

A voice for tenants

STEERING GROUP

Response to the “A New Deal for Social Housing” Green Paper

1 A Voice for Tenants Steering Group

- 1.1 **A Voice for Tenants (AV4T)** was set up in 2017 in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy to seek the establishment of a national body in England to advocate for social housing tenants.
- 1.2 **AV4T** is not a tenant representative body. It is set up as a steering group with one aim – to establish a national body for tenants.
- 1.3 **AV4T** steering group includes representation from all the National Tenant Organisations¹ from the social housing sector alongside members of the former National Tenant Voice Board and other tenants who have played national roles. AV4T seeks as best it can to reflect the breadth of tenant opinion, but it currently does not purport to be a formally democratic or representative tenant body.
- 1.4 **AV4T** seeks constructive and positive dialogue with Government, with the national bodies that represent social housing landlords and with others.
- 1.5 **AV4T** worked in partnership with Government in Winter 2017 and early 2018 to carry out a series of 12 events to enable the two former Housing Ministers to engage with tenants. Over a thousand tenants participated in this dialogue. AV4T representatives have also attended current Ministerial events being held to enable dialogue with tenants about the Social Housing Green Paper.

¹ Association of Retained Council Housing Tenant Body, Confederation of Co-operative Housing, National Federation of TMOs, TAROE Trust, Tpas

- 1.6 In assembling our response to the Social Housing Green Paper, **AV4T** has carried out an online survey – primarily aimed at social housing tenants. The survey specifically focuses on Question 21 in *A New Deal for Housing* about national representation of tenants. **832** responses have been received to this survey of which **627** are from social housing tenants. An analysis of the survey is set out at Appendix one to this submission.
- 1.7 It should be noted that **AV4T** currently has no financial resources. All the participants in the steering group are acting in a voluntary capacity and find their own resources to cover any expenses incurred. This has meant that it has not been able to consult more widely with tenants other than through the survey.

2 Summary of recommendations

AV4T Steering Group makes the following recommendations in relation to enabling local and national tenant voices to be heard. The question numbers below relate to question numbers in *A New Deal for Housing*.

Recommendations (subject to consultation with tenants)	Question number
There is a need to establish national representation for tenants (AV4T) – the way that it is set up needs to be based on a broad well-resourced tenant-led consultation with tenants that aims to reach many thousands of tenants. Suggestions below regarding AV4T should be subject to tenant consultation.	21
A proposed mission for AV4T is set out in Clause 5.3. The mission should be about enabling tenant voices to be heard locally and nationally	21
A set of proposed objectives for AV4T is set out at Clause 5.4	21
A set of proposed values for AV4T are set out in Section 6. They include democracy, accountability, independence, equal opportunities & diversity, empowering and achieving outcomes	21
AV4T should use many ways to communicate and have dialogue with tenants. A broad set of methods of tenant communication are set out in Section 7.	21
A set of possible ways that AV4T could be funded is set out in Section 8	21
The primary purpose of AV4T's governing body should be to govern AV4T and not to be its public face. This is to ensure that AV4T is about the voices of as many tenants as possible rather than a specific set of tenants who may be on its governing body	21
Enabling tenant voices locally	
Disseminate best practice on complaints handling	5-11
Dismantle the designated persons scheme	6-7
Ensure that there is a resourced tenant-led body available for tenants to contact if they wish tenant-to-tenant support in relation to complaints	9
Include reference to the complaints procedure in the secure and assured tenancy regimes	8

Recommendations (subject to consultation with tenants)	Question number
Ensure that there are serious consequences for those involved in governance where the Ombudsman identified serious maladministration in relation to a complaint	10
Introduction of additional Key Performance Indicators and league tables will not contribute to redress the balance between tenants and landlords. The introduction of league tables is likely to make tenants less powerful.	12-14
Assess implementation of the Involvement and Empowerment Standard for all Registered Provider landlords with a view to encouraging best practice	20 29-32
Ensure that a range of tenant orientated organisations feed into methods to assess the Involvement and Empowerment Standard. The system developed by the National Tenant Organisations may be one means of assessing landlords.	20 29-32
Introduce an Involvement assessment rating to sit alongside governance and viability ratings. Where a Registered Provider performs poorly on involvement, this should have an impact on their governance rating.	20 29-32
Include reference to involvement and empowerment in secure and assured tenancy agreements	20
Enable AV4T to provide advice to tenants on what they should expect in relation to involvement and empowerment	20
Involvement and empowerment should be included with the remit of the Ombudsman	29-32
Consider various options to promote tenant leadership in Section 12	23
Develop less onerous forms of tenant management as set out in Section 13	24-26
Work with the community-led housing organisations and the regulator to develop a system of regulation for community-led housing organisations including Registered Providers co-operatives and small housing associations and TMOs	35

