

# Cambridge City Council

## A Review of Resident Involvement and options for an independent voice for Residents

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## **Executive Summary**

1. Cambridge City Council's framework for resident involvement is robust, effective, and represents excellent value for money.
2. Residents have a strong voice in setting strategy, in formulating policy and in monitoring and improving service delivery.
3. Effective mechanisms are in place that allow residents to scrutinise the housing service and to hold their landlord to account.
4. Existing structures for involvement allow residents to exercise a high degree of independence.
5. Although the menu of resident involvement is comprehensive, there needs to be greater co-ordination and communication so that active residents are kept informed of the full range of actions and activities being carried out.
6. There are some gaps in service provision and the Council has not yet reached the "ceiling" of involvement that has been identified by the Tenant Services Authority. This is partly because the level of investment in resident involvement has been low compared to some other providers. Some ideas are put forward for marginal improvements in the service.
7. Following the demise of the Cambridge Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations there is a widespread view that an external "independent voice" should still be available for residents.
8. There is general agreement that a new Cambridge Federation should not be created. Residents are already able to exercise a high level of independence; therefore the budget previously used to fund the Cambridge Federation should be re-allocated. Some of the budget should be used to fund an additional member of staff within the Council who would support grass-roots groups and a revived independent residents' forum. Training and support to residents should also be increased. A summary of recommendations for future action is presented at section 12.1.

## **1. Introduction and background**

I was appointed by Cambridge City Council in July 2011 to carry out a review of the Council's resident involvement framework. The brief asked me to consider two questions:

- 1) Are current arrangements for resident involvement robust and fit for purpose in a changing world?
- 2) Should tenants and leaseholders have an "independent voice", free from Council influence and interference?

Cambridge City Council manages 8,451 homes – 7,290 tenants, 89 shared owners and 1,072 leaseholders – and this amounts to around 18% of the total of 46,611 homes in the City (April 2008 figures).<sup>1</sup>

The Council's housing service has been awarded 2 stars with excellent prospects for improvement by Audit Commission inspectors. The Council has also been praised in the past by regulators and inspectors for having an effective approach to resident involvement. But in a period of dramatic change in the housing world the City Council wishes to maintain its position as one of the best performing local authorities.

The Council's landlord function is regulated by the Tenant Services Authority, and the TSA expects robust self-regulation by councillors "incorporating effective tenant involvement". The TSA standards place a strong emphasis on providers carrying out "co-regulation" with their tenants, and involving their tenants to shape local delivery.

The scaling down of the TSA and its merger with the Homes and Communities Agency from April 2012 means that future regulatory interventions will be minimal and the drive for improvement and effective governance has to come from within the authority itself. The notion of co-regulation and "Resident Led Self Regulation" implies that

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<sup>1</sup> City Council housing strategy 2009/12. Available at [www.cambridge.gov.uk](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk)

residents will be responsible for driving this forward in the future, and this will require them to be effectively trained, supported and empowered to play their part.

## **2. Methodology**

I conducted three discussion groups: one with members of the Housing Management Board; one with members of the Housing Regulation Panel and other active residents, and one with non-active residents.

I carried out face-to-face and telephone interviews with a number of active residents, council officers and councillors, including Catherine Smart the Executive Councillor for Housing. A list of these respondents is at Appendix 1 and I would like to thank them for their time and their enthusiasm.

All members of the Housing Management Board and the Housing Regulation Panel were given the opportunity to respond to some written questions and to conduct a personal interview if they chose to do so. I also reviewed internal Council reports and wider policy issues in framing this report.

## **3. External change**

The housing world is changing. From April 2012, as a result of Housing Revenue Account reform, the City Council's housing service will become self-financing . All rental income will be retained locally instead of a significant proportion being returned to the Treasury. Under the new arrangements the Council will be allocated a fixed amount of debt to pay off, allowing it greater freedom and certainty to run its own affairs. This effectively ends any need to look at stock transfer and will allow the Council to make longer-term plans and to build new homes. Many local authorities are bringing their ALMOS (Arms Length Management Organisations) back in house as a result of this change.

The Tenant Services Authority, which regulates the Council's landlord service, will be absorbed into the Homes and Communities Agency in 2012 and the scale of inspection has already been significantly reduced. In effect, no landlord will be inspected unless there is some form of serious detriment (yet to be defined) to tenants. This provides the Council with a degree of breathing space and more freedom to innovate,

but it does mean that the impetus for improvement will need to come from within the authority. Residents will need to access suitable training and resources in order that they are empowered to take on the step change that will come with this enhanced role. It will also mean linking tenant activists into wider networks, such as ARCH, TPAS and tenant groups that are being developed through Facebook and Twitter where ideas and information can be rapidly disseminated.

The Localism Bill also contains a number of measures, (such as the Right to Challenge, Neighbourhood Plans, the Right to Build and the Right to Acquire), that could also have an impact upon wider community development issues. Changes in housing and welfare benefits could also have an impact upon tenants and communities. Some of these issues are discussed in greater detail below.

#### **4. Present arrangements for resident involvement**

The key requirements for resident involvement and empowerment are as set out in the Tenant Services Authority's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard – see Appendix 2.

Resident involvement should take place at three levels.

- The ability to influence strategic priorities
- To be Involved in the formulation of policies
- To have a say in the delivery of housing services

##### **4.1 Strategic**

At the strategic level, a Housing Management Board (HMB) effectively acts as the main governing and discussion forum for the housing service. It comprises 9 councillors (6 from the ruling group and 3 from other parties) and 6 residents. The 6 residents (five tenants and a leaseholder) are elected by all residents every four years to serve a four-year term. The elections are run by the Electoral Reform Society and are well contested. The response rate at the last election in 2008 was 22.5%.

The composition of the HMB is such that if opposition councillors and residents unite they could out-vote the ruling party. This represents a

really powerful and independent role for residents and is possibly unique within the country.

The City Council has a system of executive councillors, who are responsible for each service. The HMB acts as a scrutiny forum for the decisions taken by the Executive Councillor for Housing. It monitors the housing service and makes recommendations to the Executive Councillor. To date, there has not been an occasion when the Executive Councillor for Housing has overturned a decision or recommendation of the HMB.

