

London Tenants Federation

NATIONAL TENANTS VOICE – CONSULTATION EVENTS

Background: In Dec '06, Government appointed a Business School Professor, Martin Cave to carry out a Review of Social Housing Regulation (focused on the way in which the government controls the rents and service standards of social landlords).

Cave made it clear that his (government's) focus was on facilitating a greater role for the private sector in managing social housing; suggesting the market place is the 'best way to incentivise landlords to provide improved services' and 'empower tenants' by offering more choice (to shop around and move between landlords).

Over a hundred submissions were made to Cave's 'call for evidence'. Only 5 were from tenants organisations, (including the London Tenants Federation). No tenants were included in Cave's 'External Advisory Group'. Only two meetings were held with tenants, one in London and one in Manchester.

The London Tenants Federation's (LTF) response to Cave's 'call for evidence' suggested that a greater role for the market in social housing would result in less democratic and accountable tenants' structures, further erosion of tenants rights and greater levels of tenant apathy rather than engagement. It said the promotion of more 'consumer choice' demonstrated a misunderstanding of the needs and concerns of council and housing association tenants in relation to their homes.

Cave's 'Every Tenant Matters': Where government has privatised other public services – like the gas, electricity or water, they have established a regulator to set standards (like OfWat) and a body to represent the 'voice' of the consumer (like WaterVoice). Cave's 'Every Tenant Matters' proposed a regulatory body for social housing (OfTenant) whose remit in part will be to facilitate mobility between tenures, reduce the 'burden of regulation and 'enable providers to have greater flexibility in the way they manage their assets'.

To represent the 'consumer voice', Cave suggested the establishment a 'national tenant's voice' (NTV). He proposed that a new national tenant body that had a regional and local structure would provide a 'level of legitimacy' for the NTV, but then immediately rejects the suggestion, apparently on the basis of the time and resources it would take too long to establish such an organisation.

Government's 'Tenant Empowerment' consultation paper: published summer 2007, set out proposals on how take forwards some of Cave's conclusions, including the establishment of a 'National Tenants Voice'.

In response three national tenants organisations, the Tenants and Residents Organisation of England (TAROE), the National Federation of TMOs and the Confederation of Co-operative Housing (CCH) proposed that they together should form the NTV.

The LTF put forward the following recommendations -

1. *That the NTV include also the 6 regional tenants' organisations alongside the three national tenants' organisations (providing as wide as possible representation of tenants across the country).*
2. *That a pilot scheme be established to bring together the Nat Fed of TMOs, TAROE, CCH and the existing regional organisations under an umbrella structure similar to that of the LTF.*
3. *That the remit for the national voice (voices) be to:*
 - *Immediately identify gaps in tenant representation (of all tenures) and develop an action plan to address these gaps*
 - *Work together through consensus.*
 - *Act in the interests of the diverse range of tenants across the country and to be accountable to them*
 - *Encourage and facilitate tenants involvement in consultation and decision making from the local to the national local*
 - *Facilitate the empowerment of tenants through the organic development of bottom up structures*
 - *Respond collectively or as a patchwork of voices in consultation with government and others at the national level*
 - *Promote strong independent tenant voices for tenants*
 - *Promote democratic and transparent accountability within the tenant movement*
 - *Have enforcement powers relating to tenants rights to consultation and involvement in decision making especially in relation to tenant compacts*
 - *Develop positive working relationships with other national voluntary and community sector organisations.*
4. *That as a first step national and regional tenants organisations be brought together to assist government in analysing the responses to this consultation.*

National Tenants Voice Task Group: The LTF's contributions were not adopted. Government established a 'task group', involving TAROE, the Nat Fed of TMOs, CCH, two regional tenants' organisations and officers of the government's 'Communities and Local Government' to develop further and more detailed proposals.

The taskforce proposals will be presented at consultation events (in London on 28th June). Some obvious questions that must be asked are:

- Will the 'National Tenants Voice' be anything more than an organisation designed to report on 'consumer satisfaction' with social landlords?
- Will it be established with clear local and regional structures and transparent lines of accountability?
- Will the NTV be an independent voice for social housing tenants, with a remit to represent their interests on a range of housing policy issues such as rents and affordability, housing finance and tenants' rights?

LTF is an umbrella organisation bringing together London's borough wide council tenant federations and organisations

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