3 General approach to the response

- 3.1 *A New Deal for Social Housing* is broadly most welcome. It is particularly welcome that:
- the Prime Minister states that too often tenant voices go unheard and that “many people living in England’s four million social homes feel ignored and stigmatised, too often treated with a lack of respect by landlords who appear remote, unaccountable and uninterested in meeting their needs”.
 - *A New Deal for Social Housing* is intended to empower tenants “by giving them greater control over their lives and homes”
 - a key stated intention of the Green Paper is that it will “rebalance the relationship between residents and landlords”.
- 3.2 The evidence gathered in our survey, and from what has been heard at the Ministerial events, is that, whilst there are some landlords who perform well, for many social housing tenants, the experience of living in their homes falls a long way short of what should be expected. It is rare that landlords listen meaningfully to their tenants. There is very limited compliance with the Involvement and Empowerment Standard and possibly other consumer standards. Engagement with tenants at the local level that would have enabled Grenfell tenant voices to have been heard, is patchy to even worse. There is now major expectation amongst those social housing tenants who have been engaged in consultations that *A New Deal for Social Housing* should be the start of very significant cultural change within the social housing sector.
- 3.3 It is to be speculated that negative evidence that AV4T and MHCLG have gathered could be the tip of a very large iceberg. Those that have engaged at Ministerial events and through respective consultations are largely those tenants who have had the good fortune to be engaged with their landlord. The experience for many social housing tenants for whom methods of engagement are very limited may be far worse.
- 3.4 Given that AV4T is not a tenant representative body and we have only the survey we have carried out that can inform our response, we have confined our response primarily to the issue of tenant voice and particularly Question 21 (Is there a need for a stronger

representation for residents at a national level? If so, how should this best be achieved?) However, in answering Question 21 there are crossovers to other questions in the Green Paper and where that is the case, those crossovers are highlighted.

4 Question 21 – national representation of tenants

- 4.1 A large majority in AV4T's survey of **93.26% (775)** respondents) have said that there should be a national voice for tenants. Only **29** said that there should not be a national voice for tenants alongside **27** who were unsure or did not know.
- 4.2 A similarly large majority of **86.52% (719)** respondents) said that their voice is not currently heard in Government policy discussions, with only **43** considering that it is, and **69** saying they didn't know. One respondent suggested that although they answered no, they "think the Government is starting to pay attention and feel that now is the time for a national voice for tenants".
- 4.3 The answer to the first part of **Question 21** - is there a need for a stronger representation for residents at a national level? - is therefore an overwhelming **YES**.

5 AV4T – mission and objectives

- 5.1 AV4T can only be set up following broad consultation with tenants. Receiving more than 800 responses to the survey is pleasing, especially given that AV4T has no resources. That MHCLG managed to get 8,000 survey responses was excellent. However, there are several million social housing tenants, the majority of whom know nothing about their rights, about what they should expect of their landlords, about critical safety matters, about Government intentions to inspire change in the social housing sector. The long-term aim has to be that AV4T engages with a substantial proportion of the tenant population, aiming to inspire self-help and empowerment.
- 5.2 The Government needs to show it means business and that it is committed to change in the sector through the starting point being a far-reaching and imaginative consultation that is both about the tenant voice nationally (specifically about how AV4T might look) and locally. This needs to include:

- the government, landlord trade bodies and AVFT jointly asking every landlord to circulate information supplied by AV4T to all tenants in paper and digital format
 - funding returns to a resourced consultation office which enters and analyses the data
 - a funded social media campaign
 - identifying regions and demographic profiles of tenants who are not engaging and gearing approaches to them such as particular advertising where necessary
 - more detailed face to face regional engagement.
- 5.3 It is proposed that this needs to be consultation done through AV4T steering group because it needs to be tenant-led – demonstrating to tenants the value and importance of the tenant voice and that the establishment of AV4T is about tenants talking to tenants. Having said this, AV4T needs to conduct this consultation in an objective, open and transparent fashion with no pre-conceived ideas about how AV4T should be set up. This response therefore sets out a series of issues that need to be consulted on.
- 5.4 This proposed consultation needs to be the start of an ongoing communication between AV4T and tenants that continues once AV4T is established and will gradually build and bring as many tenants as possible into the dialogue with Government and others.
- 5.5 Consultation should take place on an AV4T **mission statement** – proposed as:

Enabling the voices of tenants to make change about their homes, neighbourhoods and communities – building trust and partnership locally, regionally and nationally

- 5.6 To achieve this mission, it is proposed that the following potential **objectives** – largely drawn from the points made by survey respondents - are consulted on:

- Extensive and ongoing communication and dialogue with tenants across the country
- Ensuring that tenants have an individual voice locally and can raise issues and have them addressed – this objective is discussed further in Section 10 below
- Ensuring that tenants have a collective voice locally and can work in partnership with their landlords – this objective is discussed further in Section 11 below
- Being available to tenants to provide advice and support
- Communicating with Government, landlord bodies and others regarding tenant views and lobbying regarding tenant related matters

6 AV4T – values

- 6.1 The following are a set of proposed **values** – again drawn from the survey - that should be consulted on with tenants:
- 6.2 **Democracy** – a democratic system for AV4T based on formal elections, whether carried out nationally or regionally, or in some other way – would be extremely expensive and potentially not very meaningful for many tenants.
- 6.3 Democracy in the context of AV4T means setting up systems where AV4T takes active steps to engage with as many tenants as possible. It may have been more appropriate to have titled the group *Voices for Tenants*, rather than *A Voice for Tenants*. Respondents in the survey clearly state that there is a need for tenant voices to be heard in many different ways. AV4T should be about reflecting potentially different views amongst tenants and helping those voices to shape policy and practice.
- 6.4 **Accountability** – AV4T needs to be formally accountable to tenants. It needs to be tenant-facing and there needs to be regular jargon free communication with tenants about AV4T's work.

- 6.5 AV4T should be organisationally accountable to tenants as opposed to being accountable through its governing body. Considerable attention has focused on AV4T being a set group of tenants, but AV4T needs to be seen as reflecting the views of many tenants. It is suggested that it should never be about the personal views of any individual tenants involved in the structure or the governing body. The role of the governing body should not be to be its public face but to govern AV4T and ensure that what AV4T does reflects the evidence base it gathers from tenants.
- 6.6 **Independence** – AV4T needs to be in a position to state the views of tenants independently and not feel constrained by Government, landlords or others. However, AV4T will need to inter-relate with Government, landlords and others, constructively challenging them where there is a need to do so to drive up standards, particularly with regarding redressing the balance between tenants and landlords. Dependent on how AV4T is funded, it will need to have relationships with its funding bodies. The nature of any relationships with stakeholders will need to be clear and transparent. AV4T will need to be non-party political.
- 6.7 **Equal opportunities and diversity** – AV4T needs to operate in accordance with the highest standards of equal opportunities and diversity. It needs to take active steps to enable the voices of tenants who often go unheard. Younger tenants, tenants with young families, tenants with an ethnicity other than White British, tenants from the North East, the South West and the East of England were all poorly represented in the survey – and these and other particular groups will need to be properly reflected in AV4T's work.
- 6.8 **Empowering** – AV4T will need to seek out ways to empower tenants with whom it works – encouraging and facilitating tenants to play leadership roles – and assisting where appropriate with their skills and personal development.
- 6.9 **Achieving outcomes** – AV4T needs to be about achieving outcomes – identifying the outcomes it seeks to achieve, setting targets and reporting on how well it is achieving them. It needs to have a professional approach – employing quality staff, who in some cases could be tenants themselves, who understand both how to work with tenants, helping them to do things for themselves and how political and other systems work. AV4T needs to work in partnership with the Government of the day, landlords and their trade bodies and others, helping to deliver programmes where they

are supported by tenants, and constructively challenging where they are not.

