

Encouraging Participation of BME Tenants and Communities for Improved Housing

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Background



Project Background

- 18 month study for ODPM
- Several stages
 - Scoping Report
 - National Survey & Regional Workshops
 - 12 case study authorities, 8 case studies
 - Dissemination
- Independent Sounding Board
- Report published June 2004 and launched by Housing Minister
- Applicable to other hard to reach groups and other service/policy areas

Project Objectives

Identify examples of good practice on involving black and minority ethnic communities in housing investment decisions in different contexts, locations and programmes

Policy context

- Decent Homes
 - 1.5 million homes to have standard by 2010
 - Requirement for local authorities
 - ties to complete Option Appraisal on stock investment plans covering ALMO, PFI & LSVT by 2005
 - Wide and active consultation with tenants leads to the questions of BME involvement

Policy Context

- Diversity and Community Cohesion
 - Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 recognised problems of discrimination within society
 - Community Cohesion Report 2001 addressed the issues of increased segregation and fragmentation following riots in Northern Cities
 - ODPM concerned about lack of involvement of BME tenants in housing policy

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Key themes

Understand barriers to involvement

- Need to recognise barriers to involvement and their scope
- Basic, intermediate and difficult
 - Basic
 - Language, interpretation and translation
 - Intermediate
 - Mistrust, unrepresentative staff and timescales
 - Difficult
 - Fragmented BME communities
- Housing organisations need to be realistic about what can be achieved during consultation

Barriers and Solutions

Forces for

- Mapping & Research
- Direct communication
- 'Deliver on the Deliverables'
- Recruit diverse staff
- New Tenant & community structures
- Diverse approaches for diverse communities

Forces against

- No information
- Language
- Mistrust of housing orgs.
- Staff not representative
- Existing tenant structures
- Fragmented BME Communities

Getting Started

- Community mapping
- Sound basis of policies such as BME Strategies and Tenant Compacts to provide framework for consultation
- Access community organisations to gain 'reach'
- Recognise the importance of committing resources

Getting Started: Some pointers

- Mapping Communities- customer basis, break down mistrust and build bridges
- Policies have a place – “BME housing strategy has opened up debate and dialogue. The Best Value Review raised a number of issues of involvement and consultation... decided to work with local groups ... to get them to consult with local people and pay these organisations”
- Community organisations can be an effective conduit but think about representation, capacity and risk
- Shops, community centres, community groups, festivals

Problem of resources?

Local authority committed to consultation:

‘Provision of translated materials on request. Hold meetings in specific areas of BME communities; create higher profile of race equality at/in tenant groups..; actively seeking to encourage BME tenants to become part of the tenants umbrella body..making links with community groups and workers to promote tenant involvement and circulate relevant information’

Get the Right Information

SHORT TERM

- Collate existing data (from census, surveys, ethnic monitoring) –ensure available to ITAs & others involved in option appraisal
- Use Option Appraisal to build evidence base on community needs and aspirations (type of homes, measures to build cohesion)

MEDIUM TERM

- Improve quality of information, commission new research, integrate BME information into general surveys

LONG TERM

- Develop evidence based and consultation based BME strategy for the future landlord organisation

What do we know about the profile, & aspirations of BME tenants?

Get the Right Team

SHORT TERM

- Work with existing BME members,
- Treat steering groups as 'new institutions' with variety of access routes
- Consider co-options from BME organisations

MEDIUM TERM

- Headhunting and capacity building to widen pool of people who may get involved in later stages of stock options

LONG TERM

- Build inclusive tenant compacts with variety opportunities for tenants to get involved
- Build shared commitment of boards/steering groups to reach out to all sections of community

Get Help

Who can help us improve our understanding of BME tenant needs & increase BME tenant involvement?

SHORT TERM

- Involve BME organisations, faith groups, mainstream organisations with 'reach' into BME communities
- Consider using specialist consultants with language skills and cultural awareness to reach specific groups

MEDIUM TERM

- Strengthen relationships with key institutions with proven 'reach'
- Build trust through delivery and feedback
- Get better understanding of which organisations deliver on what

LONG TERM

- Position within local community networks
- Join community & race equality alliances
- Shorten the 'supply chain' between the organisation and BME tenants

Formal Consultation Campaigns

- All stock options have formal consultation stages e.g. to demonstrate tenant support for preferred option in Option Appraisal
- What happens when formal approaches (offer documents, newsletters, meetings, surveys) don't reach or exclude 'hard to reach' tenants?
- Need to target all segments of tenant population
- Plan well ahead: budget and allow enough time to meet targets for hard to reach groups
- Use variety of formal/informal methods
- Monitor impact and involvement achieved

Example of effective formal consultation campaign

- Treated Residents' Steering Group (RSG) as 'new institution'- variety of access routes
- RSG committed to ensuring all residents would have a genuine opportunity to give feedback
- Preliminary visits to local organisations with 'significant' reach (e.g. churches) to build understanding and trust
- Advance publicity through mail shots, posters (African Caribbean barbers, Asian food and clothes shops, GP surgeries, bus stops etc)
- Advertised child-care assistance so that residents could attend meetings