In addition, three residents are selected to sit on the Community Services Scrutiny Committee, which has a wider remit to consider strategic housing issues.

I deal with the composition and constitution of the HMB in greater depth at section 5. below.

## **4.2 Policy formulation and service delivery**

The City Council offers a menu of involvement methods. This includes street forums, area meetings in the north and south of the City, ad-hoc meetings, estate walkabouts, support to residents' associations, a citywide forum for leaseholders, a youth forum in Abbey, a Tenants' Initiative Scheme that offers up to £7,000 for environmental projects and an annual garden competition. The Tenants' Initiative Scheme and the garden competition were previously run by the Cambridge Federation. Local offers have been developed in partnership with residents.

The Council also offers a range of ways to communicate with residents. *Open Door* magazine is co-edited with residents and is distributed to all residents quarterly. This magazine includes a freepost feedback survey so that improvement can be built in. The Annual Report to residents is also co-edited with residents and includes a feedback survey. The Council website includes a *Your Home, Your Say* feature and there are residents' videos on YouTube and on the Council website. The *Count Me In* campaign has sought to involve Black and Minority Ethnic residents and has been successful. In addition, an annual residents' day and an annual tour take place- both organised with residents.

In terms of tenant scrutiny, the Housing Regulation Panel (HRP), monitors service delivery and scrutinises the performance of the housing service. It is properly constituted, its members have been properly trained and it has formal powers to seek evidence and hold officers and councillors to account. The HRP has carried out a number of independent surveys of council services and the Council has adopted its recommendations. A Residents' Asset Management Group (RTLG), inspects work done on homes, Green Inspectors check work carried out on estates and the Council also uses Mystery Shoppers.

Details of the full range of involvement and communication methods are shown at Appendix 3.

Traditionally, many housing providers supported residents' associations and saw this as the principal means of consulting with and involving their tenants. Progressive landlords recognise that this model is out of date and that residents associations are not always representative of their communities. Involvement needs to take place at many levels to reflect the differing aspirations, enthusiasm and lifestyles of residents. Some residents want to be heavily involved. Many more want to have the comfort that their views will be taken into account if issues arise. The Council's menu of methods therefore offers something for everyone, from the resident who does not wish to be involved, through armchair activists to those who are completely committed to being involved.

All of the respondents I spoke to felt that the Council's internal methods of resident involvement were comprehensive and valuable. However, there was a widespread feeling that, although much activity was taking place, there was sometimes a lack of co-ordination and communication. Tenants who were active in one area did not know what others were doing elsewhere. Some respondents wanted more feedback on discussions and decisions from the Housing Management Board. There seemed to be a genuine appetite to understand the bigger picture. This was felt to be a particular problem following the demise of the Cambridge Federation. Current gaps in provision are identified in section 7. below.

## **5. Governance and Accountability**



Within any landlord organisation a clear distinction needs to be made between governance and accountability. The governing body is responsible for leading and controlling the organisation, ensuring that all legal and regulatory requirements are complied with and that risks are effectively managed. In the event of a serious incident, regulators, customers and other partners need to know where the “buck stops”.

Accountability means that customers and other stakeholders are able to scrutinise the work of the governing body and to hold them account, making them change direction or even changing their composition if necessary. During my discussions with respondents I used the example of RBS, where Fred Goodwin had been able to lead the bank to bankruptcy due to ineffective governance and poor accountability. The governing Board of RBS was weak and unable to control him, and he was not held to account either by shareholders, regulators or staff, either because they were ignorant of his activities or were scared to challenge him.

For a housing association, the relationship between governance and accountability is fairly straightforward. The Board is the governing body, responsible for leading and controlling the organisation, and the Tenant Scrutiny Panel should, in theory, be able to hold the Board to account.

Within the City Council the situation is more complex. When I asked the question “who or what is the governing body of the housing service?” the answers were unclear. Some people stated that the buck stopped with the Executive Councillor for Housing. Others felt that the HMB acted as the governing body. Perhaps the fact that the question was not properly understood reflects the complexity of Council structures.

The HMB terms of reference lists three main objectives:

- To be the main discussion forum between the Council, its tenants and its leaseholders for all matters relating to the landlord function of Cambridge City Council.
- To make recommendations to the Council’s Executive or to full Council as appropriate.
- Pre-scrutiny of non-strategic housing management functions.

The HMB is also a scrutiny body holding the Executive Councillor for Housing to account. The HMB and the Executive Councillor for Housing are also held to account by the Housing Regulation Panel, which acts as a tenant scrutiny panel. Councillor members of the HMB, along with all councillors, are also held to account by their electorate, and resident members of the HMB are held to account by all residents, who vote for resident places every four years. All members of the HMB sign the Council's code of conduct for councillors.

In the light of this, I feel that the terms of reference of the HMB should be revised to clarify, beyond any reasonable doubt, the lines of responsibility between the Executive Councillor for Housing and the Housing Management Board.

In terms of resident elections to the HMB, in theory all six residents could be replaced at the four yearly elections. In order to ensure effective continuity and succession planning, and to get residents into the "habit" of electing their resident representatives, it may be sensible to hold elections every two years, with three resident places available at each election. This means that two tenant representatives and a leaseholder could be elected in year 1 and three tenant representatives could be elected in year 3, each to serve a four-year term.

The current resident members of the HMB are experienced housing practitioners. They all feel able to think and act independently and to campaign on behalf of residents. They also display a high level of competence and a close familiarity with strategic housing issues and the Council should be proud to have the benefit of their contribution. However, by their own admission, they are not as young as they were. The Council will need to think carefully about succession planning and where their replacements might come from. Within the context of co-regulation it will be important to "talent spot" and nurture up and coming resident activists who can take on a wider and more strategic role in the future.

As detailed above, the Housing Regulation Panel also plays a key role in holding the landlord service to account. It has a comprehensive constitution and robust powers to investigate services, to question councillors and officers and to make recommendations for service improvements. The HRP can also commission advice from independent consultants.