7 AV4T – enabling tenant voices nationally

- 7.1 **Communications** – there should be consultation determining priorities at the outset for how AV4T will communicate with tenants. Most of the following possible engagement methods have been suggested in the survey:
- **Ongoing regional meetings** – building from the Ministerial meetings held by MHCLG and supported by AV4T
 - **Digital engagement** – ongoing use of surveys, using the growing AV4T database to get reasonably quick responses to particular issues, setting up a Facebook page, using other digital platforms
 - **Regional structures** – regional tenant bodies exist in London and the East Midlands. It may be that some tenants may wish to establish other regional bodies.
 - **An annual conference** – it may be appropriate to hold an annual conference – but this may clash with other existing tenant conferences
 - **Engagement relating to specific activities** – such as bringing together tenants on scrutiny panels or in governance roles
 - **Engagement relating to specific demographic groups** – disabled tenants, young tenants, tenants from different ethnic groups
 - **Engagement relating to specific groups of tenants** – such as urban and rural tenants; tenants of smaller landlords; tenants in work and tenants on benefits
 - **Engagement with homeless people** – in seeking to address the needs of existing tenants – there is a need to be aware of the needs of homeless people, prospective tenants and how tenancies are sustained. In the Ministerial events, tenants strongly highlighted the need for more social housing.
 - **Engagement with leaseholders and shared owners** – it is not currently proposed that AV4T represent leaseholders and shared

owners. LEASE is currently established to represent leaseholder needs (including leaseholders who are shared owners). However, leaseholders and shared owners are important parts of local empowerment frameworks and so AV4T will need to link with leaseholder and shared owners issues.

- **Engagement with private sector tenants** – it is not currently proposed that AV4T should represent private sector tenants, but AV4T should certainly link with equivalent programmes in the private rented sector.
- 7.2 These are some potential methods and channels of communication. They will need to be assessed and changed over time dependent on how successful they are at engaging with tenants. Engaging and exciting jargon free methods need to be used to engage with tenants. Consideration will need to be given to equal opportunities issues in relation to communications.
- 7.3 There need to be other ways in which tenants become aware of AV4T's existence. Landlords will need to be required to provide information to all tenants that AV4T exists – for existing tenants and subsequently at tenancy sign up – possibly using publicity provided by AV4T. In time, it may be appropriate for AV4T to be based in law and reference made to AV4T in tenancy agreements.

8 AV4T – funding

- 8.1 There are various methods by which AV4T could be resourced and these approaches need to be consulted on with tenants. Possible options may include:
- 8.2 **Government funding** - there are many who consider that the Government has a duty to fund AV4T, and this needs to be considered in the consultation. However, Government funding for AV4T would bring implications regarding AV4T's governance and accountability to Government for the funding received who would in turn be accountable to the taxpayer for any funding provided.
- 8.3 **A tenant levy** – some have suggested that AV4T should be funded through a tenant levy – equivalent to fees paid by housing associations to the Housing Ombudsman Service and now the Regulator. This approach may be desirable, but it would bring the same requirements regarding accountability to Government for

funding and it should be noted that local authority landlords do not pay fees to the Ombudsman or regulator.

- 8.4 **A tenant subscription** – it has been suggested that AV4T could be set up as a “tenants union” where tenants pay a subscription. This would have advantages of independence, but it would be very challenging to bring in sufficient funding, especially in the short term. It would also be very difficult to collect subscriptions and to verify existing and ongoing eligibility for membership.
- 8.5 **Private grant funding** – it may be the case that private sources could be found to support AV4T in its initial stages, although it is possible that private funding sources might question why it is not a role for Government to support AV4T.
- 8.6 **In kind support** – AV4T could be developed in partnership with an existing body. This might mean that an existing organisation could lessen the need for resources and provide a form of “in kind support”.
- 8.7 **Crowdfunding and other similar approaches** have been suggested as possible ways to raise funding.
- 8.8 It could be the case that temporary resourcing arrangements (ie. Government funding) are made pending AV4T becoming established and then different approaches are taken.
- 8.9 Detailed funding proposals and arrangements need to be developed as part of a feasibility study into the setting up of AV4T.

9 AV4T – the governing body

- 9.1 AV4T will need a governing body, but as suggested earlier, it is proposed that its public face be low key to seek to deter the “glory and glamour” seekers (as described by one respondent in the survey) and to ensure that AV4T is seen as potentially being about all tenants and not a chosen few.
- 9.2 The primary purposes of the governing body should be explained briefly in the consultation:
 - To have oversight of AV4T’s work programmes
 - To agree AV4T’s staffing arrangements

- To appoint and have oversight of the senior member of staff
- To have oversight of AV4T's finance and business plan
- To agree AV4T's approach to risk management
- To be accountable to AV4T's funders
- To ensure that AV4T's outputs reflect information being gathered in communications with tenants.