Menu of involvement methods

- Neighbourhood conferences
- Community surveys
- Citizens juries
- Focus groups
- Community outreach
- Local & BME specific media
- Women only meetings
- Appropriate venues; piggy back on existing meetings
- Shops and leisure venues for information giving
- Community Calendar
- First force organisations, faith groups
- Informal networks, including staff networks

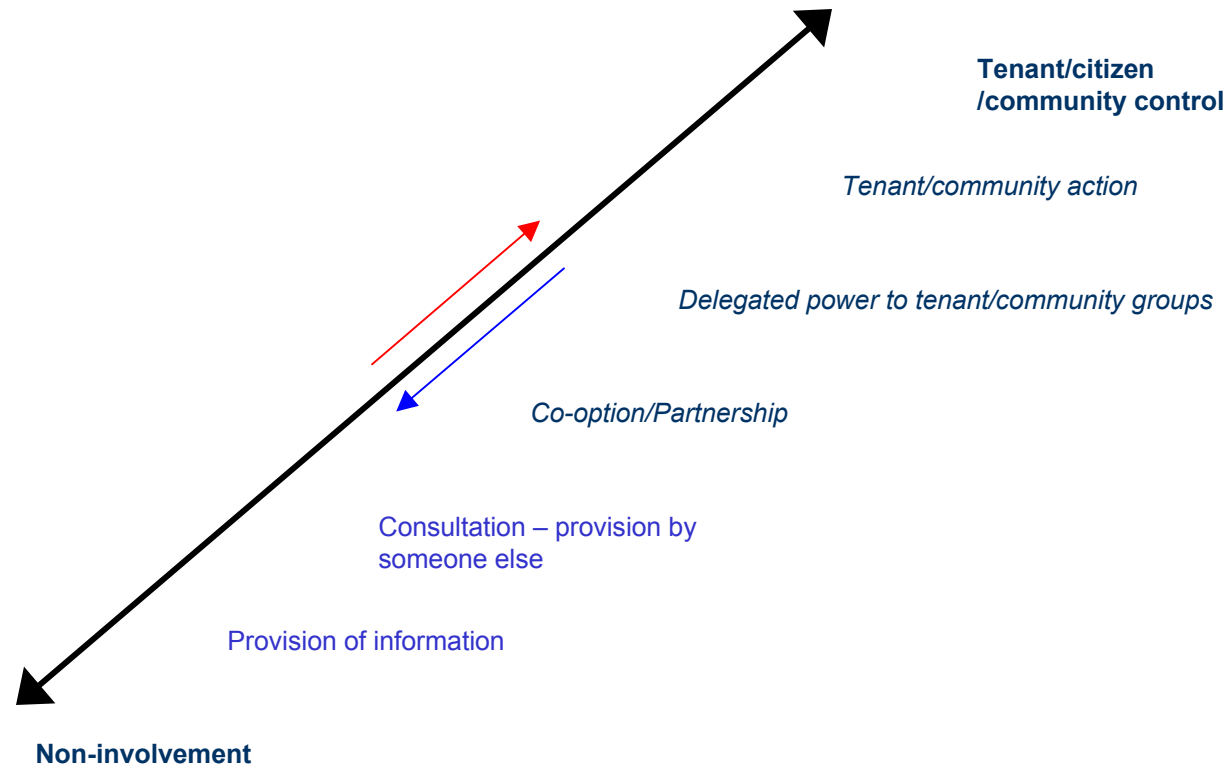
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BME Involvement in Steering Groups and Boards

- Requirement for all social landlords
- Brand stock investment panels as 'new institutions'
- Problems of representation
- Move to quality and smart involvement
- Succession Planning required complemented by training and capacity building

Levels of Participation



Reaching BME Tenants

- Tenants generally hard to reach; BME communities can be more so
- ‘Community Leaders’ can provide access **BUT** need to be audited for effectiveness
- Survey communication needs - translation can mask literacy problems
- Mix formal and informal methods to improve reach
- Participation required at all stages and all levels of the stock investment process

Increasing your reach

Formal methods

- Translation
- Interpreting
- Meetings, focus groups, citizen panels
- Working with community organisations

Informal Methods

- Utilising staff
- Go to the people
- Community events
- Word of mouth
- Alternative forms of media

Wider Benefits

- Catalytic role of housing investment as driver for training, employment and renewal
- Housing design and build to meet BME aspirations
- Community cohesion and capacity building
- Actively responding to racist harassment
- Reviewing policies to asylum seekers and refugees

A Holistic approach

- Housing as driver – housing plus initiatives on training & increasing skills, establishing businesses and sub-contracting
- Response to racist harassment – increase trust, respond quickly to incidents, use community networks, take action against perpetrators

Summary

- A process not a product
- Obtain the basic tools
 - Barriers, research, strategies & resources
- Provide opportunity for involvement
 - Formal; informal
- Long term relationship building

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More information about project along with
working papers from www.curs.bham.ac.uk