All of these factors show that the HRP is able to exercise an independent role within the Council, and that resident members of the HMB also feel able to act independently.

## **6. Staffing and the Financial costs of resident involvement**

The Council employs a Resident Involvement Officer. A Publications Officer also assists with resident involvement work. Both of these posts are full time. These staff work with residents and other officers to ensure that resident involvement work is effective within the Council.

The Council's annual Budget for Resident Involvement is £158,000, of which £78,000 funded the Cambridge Federation with the remaining £80,000 funding the Council's in-house service and grants. It is fair to say that this rough 50:50 split was not reflected in outputs of equal value. Most respondents felt that the Cambridge Federation had not been providing value for money in recent years in comparison to the Council's in-house staff.

£158,000 amounts to just over £21.09 for every Council property per annum. According to Housemark the national upper quartile for spend is an average of £33.91, and the lower quartile is an average of £21.90, so the City Council is achieving remarkable results in resident involvement given that it is spending below the lowest quartile.

In my view, given the regulatory emphasis upon co-regulation and the changing housing landscape, it will be important to retain and redirect the £80,000 budget that previously supported the Federation into alternative resident involvement mechanisms, and options for this are set out in this report.

## **7. Are there gaps in provision?**

The menu of involvement offered by the City Council more than complies with regulatory advice. Of course there is always room for improvement, and complacency should never be an option. Some ideas that the City could consider are listed below.

## APPENDIX 1

National research shows that there is always a ceiling to involvement. However hard you try there will only be a minority of residents who wish to be actively involved. Research by the TSA showed that 50 per cent of tenants were not interested in any form of involvement. Of the tenants who were interested, the most popular involvement methods were:

- Responding to surveys (20 %)
- Site surgeries (14%)
- Tenant and residents associations (13%)

Only 9 per cent of tenants were interested in becoming a tenant board member.<sup>2</sup>

Data provided by Housemark<sup>3</sup> shows how Cambridge compares to other landlords (national figures).

	Cambridge	National data		
		Upper Quartile	Median	Lower Quartile
<b>% Responding to consultations and surveys</b>	33.4%	43.2%	33.1%	23.1%
<b>% Who feel their views are taken into account</b>	65%	69.1%	64.9%	59.9%
<b>% Satisfied about being kept informed by their landlords on issues affecting them</b>	75%	84.5%	81%	76%

This indicates that the City is still below the upper quartile averages for each of these questions, and this suggests that the “ceiling” of involvement has not yet been reached in Cambridge. This is not a criticism, because the Council has achieved remarkable results with a

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<sup>2</sup> Understanding tenant Involvement Tenant Services Authority, 2009

<sup>3</sup> Housemark – Resident Involvement benchmarking. 2009/10

relatively modest resident involvement budget. But it does indicate that an additional investment in resources could yield further benefits.

## **7.1 Critiques of current provision**

Most respondents felt that the Council was doing excellent work in resident involvement and that Cambridge was well ahead of the vast majority of housing providers. However, many resident respondents felt that there was a lack of co-ordination and a lack of publicity between and about the various activities. Everyone was busy in their own “silo” but they did not always know what others were doing. They wanted to see the bigger picture and they felt that current resource levels and communication methods were not always adequate. This was felt to be a particular issue since the decline of the Cambridge Federation.

There was an assumption on the part of the Council that all residents had access to electronic communication, but many active residents do not have computers and prefer to use the telephone or to write and receive letters.

The Council has highlighted the fact that residents contribute over 3,000 hours of voluntary effort each year but some respondents felt that this contribution was not always recognised or rewarded. It was felt that small gestures such as an invitation to an occasional civic function would be highly appreciated. One resident member of the HMB stated that their greatest achievement had been to receive a key to the drinks’ machine on the civic floor! These gestures may seem minor, but they are very symbolic and meaningful to residents and provide proof that residents are being treated as genuine and equal partners.

In addition, some respondents felt that they were not give adequate support to carry out their work. Some commented that they had found it hard to get leaflets printed. Others commented that it could be difficult to obtain expenses forms to reclaim money for travel and other spending. The procedures for claiming expenses were felt to be poorly publicised and that residents had to push hard to get their proper entitlement.

It was felt that there should be an effective system in place to allow residents to produce newsletters and other publications.

Many respondents felt that the Council could do more in terms of grass-roots work, reaching out to people and communities who have been untouched or unmoved by previous methods of involvement. One councillor expressed concern that areas of his ward lacked any viable groups that could access council funds and that the ward was therefore “losing out.”

With the new provisions in the Localism Bill, and the initiatives that come under the general heading of the Big Society, it will also be important for neighbourhoods and communities to have a “civic core” of active citizens who are able to take advantage of funding and other opportunities. This is dealt with in section 10. below.

Some of the non-involved tenants that I spoke to were unaware of formal structures such as the HMB and the HRP. They could not recall being asked to vote in elections to the HMB. Their focus was very much on their immediate neighbourhood. They stated that they would appreciate the occasional knock on the door or a letter to ask them how they were. When pushed, they did admit to reading Open Door, but did not appear to recall much of its content. They also commented that good and regularly updated notice boards in their immediate vicinity would be helpful and that the Council should make more use of Radio Cambridgeshire as many residents listened to it. This again proves the point that grass roots’ door-knocking and street-level communications could have a positive impact.

## **8. The Cambridge Federation of Tenants, Leaseholders and Residents and an independent voice for residents**

Until recently, the Cambridge Federation of Tenants, Leaseholders and Residents nominally provided an independent voice for residents. However, in early 2011 they decided not to apply for further grant support from the City and the organisation has effectively ceased to exist. A formal winding up meeting is to take place in September 2011.

The reasons behind this decision are complex, but in summary the history of the Federation over the past few years appears to be a classic case of a third sector organisation losing its way due to a lack of effective leadership and internal infighting. Voluntary trustees are not always able to steer an organisation in the right direction, particularly if they do not have the requisite legal, financial and human resources skills that are

needed to run an independent organisation. This will be compounded if trustees have to tackle what they may perceive to be unreasonable demands from the funding organisation, and if they are also attempting to manage staff who are steering a different course to the one that is required.