9.3 It is suggested that the consultation explore the following questions:

- Is it important to have a tenant majority on the governing body? Should the governing body be made up of all tenants?
- Is it important that the governing body have tenants (and others if it is desirable to have others) on it who are chosen for skills, knowledge and experience – particularly in understanding how Government and other systems work - that can make a difference for tenants? If so – how should initial governing body members be chosen?
- Is there any electoral system that AV4T could adopt – either nationally or regionally - where tenants could elect tenants to the governing body and it not be extremely expensive and which would result in significant numbers of tenants voting?
- Is there any way that a governing body could be established that would be seen as representative of all tenants?
- Is it better to have a larger governing body that might be able to incorporate more strands of tenant thinking but which might be less easy to manage, or a smaller governing body that is focused on the business of governing AV4T?
- Might it make sense to have transitional business focused governing body arrangements to ensure that AV4T has a chance to get itself established with a possible view to reviewing structures once AV4T is established?

9.4 The reason for the last point is because ten years ago considerable effort and voluntary time over a three-year period went into establishing the National Tenant Voice with structures that could potentially be seen as bringing together a cross section of tenants. It was still criticised by some as not being reflective and because of the time taken to establish the organisation, it suffered from the

vagaries of politics and lost its funding before it had a chance to do the work it was set up to do.

- 9.5 Detailed proposals and arrangements for an AV4T governing body need to be developed as part of a feasibility study into the setting up of AV4T.

10 Enabling individual tenant voices locally

- 10.1 Developing AV4T nationally is fundamentally inked to developing tenant voices locally.
- 10.2 **Enabling individual tenant voices locally – raising issues and making complaints (Questions 5-11)** – tenants often wish to simply raise an issue, discuss it with the landlord, and have it resolved. This should be simple, but the evidence in the survey, in Ministerial events and experience suggests that it often isn't. Too often something that could be resolved earlier and with less formality turns into a lengthy formal complaint that often creates more frustration.
- 10.3 Given that the tenants engaged in the survey and the Ministerial events tended to come from landlords who are better at engaging with tenants, it is speculated that the problems expressed are the tip of a much larger iceberg.
- 10.4 Problems occur for a variety of reasons:
- The ways that tenants can raise issues and make complaints are too cumbersome and they just give up or decide not to bother
 - For some landlords, it is more important that Key Performance Indicators relating to complaints resolution look good rather than solving the problems that tenants want resolved.
 - Similarly, some landlords would prefer that issues that tenants raise do not even get into the system because they would provide negative statistics. Tenants can be deflected from raising issues, meaning that there are no records that an issue was raised.
 - The response of some landlords to complaints is to place more emphasis on defending the organisation rather than resolving the problem
 - Many issues that come up in a housing organisation can be "out of policy" meaning that decisions need to be taken regarding how to resolve the issue. If the issues are complex, for some

housing staff, it's easier just to say no rather than to either take the initiative or to escalate the problem up to higher levels of authority where the problem can be resolved

- In some cases, services have been so cut back that the landlord does not provide the service the tenant wants
- Sometimes tenants have low or high expectations
- Perceptions grow that the landlord will not respond to problems and so the tenant doesn't bother to raise the issue
- Some tenants perceive it that there will be negative consequences for them if they make complaints
- Some landlord staff may be poor at providing customer service
- Some landlord staff do not consider alternatives when a tenant requests something that they can't have
- Some landlord staff have a cultural attitude that the tenant is always wrong and does not take issues raised seriously.

10.5 A "just be grateful that you have a home and stop complaining" culture exists amongst some housing staff. A recent example illustrates the culture that exists with some landlord staff. A housing officer made an unscheduled call on a tenant. The tenant said – I'd rather you didn't come into my home right now. The housing officer responded – it isn't your home, it belongs to *landlord name*.

