wide ALMO and local authority borough wide council tenants' organisations. It is committed to

strengthening the collective voice of council tenants across London on issues where there is consensus. Where there is no consensus, borough wide organisations make their own responses, lobby or campaign on their own or with others. This enables open debate, support of diverse views, avoidance of splits and divisions and necessarily a stronger voice where there is consensus.

Chairing of LTF meetings is shared amongst its members. Delegates and spokespersons are appointed as and when necessary. This enables and equal, inclusive and accountable engagement of all member organisations. (LTF constitution, policies and procedures are attached).

LTF members are proud of the way its organisation operates.

- **Identification of gaps in tenant representation across the country and the drawing up of proposals on how gaps may be addressed.**

At the national level there are three independent tenant structures – TAROE, The National Federation of TMOs and the Confederation of Co-operative Housing. There are though quite large gaps in representation of tenants in some parts of the country within these three organisations.

Since the publication of the government's 'Communities Plan' and the development of regional housing boards, there has been a demand for tenant representation at that regional level. Government has supported the development of regional tenants' structures through the provision of start up funding. Again though there are gaps (only 7 out of 9 regions so far have regional tenants' organisations), some are not resourced to represent tenants of all tenures and the majority are operating on inadequate resources.

The LTF for example is built on existing local authority / ALMO tenant structures, bringing together borough wide council tenant federations and organisations. It was established prior to the development of regional housing boards. It has been in existence for 6 years with a small grant (for a part time support worker) from London Councils and has recently been allocated a further 4 years funding from London Council's grants committee.

There is no similar representation for RSL tenants.

Since gaining representation at the Housing Forum for London, (now the Mayors Housing Forum) the LTF has argued for similar representation for RSL tenants, through the organic development of accountable RSL tenant structures. The presentation of an LTF paper to the Housing Forum for London in September '05 kick started debate and resulted in the establishment of the Community Engagement Taskforce, (now a sub group of the Mayors Housing Forum which is chaired by an LTF delegate) – dealing with issues of community engagement in the regional housing agenda.

A report with specific recommendations enabling the representation of tenants of all tenures at the regional level was set out in a report, which was agreed at the Mayor's Housing Forum in January 2007. It is difficult to see how RSL tenants will be properly engaged without resources to fund an organisation that may run alongside (with strong links to) the LTF. The most important thing about the report is that it supports the notion that structures must be developed in a bottom up and organic fashion.

The LTF suggests that this approach should be adopted in the development of all tenant structures.

- Development of and agreement on a structure for the NTV that is satisfactory to all national and regional tenants' organisations.

3. Visions and Values

3.1 London Tenants Federation members are broadly in agreement with the 'vision' set out in the proposals.

3.2 The LTF proposes the following amendments to the NTV's 'values'. Additions are underlined.

- Bullet point 1. A **democratic and accountable tenants'** organisation that operates and supports consensus working; enabling both respect and expression of, the diversity of the tenant movement. (Revision of proposed bullet point 3)
- Bullet point 2. **An organisation that is a sum of its diverse and constituent parts** and which supports and promotes tenant engagement at all levels of decision-making in relation to their homes. (Additional bullet point)
- An organisation which ***has a core belief that tenants are citizens of equal worth*** who should not face discrimination, social exclusion, prejudice or stigmatisation because of their tenure. (Revised bullet point 7)
- Bullet point 4. Insert proposed bullet point 2 – ('An ***open, transparent and communicative*** organisation.....')
- Bullet point 5. An organisation that sets out ***clear practical and achievable objectives set each year***, through the development of a sound business and delivery plans each year and which **undertakes research and develops high quality skills amongst its members**. (Revision of proposed bullet point 4.)
- Bullet point 6. A ***professional*** organisation **with strong links with other voluntary sector organisations, private sector tenants** and which has clear working protocols with national organisations such with as CLG, Tenant Services Authority, the Audit Commission, the Ombudsman Services, the Homes and Communities Agency, TPAS. (Revision of proposed bullet point 5.)
- Bullet point 7. Proposed bullet point 6 (An ***inclusive*** organisation.....')

4. Roles and remit of the National Tenants Voice

- 4.1 The London Tenants Federation can support many of the proposals in this section, but only if there is also an inclusion of a commitment to consensus, bottom-up and non-hierarchical methods of working within the NTV. As noted in 2.1, the LTF is of the view that there is no one voice for tenants, but a number of voices determined by differences in housing and indeed the economy across the country. The Government already recognises differences between regions; in establishing regional housing boards and making available start up funding for regional tenants organisations.

The NTV should operate through its constituent parts (national and regional tenants organisations) – ensuring that all voices are strengthened – sometimes individually and sometimes collectively. A commitment must be made that the collective will not supersede any of its constituent parts.

- 4.2 We feel the proposals above, in 4.1, would strengthen and support existing tenant structures, would respect the diversity of views and concerns regionally and nationally and would ensure accountability in a bottom up fashion. They would provide legitimacy to the organisation and ensure its sustainability.

One of the first tasks of the NTV should be, as already suggested in 2.7, to identify the gaps in representation and to set out a plan to address these gaps.

- 4.3 The LTF proposes that in terms of government consultation the NTV's role should be to encourage tenants' organisations locally, regionally and nationally to respond to consultation and to also have a monitoring role in how much impact tenants' responses to government consultation have had.

5. Organisation and Governance

- 5.1 This section of the proposals is the most problematic for LTF members.
- 5.2 The LTF feels that the NTV must be made up entirely of tenants and must be accountable exclusively to tenants.
- 5.3 The LTF feels that should the NTV require support or advice from organisations outside the tenants' movement; this is something they should / will be able to ask for. The LTF does not support the notion of independents being involved in any part of the NTV structure.
- 5.4 LTF members suggest it is better to spend time on developing a structure that is genuinely democratic and accountable than to establish a structure which may well be perceived as lacking legitimacy by large numbers of tenants and potentially fails to deliver positively for the majority of tenants. The LTF suggests that short term aims, including those proposed in 2.7, be set out and a final structure agreed two years hence.

6. Is National Tenants Voice the right name for this organisation?

LTF members do not think 'National Tenants Voice' is an appropriate name. It suggests that 'National Tenants Assembly' would be better.

Yours sincerely

Michael Beverley
Secretary
London Tenants Federation