It was made clear to me that the Federation had been carrying out very little campaigning and advocacy work over the past few years and that, although they had been successful in earlier years, their recent performance had been poor in terms of outputs and outcomes and that the relationship with the Council had been difficult. A great deal of work had been carried out by councillors and Council officers to resolve these issues but to no avail.

A minority of respondents expressed a dissenting view. They felt that the Federation had been too successful and too independent and that this was the reason for the difficult relationship with the Council. However, I did not find any substantial evidence that the Federation had been producing a high level of positive outputs and outcomes for residents.

At a meeting with tenant activists it became clear that the demise of the Federation had caused a great deal of bitterness, with personal insults being traded between some respondents. It will therefore be important for the Council and residents working together to carry out some form of “healing” exercise so that the wounds of this saga can be mended and resident activists can “move on” without the demise of the Federation becoming a running sore. It may be useful to bring in an external facilitator to conduct this exercise.

Residents need to be re-assured that their work is valued and that what has happened in the past should be seen as a learning experience for future ways of working. Every cloud has a silver lining.

However, many residents told me that the monthly forum previously organised by the Federation had been a very successful event, since it allowed residents to hold officers to account and was run entirely by residents without Council interference. It had acted as a kind of select committee, with an agenda set by and for residents and had the ability to call Council officers to attend in order to answer questions on service delivery issues. Several respondents stated that the forum, or an updated version, should be revived.



The demise of the Federation does leave a gap in terms of an independent voice for residents. However, it also represents a significant opportunity to develop new and better ways of working. The Council's internal structure for involvement already provides residents with a large degree of independence. As stated above, HMB resident members can out-vote the ruling group if they combine with opposition councillors and the Housing Regulation Panel is able to hold officers and councillors to account and has formal powers to commission advice and consultancy.

However, many respondents felt that, when and if it comes to the crunch, residents as a whole should have the ability to seek independent advice and to hold the Council to account outside of existing mechanisms. The options for how this could be put in place are set out below.

## **9. Options for an independent resident voice**

The options are set out below.

### **1. Do nothing.**

**For:** The Council's framework for resident involvement is comprehensive and successful and residents have the ability to act independently - for example their ability to out-vote the ruling group on the HMB and the ability of the HRP to commission research.

Doing nothing saves money and funds could be re-directed to other essential areas.

**Against:** Complacency should never be seen as an option. If the Council stops improving it will fall behind other providers and it will take more effort and resources to catch up.

An independent voice could help to keep the Council focused on improvement.

Most respondents felt that an independent voice over and above existing structures should be provided.



**2. Set up a Cambridge Federation Mark 2 using the current budget.**

**For:** A new Federation could revitalise residents' associations and act as an effective independent voice for residents.

The Federation would be truly independent of Council control.

**Against:** Unless it could gain access to alternative funding, the organisation would still be dependent upon Council funding and could go the way of the previous Federation.

Residents' associations on their own are seen as only part of a wider spectrum of resident involvement spectrum. This could alienate a significant proportion of tenants who do not wish to become involved in formal groups.

As an independent company, the Federation would require an effective Board of Management and separate premises. Not only is this costly, but many third sector organizations struggle to find experienced trustees who are able to deal with complex legal, financial and human resource issues.

**3. Appoint an independent external advisor/consultant who could provide advice to the HMB/HRP or other resident forums as and when required.**

**For:** The cost would be significantly less than the cost of the Federation and would allow residents to draw upon external expertise.

The support provided could be genuinely independent.

**Against:** It may be difficult to find someone who could carry out this role effectively.

If they move on, or have other work, a new advisor would need to be recruited and this would hamper continuity.

**4. Provide all active residents and associations with membership of TPAS, or a similar organisation, allowing access to an independent advice service.**

**For:** The costs would be significantly cheaper than previous funding of the Federation. If the landlord is a full member of TPAS membership for groups is free. If not, it is £73 per annum.

**Against:** The approach is fragmentary and lacks co-ordination. It would require a clear process by which advice would be sought.

**5. Re-launch the regular resident forum, properly resourced, with a defined constitution and the ability to hold councillors and officers to account.**

**For:** The forum has the scope to act as a genuine independent voice, with the power to invite officers to attend, commission advice and to campaign outside of Council structures.

This option was favoured by many respondents.

**Against:** It is likely to attract only the more active residents.

On balance I recommend option 5. This option appeared to be favoured by respondents, followed by option 3. I found few respondents who favoured Options 1 or 2.

Given the constraints upon budgets and the need to get value for money for residents, it would seem sensible to re-direct the Cambridge Federation's previous budget into areas that have proved to be the most cost effective in the past. Assuming that the re-launched forum is properly constituted and is given effective support by the Resident Involvement Team, it has the ability to act as a genuinely independent voice for residents, a place where all resident involvement issues can be "washed up" and co-ordinated as requested by residents.

## **10. Wider community development issues**

Resident involvement is one element in a wider perspective of community development. Social landlords engage with their residents because they are required to do so and because they want to. The business case for involving residents within a co-regulation framework is sound – it increases efficiency and provides greater value for money and residents who are able to participate display higher levels of satisfaction.

But there is a bigger picture. Many Councils have now disposed of their stock, but they still have a wider responsibility to create and maintain healthy and sustainable communities. In Cambridge, the Council still owns and manages the majority of social housing. However, there are 29 housing associations with stock in the City amounting to around 3,300 homes.

The Localism Bill may present additional opportunities for communities to take greater control of their futures. Many social landlords will be looking at their wider role and considering whether social enterprises and other forms of community capacity building can be developed in the future.

Following the August 2011 riots there may also be greater pressure upon local authorities and other agencies to provide opportunities for young people, in particular. This report proposes that an additional member of staff should be recruited to the Resident Involvement team and one element of their job description would be to ensure that resident involvement work links to the Council's wider community development role. This will facilitate a comprehensive approach and ensure that tenants and leaseholders feel connected to the wider community.

These issues are dealt with in greater depth at Appendix 4.