10.6 The housing sector knows what best practice regarding to responding to issues and handling complaints is. It includes:

- Having simple and clear complaints resolutions procedures
- Not having long and complex stages within complaints procedures. Within a landlord, there should not be a need for more than an initial resolution stage and a review stage.
- Enabling tenants to raise issues informally to enable swift resolution of problems (but still recording the issue) or formally if they wish to take matters through a formal procedure
- Acknowledging that a tenant who makes a formal complaint perceives that something has not been done as it should be and that they are not wrong to have that perception
- Having review processes that involve tenants
- Tenants having access to other tenants who know about complaints processes who can provide assistance
- Ensuring follow up of issues agreed in complaints resolutions
- Having systems to manage vexatious and malicious complaints

10.7 To ensure that individual tenant voices are enabled locally, the following are proposed:

- Consider how best to ensure that best practice in complaints handling is disseminated. This could in part be done as part of the effective approach to regulation of the Involvement and Empowerment Standard as discussed below.
- Dismantle the designated persons scheme. MPs and councillors play a role anyway with regards complaints in that they raise issues with landlords, but they do not get involved in the details of complaints. Better landlords may choose to include tenant panels within their complaints procedures if tenants wish to operate panels. The designated persons scheme is but an encumbrance in successfully resolving complaints.
- Ensure that there is a resourced tenant-led body (such as TAROE Trust) available for tenants to contact if they wish tenant-to-tenant support in relation to a complaint
- Include reference to the complaints procedure in the tenancy agreement including access to the Ombudsman and any tenant-to-tenant support framework
- There should be serious consequences for those involved in governance of landlords where the Ombudsman delivers a judgment where there is serious maladministration, potentially delivered through the regulator.

11 Enabling collective tenant voices locally

- 11.1 **Enabling collective tenant voices locally – the Involvement and Empowerment Standard (Questions 12-14; 20; 25-27; 29; 32)** – the relegation of the Involvement and Empowerment Standard as a consumer standard has resulted in a culture across the sector where involvement and empowerment are not seen as important. The regulator rarely wishes to exercise the powers it has in relation to the economic standards, but it is toothless when it comes to the consumer standards.
- 11.2 Co-regulation was introduced as a three-corner partnership between the regulator, the landlord and tenants. Had this three-corner partnership been properly developed, it is likely that it would have resulted in better performance in relation to the other consumer standards. Co-regulation has been subsequently diminished by the lessening importance placed on the Involvement

and Empowerment standard and a toothless regulator resulting in the tenant part of co-regulation being absent in most landlords.

- 11.3 All available evidence suggests that when landlords properly engage with their tenants – when they do what is necessary to build a relationship of trust and partnership – the results are better business efficiency – better value for money – improved services - a wide range of social and community benefits – better job satisfaction for staff. This was identified in the National Tenant Organisations' report *An Investment not a Cost* in 2015. Landlords should be identified as having poor governance if they do not effectively work in partnership with their tenants.
- 11.4 Many landlords barely comply with the Involvement and Empowerment Standard. There is limited evidence to suggest that any Registered Provider landlords comply with the part of the standard cited in the Green Paper which requires landlords to consult with their tenants once every three years about how they are engaged.
- 11.5 The regulator freely admits that they lack the skills, knowledge and experience to regulate involvement and empowerment. It is an area that defies measurement and indeed most of what tenants value the most – building trust and partnership between them and their landlords – is unmeasurable.
- 11.6 **Questions 11-13 – Key Performance Indicators and League Tables –** KPIs can be useful tools in some areas, but what KPIs mean always needs to be interpreted by stakeholders – which should include tenants. Of themselves – KPIs will not enable tenant voices to be heard locally or collectively.
- 11.7 In some cases, the pursuit of good Key Performance Indicators deflects landlords from seeking positive outcomes. The introduction of league tables will make this worse not better and is likely to lead to tenants having less power.
- 11.8 To reinstate Involvement and Empowerment as a meaningful standard and to enable tenant voices to be heard collectively and locally - the following are proposed:
 - Implementation of the Involvement & Empowerment Standard be assessed in conjunction with the regulator in all housing association and local authority landlords.

- Assessment of the I&E standard should be done with a view to encouraging best practice. The National Tenant Organisations developed a framework to enable such a review and this approach could be adapted for this purpose. The system could be piloted with a cross section of landlords.
- Landlords could be scored on their compliance with the Involvement and Empowerment Standard in the same way the regulator currently scores their compliance with Governance and Viability (eg. introduced a T1 assessment alongside the G1 and V1 ratings system). Given that involvement and empowerment are central to good governance, a poor involvement rating should also lead to the governance rating being reduced. It is important that the Involvement and Empowerment Standard is linked to the Governance Standard and that Economic and Consumer Standards remained linked to each other.
- The way that assessments are carried out needs to be discussed between Government, the regulator and tenant-orientated organisations, including AV4T, who fully understand involvement and empowerment. The tenant orientated nature of involvement and empowerment assessments need to be clearly got across to landlords.
- Include reference to involvement and empowerment in the secure and assured tenancy agreement framework
- AV4T could provide advice to tenants on what they are entitled to expect in relation to involvement and empowerment, if tenants agree that this should be part of its remit
- Involvement and empowerment should be included within the Ombudsman's remit with AV4T and the regulator having a role to ensure that the Ombudsman is able to field queries in this area (possibly by passing them onto AV4T or the regulator).

