

**The Tenant Services Authority National
Conversation – A joint briefing from HQN and
the Northern Housing Consortium**

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Charlie Hughes

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What is this briefing about?

The new Tenant Services Authority (TSA) has been charged with promoting and championing the interests of social housing tenants. It is going to establish a national standards framework that promotes choice and excellence and challenges mediocrity. It wants this framework to be based on a serious understanding of what tenants want from their landlords. The National Conversation is the process whereby they intend to find that out. This paper sets out what we know so far and explains why providers from all parts of the sector should get involved.

Who is this briefing for?

Anyone involved in the management, maintenance or provision of social housing needs to know about the National Conversation because whether you are in a housing association or an ALMO, are a local authority with retained stock or an accredited private landlord, whether you are strategic or delivering the service, sooner or later the outcome of this conversation will directly affect you.

Introduction

The TSA is a new, independent regulator charged with promoting and championing tenant's interests. It became the regulator for housing associations and accredited private landlords on 1 December 2008 and – subject to the completing the necessary parliamentary process – it will do the same for local authorities and ALMOs from 2010. It is promising a tough regime to promote excellence and challenge mediocrity based on the establishment of a national standards framework – see www.tenantservicesauthority.org for more information.

In order to inform the development of the national standards framework, it is about to launch a National Conversation. The primary objective of the National Conversation is to capture information on the views of tenants, prospective tenants, other service users and providers. It seeks to involve a wide range of tenants, prospective tenants and shared owners, all types of social landlord and other key stakeholders.

Three phases are envisaged. In phase one, 'What tenants want', it will seek to engage, inform and record the views of tenants as to what they want from their landlords. This will be done through a series of events and a parallel research programme. In phase two, 'Developing our response', the feedback from phase one will be used to engage tenants' groups and landlords in a discussion about how the framework should operate and what should be in it. Phase three will be the formal statutory consultation about the final framework proposed. Essentially this briefing is about the details of phase one, as details beyond that are not yet clear.

Phase 1 – What tenants want

A dedicated research agency is drawing up a research questionnaire which will be used to structure and gather much of the information. The same questionnaire will provide the structure for a series of co-ordinated events taking place in the first three months of 2009:

- Eighteen half-day regional events for tenants, led by the TSA, with up to 200 delegates per event
- ‘Franchised events’ led by social landlords and others. Every social landlord with over 1,000 properties is asked to hold at least one event, smaller landlords are encouraged to hold events and more informal ‘coffee morning’ events by established tenant groups are promoted
- Five one-day regional events for landlords, led by the TSA, with up to 100 delegates per event.

There will be a standard resource pack for all the events so they have some consistency, with the TSA approving the final design. The events will be designed to raise awareness of the TSA and its new approach, and to seek feedback on tenants’ views and priorities. As well as landlords, the TSA wants other stakeholders such as the Chartered Institute of Housing, the National Housing Federation, the National Federation of ALMOs, the Local Government Association and TAROE to get involved so as to achieve as wide a buy-in as possible to the end result.

There will be a real push to reach every type of tenant rather than just the usual suspects – people from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, younger people, homeless people, rural as well as urban, etc.

This will be a tall order given a short lead-in time and the fact that those of us used to working with tenants know what a dead patch early January can be... let’s hope the importance and significance of this opportunity helps overcome those problems.

Get involved

The TSA will shortly be announcing its choice of contractors to deliver three separate but interdependent pieces of work to support the National Conversation – the research contract, delivering the conversation process itself and a communications consultant. HQN and The Northern Housing Consortium will keep you briefed as things develop but urge all landlords – even if you won’t come under this regime until 2010 – to get involved now while there is still the opportunity to influence things.

Tell your tenants about the National Conversation

Landlords should also begin now to make tenants aware of the National Conversation and to publicise the opportunities they will have to make their views known to the TSA. Sample text that can be used in tenants' newsletters or posted on your website to help facilitate this process is being drafted by HQN and will follow this briefing within the next few days.

HQN is the largest independent housing training and consultancy company in the UK. Over 680 housing organisations nationwide subscribe to The Housing Quality Network which provides high quality briefings and workshops on a wide range of issues affecting the sector. We also run a number of specialist networks, provide bespoke consultancy and research, in-house training, interim management (The Pool) and executive recruitment (The Source) services and host a comprehensive programme of conferences and seminars.

For further information, please contact:

Consultancy: Jason Lukehurst – jason@hqnetwork.co.uk

The Housing Quality Network: Claire Turner – claire@hqnetwork.co.uk

Specialist networks: Ben Osborne – ben@hqnetwork.co.uk

Events: Fiona Macfarlane – fiona@hqnetwork.co.uk

Training: David Ganz – dave@hqnetwork.co.uk

The Pool: Ruth Leap – ruth@hqnetwork.co.uk

The Source: David Ganz – dave@hqnetwork.co.uk

Or call any of the above on 0845 4747 004 For further information: www.hqnetwork.co.uk