## **11. The way ahead**

In the light of the issues raised in this report, and on the assumption that the Council will not be re-forming a Cambridge Federation Mark 2, I believe the Council should consider re-allocating the £80,000 previously used to fund the Cambridge Federation as follows:

1. To recruit an additional member of staff to the in-house RI team. Their duties could include some or all of the following.

- Linking Resident Involvement work with the Council's wider community development role and ensuring effective links with community development outreach staff, CHYPPS team and others.
- Supporting grass-roots groups and reaching out to harder to reach residents (this work previously came under the remit of the Cambridge Federation).
- Working with BME and youth-panel groups.
- Identifying and supporting small-scale grants for local groups.
- Identifying and nurturing up and coming talent with an eye on succession planning.
- Working with other housing staff to ensure that resident involvement is properly resourced and prioritised within the Council.
- Providing support to the Sheltered Housing Scheme Residents' Association
- Supporting the proposed residents' forum and ensuring its independence

So long as the work of the RI team is accountable to residents I do not believe the new post will compromise the independence of the work that is undertaken.

2. I would also suggest that the Resident Involvement Team should have a greater pot of grant funding to support and "pump prime" new groups and activities, in addition to the environmental grants that are offered currently.

3. Additional funds should also be committed to supporting active residents, ensuring that residents are also properly rewarded and recompensed for their time. This should include an analysis of how residents prefer to communicate with the Council and with each other so that communication is more effective. Some may prefer the telephone; others may prefer to use electronic media or traditional pen and paper. In either case, residents should be helped to communicate effectively and should not be left out of pocket for the time they spend on RI work.

4. The Council should consider investing more funds in training and capacity building so that residents can ask informed and high-level, challenging questions about the running of their organisation, including major procurement decisions. (Involving tenants at the early stages of procurement has been shown to save millions of pounds elsewhere in the country).

The new post, and the wider work of the Resident Involvement team, could be overseen by the Residents on the HMB or by the monthly residents' forum. This already happens in practice, since the team works on a partnership basis with residents, but it may be sensible to formalise the arrangement so that residents know exactly the services they can expect to receive. In the spirit of co-regulation, the principle should be that a significant proportion of the team's work should be resident-led. This reflects the fact that involvement has shifted to a position where residents are the driving force for improvement.

### **11.2 Some ideas for further development of resident involvement**

As part of this review I have consulted with colleagues and reviewed some of the innovative schemes that have been implemented elsewhere in the country. Some of these are presented below and the Council should consider whether any of these could be relevant to Cambridge.

- The additional use of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter and the use of new technology, such as texting or on-line voting, to communicate with residents and elicit views. These methods may be particularly useful for younger people.
- Setting up a junior board, as at South Liverpool Homes. This would have formal powers and could contribute to the shaping of the housing service. It would help to embrace youth issues within the housing service and to encourage new talent who could succeed to more senior posts in the future.
- Setting up a cross-district scrutiny panel covering all social landlords, as at Welwyn Hatfield, where every social landlord, regardless of size, nominates two representatives to a cross-

district scrutiny panel. This reflects the fact that people live in neighbourhoods where many landlords may be active and builds upon the notions of wider community development issues discussed in section 10. above.

- Review of provisions within the Localism Bill such as the community Right to Challenge and Acquire, and the impact that these may have upon resident involvement and community empowerment within Cambridge. As set out in section 10. above, it will be important that less-prosperous neighbourhoods are able to take advantage of these initiatives in order that they do not lose out.
- Review of initiatives coming out of the forthcoming Big Society White Paper about community empowerment.
- Discussion and training, with residents, for the world of post-HRA reform after April 2012, looking at longer-term business planning.

## **12. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The systems for resident involvement in Cambridge are robust and comply with regulatory expectations. In terms of the quality of the service, its value for money and the range of involvement options on offer Cambridge sits within the top quartile of landlords and has been rightly praised by regulators and bodies such as the Audit Commission and the CIH.

However, the national landscape is changing fast. The top down regulatory framework for social landlords is retreating, and there is an expectation that co-regulation will fill the gap, with much more emphasis on highly trained and active tenants who can deal not only with day to day service issues but who are able to take a view on strategic housing issues and have the skills and experience to provide an independent challenge and hold their landlord to account. In addition, progressive local authorities will be considering wider issues of community development and responding to the provisions in the Localism Bill to identify and support a “civic core” or citizens, particularly in more deprived areas, which can help to build community investment and community resilience.

The figures provided by Housemark (see section 7. above) indicate that the Council has not yet reached the “ceiling” of participation. In my view, the Council is unlikely to reach this ceiling unless it commits resources to further resident involvement work. The demise of the Cambridge Federation provides an opportunity to extend the scope of current work and to reap additional rewards in terms of resident engagement and satisfaction levels.

### **12.1 Summary list of Recommendations**

This is a list of recommendations arising from the points raised in this report. The adoption and implementation of these recommendations should be carried out in partnership with residents.

1. To re-channel the budget of £80,000, previously used to support the Cambridge Federation, into other Resident Involvement activities.
2. To recruit a new member of staff to the Council Resident Involvement team, reporting to the Resident Involvement Manager. The suggested key duties of this post are as set out at 11. above.
3. To ensure that the work plan of the Resident Involvement Team has a high degree of guidance and involvement from residents.
4. To review the terms of reference of the Housing Management Board, and other formally established groups, to ensure that there is clarity over the lines of governance and accountability for the housing service.
5. To consider holding resident elections to the Housing Management Board every two years.