12 Tenant voices and tenant leadership

- 12.1 It is welcome that **Question 23** refers to tenant leadership. Developing tenant voices means that it is necessary for tenant leaders to emerge, be encouraged and facilitated. It is probable that tenant leadership will naturally emerge if the sector starts to

implement the Involvement and Empowerment Standard and develops the cultural changes that are necessary to implement it.

12.2 However, the following steps – aimed at both Government and landlord sectoral bodies - are suggested that could facilitate the growth of tenant leadership:

- Support and resources for a national programme to encourage tenants to participate in governance and other related training
- Particularly resourcing a young tenant leader programme
- Encouraging all landlords to include a tenant champion as a representative to landlord trade bodies alongside their standard staff representative
- Government only meeting with representatives of housing organisations if tenant champions from the organisation are in attendance as well
- Building an expectation that there should be equal representation of tenants and landlord staff/governing body members at national housing conferences, particularly where the Housing Minister or other Government representatives are present
- The Housing Minister and other Government representatives continually referring to the need to engage, involve and empower tenants in conference speeches and in meetings with senior housing representatives
- Requiring that discussions about potential tenant leadership and skills development take place during tenancy sign up processes with a view to assisting new tenants into volunteering roles in the organisation.

13 Tenant voices and community-led housing

13.1 It is welcome that **Question 46** asks about boosting community-led housing and that **Questions 24-26** and **Question 35** specifically focus on tenant management forms of community-led housing. Community-led housing at its best, is one way of ensuring that tenant voices can particularly be heard. It has been confirmed in countless pieces of research that effective community-led housing

both achieves well in performance measures by comparison to housing association and local authority counterparts, but also produces a range of social and community benefits.

13.2 The community-led housing sector however suffers from not having an effective regulatory system. Whilst Registered Provider housing co-operatives (and other small Registered Providers) are theoretically regulated, there is no assessment of their governance and viability. Local authority and housing association landlords theoretically have oversight over TMOs managing homes for them, but some do not perform this function effectively. Volunteers who participate in community-led housing organisations do so to produce local community benefits but they rarely participate because they want to become experts on the bureaucratic requirements that are intrinsic to housing provision today. Lack of regulatory oversight means that there may be patchy performance in some community-led housing organisations in such areas.

13.3 The following are proposed:

- Development of less onerous systems to enable the benefits of community-led housing as proposed by CCH. Such a system is being developed by WATMOS Community Homes and may prove attractive to some tenants and some landlords.
- Development of an appropriate regulatory system for community-led housing organisations funded through the contributions made by community-led housing organisations. This system should be set up in conjunction with the CCH, NFTMO and other community-led housing organisations.

For further information about this submission, please contact Nic Bliss (Secretary to AV4T Steering Group): nic@cch.coop 07947 019287

Appendix One – survey comments analysis

832 responses have been received to the AV4T survey. **627** responses are from tenants; **22** from leaseholders; **17** from shared owners; 56 from landlord employees; and 44 from others. **201** responses were from council tenants; **475** from housing association tenants; **33** from housing co-op tenants/members; and 57 from others (66 did not respond to the question). **78** respondents live in homes managed by ALMOs; **62** by TMOs.

The majority of respondents are within the 46 to 75 age group. Most are white British. Most responses have come from people in the South East, London and the West Midlands. The least responses have come from the North East, the East of England, Yorkshire and Humberside and the South West.

Thanks are due to everyone who responded. A large majority of **93.27%** (**776** respondents) have said that there should be a national voice for tenants. Only **29** said that there should not be a national voice for tenants alongside **27** who were unsure or did not know.

A similarly large majority of **86.54%** (**720** respondents) said that their voice is not currently heard in Government policy discussions, with only **43** considering that it is, and **69** saying they didn't know. One respondent suggested that although they answered no, they "think the Government is starting to pay attention and feel that now is the time for a national voice for tenants".