6. To review the system of support and expenses for active residents, so that their efforts are properly rewarded and recompensed. This should include a review of IT support and the possible provision of IT facilities for current and new resident activists.
7. To review the arrangements for recruiting resident activists and for succession planning for resident involvement. The aim should be identify and recruit a new cohort of active residents who can be step into the shoes of current activists in the future, and to create a civic core of active residents who can be involved in resident involvement and wider community development issues.
8. To review the level of training and support for residents so that current and new resident activists can take on a range of roles within the tenant involvement framework, and be fully equipped to handle strategic housing issues as well as day-to-day service delivery issues.
9. To review the communications strategy for resident involvement so that all residents, and particularly activists, are kept informed of actions and activities on a need to know basis. This should include a review of social media, more and better training on the use of IT and the provision of IT equipment where necessary, and the ability for all residents' groups to have access to effective printing facilities. It should also include a review of estate notice boards and the use of Radio Cambridgeshire and other local radio stations to publicise events.
10. To re-launch the residents' forum and to make this the independent co-ordinating body for resident involvement in Cambridge. The details of its terms of reference would need to developed but this could include the following: meetings to be open to all tenants and leaseholders and held four or five times a year; meetings to be fully supported by the City Council; meetings to have a clear agenda with the ability to call officers to answer



## APPENDIX 1

questions and an opportunity for elected HMB members to provide feed back; the ability to seek advice from independent advisers with an appropriate budget; a formal voting using green and red voting cards for all registered residents; a clear commitment to the independence of the forum from all parts of the Council.

11.To consider some of the ideas for further development of resident involvement as highlighted at 11. above.

12.To undertake a “healing” exercise with residents where the events surrounding the demise of the Cambridge Federation can be used as a positive learning exercise in order to move forward.

13.To increase the level of grant funding to support residents’ associations and other grass roots bodies. The grants previously awarded by the Cambridge Federation for environmental improvements should also be brought back under City Council control and integrated with other grant funding for resident support.

Colin Wiles August 2011

## **Appendix 1**

### **List of interviewees/respondents**

Councillor Catherine Smart, Executive Councillor Housing

Councillors Adam Pogonowski Mike Todd-Jones, Andy Blackhurst, Kevin Blencowe, Colin Rosenstiel, George Pippas, Kevin Price, Roman Znajak.

### **Residents: (tenants and leaseholders)**

Diane Best (HMB), John Marais (HMB), Terry Sweeney (HMB), Kay Harris (HMB), Stan Best (HRP), Margaret Betson, Anna Vine-Lott (HRP), Trevor Ealey (HRP), Ann Chapman, Jane Tanburn, Leila Dockerill, Eugene Toyloy, Colin Dickins (RTLG), Archie Ferguson (HRP), Jill Crossley (Cambs Federation/RTLG), Harold Jenkins, Gwen Wesley, Leroy Simpson, Julia Reid, Dennis Rowlands, Cathy Stothart.

### **Officers:**

Liz Bisset, Alan Carter, Robert Hollingsworth, Sandra Farmer, Marella Hoffman.

Thanks also to Kathy Brown

## Appendix 2 TSA Tenant involvement standard

### Tenant involvement and empowerment standard

#### Required outcomes

##### 1 Customer service, choice and complaints

Registered providers shall:

- provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly

##### 2 Involvement and empowerment

Registered providers shall support co-regulation with their tenants by:

- offering all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing, including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formulation of housing-related policies and the delivery of housing-related services
- consulting with their tenants and acting reasonably in providing them with opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery
- providing tenants with a range of opportunities to influence how providers meet all the TSA's standards, and to

scrutinise their performance against all standards and in the development of the annual report

- providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved

### 3 Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

Registered providers shall:

- treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the seven equality strands and tenants with additional support needs

Registered providers shall set out in an annual report for tenants how they are meeting these obligations and how they intend to meet them in the future. The provider shall then meet the commitments it has made to its tenants. Registered providers shall take the obligations of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard into account in setting out how they are meeting and intend to meet all the other TSA standards.

## **Specific expectations**

### **1 Customer service, choice and complaints**

1.1 Registered providers shall provide tenants with accessible, relevant and timely information about:

- how tenants can access services
- the standards of housing services their tenants can expect
- how they are performing against those standards
- the service choices available to tenants, including any additional costs that are relevant to specific choices
- progress of any repairs work

- how tenants can communicate with them and provide feedback
- the responsibilities of the tenant and provider
- arrangements for tenant involvement and scrutiny

1.2 Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about performance against the standards, and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenant's/tenants' behalf.

## **2 Involvement and empowerment**

2.1 Registered providers shall consult with tenants on the desirability and scope of local offers in relation to services to meet the following TSA standards: Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, Home and Neighbourhood and Community. In providing opportunities for tenants to agree local offers by no later than 1 April 2011 they shall offer commitments on:

- local standards for performance
- how performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by tenants
- what happens if local offers are not met (including procedures of redress)
- arrangements for reviewing the local offers on a periodic basis

2.2 Registered providers shall enable tenants' opportunities to scrutinise the effectiveness of their policies in relation to tenant involvement.

- 2.3 Registered providers shall inform tenants about the results of their consultations on issues related to the standards.
- 2.4 Registered providers shall consult with their tenants, setting out clearly the costs and benefits of relevant options, if they are proposing to change their landlord or when proposing a significant change in their management arrangements.
- 2.5 Registered providers shall consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service. They shall ensure that any changes to tenant involvement in governance and scrutiny leads to an enhancement of the overall effectiveness of their approach.
- 3 Understanding and responding to diverse needs**
- 3.1 Registered providers shall demonstrate how they respond to tenants' needs in the way they provide services and communicate with tenants.

## Appendix 3 – Range of Resident Involvement and communication methods

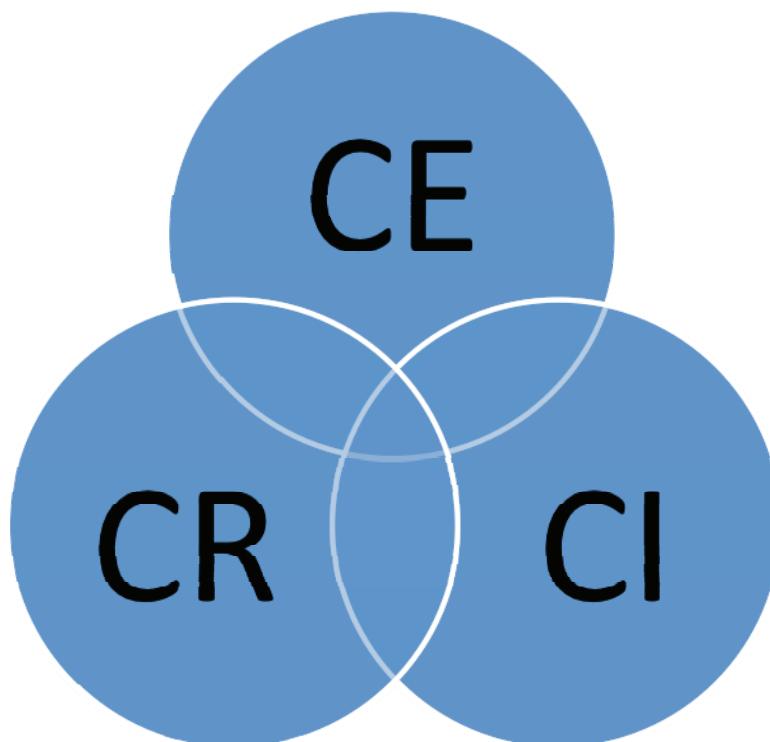
<p><b>Running resident involvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing and supporting over <b>3,100 volunteer hours</b> from resident reps each year</li> <li>Demonstrating and <b>recording the positive impacts</b> on services</li> <li>Publicising these involvement opportunities and recruiting residents to new ones</li> </ul>	<p>Organising resident events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Residents' Festival Day</b>, bringing residents together with other providers &amp; promoting RI</li> <li><b>Residents' Housing Tour</b> organising event &amp; facilitating hosting by HRP for 2011 <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li>Resident reps meeting Lead Cllr</li> </ul>	<p>HMB resident Elections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advertising; call for candidates; meeting, training, screening all new candidates; screening of manifestos; commissioning Electoral Reform Services; advertising results; training &amp; induction of new HMB resident reps <i>New, 2011</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Publications &amp; communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Annual Report for Tenants</b> (summary &amp; long versions) <i>New since 2010</i></li> <li>Quarterly <b>Open Door</b> magazine</li> <li>Making <b>Residents' Videos, posted on YouTube</b> <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li><b>Your Home, Your Say</b> webpages</li> <li>Year-in-advance calendar of article-planning with c.15 housing-related managers</li> <li>Contributing to corporate Diversity events as part of <b>Count Me In</b> brand <i>New since 2010</i></li> </ul>	<p>Performance info for residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with partners &amp; HRP to select a range of tenant-friendly PI's about Housing <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li>Publishing performance on these quarterly <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li>Involving resident reps in Housing's <b>Value for Money Group</b> in 2011 <i>New, 2011</i></li> </ul>	<p>Consultations with residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assisting with commissioning &amp; design of STATUS survey-replacement <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li><b>Open Door</b> postal surveys &amp; feedback-loops</li> <li><b>'RI Impacts': A-Z Database</b> outcomes-based evidence of Housing's 35+ consultations each year</li> <li><b>Open Door</b> &amp; online communications-loop for &amp; about HRP <i>New since 2010</i></li> <li>Maintaining Community Services' <b>online consultation database</b></li> <li><b>Housing Sounding Board</b> local survey-panels for housing officers <i>New, 2011</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting national requirements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating &amp; returning all required reports &amp; evidences for Housing Regulator</li> <li>Completing Regulator's processes &amp; submissions on Council's behalf each year for <i>National Standards &amp; Annual Reports</i> <i>New since 2010</i></li> <li>Implementing annual Local Offer cycle; submission on Council's behalf in Regulator's formats <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li>Keeping Council ahead of national RI policy requirements</li> <li>Keeping resident reps &amp; tenant public well informed on the above</li> </ul>	<p>Supporting &amp; communicating work of <b>Housing Regulation Panel</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular support-meetings &amp; admin for <b>HRP Chair</b> <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li>Supporting <b>HRP</b> in planning Housing Tour &amp; promoting HRP at the Tour <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li>Quarterly article for <b>HRP</b> in <b>Open Door</b> <i>New since 2010</i></li> <li>Creating &amp; maintaining webpage about HRP <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li>South Office window display featuring <b>Housing Regulation Panel</b> <i>New, 2011</i></li> </ul>	<p>Outreach through new media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contributing to corporate <b>Facebook</b> project at request of Antoinette Jackson <i>New, 2011</i></li> <li>Exploring Resident Involvement pilot through Facebook, as part of Arbury Area Committee pilot project with Committee Services <i>New, 2011</i></li> </ul>
<p>Supporting residents' groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular support-meetings &amp; admin for <b>Open Door Residents' Panel</b> and <b>Green Inspectors</b>, and for <b>Housing Management Board</b> reps and <b>Count Me In BME</b> reps as requested, etc.</li> <li>Quarterly public communications loops via Open Door for <b>HMB</b> reps, <b>HRP</b>, <b>Green Inspectors</b> and <b>Count Me In</b> reps; then fielding public's calls &amp; emails for the groups <i>New since 2010</i></li> <li>Residents' Association grants &amp; all resident reps' expenses</li> </ul>	<p>Positive practice for residents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organising residents' positive practice visits or exchanges with other providers</li> <li>Building learning-exchange into annual <b>Residents' Day</b></li> <li>Giving positive practice trainings at national agencies as appropriate when requested (at TSA, CIH, Housemark, etc.) <i>New since 2010</i></li> <li>Fielding requests from other providers about our positive practice <i>New since 2010</i></li> </ul>	<p>Diversity &amp; Equalities</p> <p>Collating and reporting on: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>City Homes' regular reports for HMT on <b>EqIAs</b> calendar</li> <li>City Homes' regular reports for HMT on Housing's <b>BME Action Plan</b></li> <li>City Homes' regular reports for HMT on overall <b>Equalities &amp; Diversity actions</b></li> </ul>



**Appendix 4 – Resident Involvement in a wider community development context**

One model for a wider community development approach is highlighted below. The key elements are:

- Community engagement – how involved are communities in available democratic processes and decisions affecting them? How well do they respond to consultations and surveys? How active is the community in fostering community relationships?
- Community resilience – how well does the community meet its own needs and respond to external threats? How well does the community recover from adverse incidents? To what degree do members of the community support each other in a crisis?
- Community investment – what internal resources does the community have? What external resources are available and how effective is the community in obtaining resources?



The area where all three elements overlap indicates a high level and comprehensive approach to community capacity building.



## APPENDIX 1

As can be seen below, various work streams sit within each element and a narrow definition of Resident Involvement represents only one element in a truly comprehensive approach. Of course, resident involvement can be a stepping-stone to wider community development. For example, where residents get together to deal with an external threat this can lead to networks and friendships developing that lead on to other activities.

<b>Community Resilience</b>	<b>Community Engagement</b>	<b>Community Investment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community safety</li> <li>• Support to disadvantaged neighbourhoods</li> <li>• Robust responses to Anti-Social Behaviour</li> <li>• Sustainability and environmental work</li> <li>• Community cohesion/ tackling discrimination</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Watch</li> <li>• Community campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community profiles/targeting services</li> <li>• <b>Resident involvement</b></li> <li>• Support to front line staff</li> <li>• Community development work</li> <li>• Local referenda and petitions</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Plans</li> <li>• Specialist projects (such as youth)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraising - support to local projects</li> <li>• Grants and fundraising</li> <li>• Social enterprise</li> <li>• Community building – support to new developments/ regeneration projects</li> <li>• Community right to build and Community right to challenge</li> </ul>

Notions of social capital also useful in understanding how successful communities work. Social capital has been defined as the sum of our “social connectedness” and reflects our shared norms and values. The concept was first described in detail by Robert Putnam in his seminal

book *"Bowling Alone – the Collapse and Revival of American Community"* (Simon and Schuster 2000) in which he established a link between high levels of social capital (neighbourliness, civic engagement, reciprocity, membership of clubs and societies, and trust) on the one hand and the health, wealth and happiness of communities on the other. Neighbourhoods with high levels of social capital, he found, will have higher levels of educational attainment, be more economically successful, suffer less from crime, and its people will be healthier and happier. This is not just a case of saying that rich areas will be better than poor ones. A major research study in the USA showed that quality of life and happiness was highest in socially connected communities. The survey also found that levels of civic engagement - how much residents trusted each other, socialised with others, and joined with others, among other measures - predicted the quality of community life and residents' happiness far better than levels of community education or income.

Putnam concluded that the stock of social capital in the developed world had declined since 1950 and the causes that he identified included increased travel time to and from work, work pressures, more women working, television, job mobility, fear of crime, and gated housing estates. He did not find any negative link with the Internet, telephones, divorce, big government or regulation.

Social capital, in Putnam's view, could therefore be compared to other forms of capital (money, human capital, land, buildings) in that it can add real economic value to communities.

Critically, Putnam identified three types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking.

- "Bonding" social capital (e.g. between family members, close friends or ethnic groups). Bonding is essential for "getting by"
- "Bridging" social capital (e.g. across ethnic groups or with work associates and employers). Bridging is essential for "getting ahead"
- "Linking" social capital (e.g. between different social classes or to the wider world).

These three elements need to be in balance for communities to succeed. If bonding is too dominant, for example, it can lead to neighbourhoods

becoming inward looking and intolerant of outsiders and change. Its residents cannot "get ahead". For example, the Traveller Community or Loyalist and Nationalist communities in Northern Ireland have impressive levels of bonding social capital but they are not so good at bridging or linking beyond their close-knit communities and this is what tends to hold them back. This can lead to racism and sectarianism, because these communities are seen as inward looking and separate.

Similarly, young people involved in gangs display impressive levels of bonding social capital, but because of their fear of violence from neighbouring gangs their geographical and social horizons are often severely constrained, and they cannot "get ahead".

Trust is a quick measure of social capital. Neighbourhoods where people trust each other and the institutions that serve them are more likely to be successful. From trust flows reciprocity – the notion that if you look out for others they will look out for you.

What does all this mean for housing providers? Well, the theory of social capital isn't necessarily telling us anything we didn't already know, but it can be a useful diagnostic tool for housing providers in creating "balanced and sustainable" communities. Assessing the level of social capital in any neighbourhood can be quickly assessed using some simple questions about trust and reciprocity and this can help to inform prescriptions for community action. Questions such as "Do you trust other people in your street?" or "How often do you speak to your neighbours?" can give a quick measure of social capital in a defined neighbourhood.

A key component of social capital is a sense of "belonging". Personal attachment to an area – something that is becoming increasingly important in a world that is more and more fragmented and global in its workings - is more likely to persuade people to invest time and effort in their community. Housing providers need to recognise this and building on local traditions and history and retaining or building local landmarks is a key element of this.

The University of Southampton has been "mapping" the Big Society and their researchers conclude that that there is only a small number of people, the 'civic core', who make the greatest contribution to voluntary

organisations<sup>4</sup>. They state that 31 per cent of the population provides around 90 per cent of hours of unpaid help, four-fifths of money donated to charities, and 70 per cent of civic participation. This civic core is more likely to be middle-aged, have higher education qualifications, own their house, practice a religion, and lived in the same neighbourhood for over 10 years. Crucially, those groups who are more active tend to be living in the most prosperous parts of communities rather than the most deprived. Their research also indicates that there are fewer third sector organisations per head in more deprived areas than in prosperous areas. Those organisations operating in more deprived areas are also more likely to be reliant on public funding. The research also shows the areas with fewest registered third sector organisations are also likely to be in areas most at risk from funding reductions.

What does all this mean in terms of resident involvement? Firstly, RI is only one element in a wider perspective of community development. One critique of traditional resident involvement is that it is a “silo” that separates and isolates social housing residents from the wider community. In order for social housing residents to “bridge” across tenure and social barriers it makes sense for involvement, in some circumstances, to involve the whole community.

The proposed new member of staff in the RI team could help this to happen, bringing other grass roots groups into the frame and working with the Council’s community development team to make sure that work is co-ordinated and “tenure blind”.

It also means that local authorities will need to commit resources to the “civic core” in less prosperous areas, so that activists can be nurtured and developed in order that they can compete on a level playing field with more prosperous areas.

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.soton.ac.uk/mediacentre/news/2011/aug/11\\_77.shtml](http://www.soton.ac.uk/mediacentre/news/2011/aug/11_77.shtml)