One respondent said that it is vital that those furthering the AV4T proposal must not "let this opportunity slip". There were many comments that tenants' voices are being ignored – by Government, in council landlords and in housing associations. There were a small number of respondents who made positive comments about their landlords.

Some identified a greater importance for "local voice", and in some cases, cited this as a reason for not supporting a national voice body.

Remit

The following points were made about AV4T's remit:

- It should focus on doing what it can to support tenants having a voice locally
- It should do what it can to achieve landlords involving tenants in decision-making effectively. It should have regulatory powers.
- It should scrutinise landlords to bring every landlord up to the standard of the best.
- It should be set up alongside strengthened consumer regulation.
- It should be "an unbiased hub for tenants to get information and support"
- It should provide support for tenants and resident groups
- It should help to empower tenants who do not have knowledge or experience
- Whatever its remit, it should be outcome focused – ie. focused on making a difference for tenants

Representation of tenants

Many respondents questioned how AV4T could be formally "representative" of all tenants. Others expressed views that it should reach a wide range of tenants and "connect with the grass roots in a simple way". One respondent referred to individuals

wanting positions for “glory or glamour”. Another suggested that there is a need for tenants to be involved who are “used to dealing with officialdom”. It was also stressed that AV4T should seek to express the collective views of tenants and not the personal views of tenants who may be in positions in AV4T.

There was discussion about the issue of regionality, particularly from people not in London and the South East expressing concern about being represented by people in London and the South East – and vice versa. Some suggested that AV4T should be set up from bodies set up in each region of the country.

There were also concerns expressed about whether urban and rural issues and tenants of smaller landlords such as co-ops would be adequately reflected. Others referred to ensuring that issues relating to disabled tenants, tenants from different ethnic groups and young tenants should be reflected. One referred to representing homeless people, another to ensuring that AV4T reflects views of both tenants on benefits and those in work, and some suggested that AV4T should also include private sector tenants within its remit and others, leaseholders and shared owners.

Structure and methodology

Several respondents referred to AV4T needing to be “democratic” and “accountable to tenants”. Some referred to democratic elections being held for places on AV4T. One respondent proposed that places on AV4T should be subject to a one-year term of office and places should be “unremunerated”. Several people referred to only tenants really understanding the issues of tenants.

There was considerable discussion about the need for AV4T to be independent (of Government and housing providers), whilst at the same time many said that AV4T should be funded by Government. One respondent interpreted independence to mean that any tenant involved with AV4T should not also be employed by a landlord or associated with any other housing organisation. But another said that any conflicts of interests could be clearly recorded and set out transparently. One respondent said that AV4T should not be a service competitively tendered for by Government. It was suggested by one that AV4T should be apolitical, well-resourced and the nature of its relationship with stakeholders made clear. Another said that AV4T should have “professional and qualified support and administrative staff”.

Some suggested AV4T should be a membership organisation, possibly like a union; one suggested it should include one representative from each association and local authority; one suggested there should be “block representation”. One respondent suggested basing representation on local tenants and residents associations, but another said that any tenant should be able to input and that many tenants do not participate in tenants and residents associations.

There were references to the former National Tenant Voice – mostly saying that it was wrong that the Coalition Government terminated its funding, whilst one respondent suggested that it had had its problems.

Some suggested using digital methods to contact tenants, with one respondent particularly referring to the current survey and another suggesting particular use of the database being built up through the AV4T survey. One respondent suggested that a survey like this one should be carried out annually and it should also be sent to tenants

and not just done online. Another said that engaging digitally through surveys would be preferable to a static body of tenants. Further suggestions were made to have a Facebook page and arrange communication through a website; hold events like the current Ministerial events; regional events; an annual conference and an event bringing together the Chairs of Scrutiny Panels. One respondent expressed concern that their landlord attends tenant events to monitor what they say.

Several respondents referred to the need for AV4T to be speaking to "an ear at the highest level" – it needs to be listened to - and for engagement not just to be lip service. Some spoke of the need for it to be recognised by Government, housing associations and local authorities. One respondent spoke of the need for AV4T to work in partnership. One respondent suggested that the AV4T structure should be based in law.

Other issues

Many other issues were also raised in the survey that were not directly specific to setting up AV4T:

- Several respondents expressed concern about the culture of housing associations
- There should be more conversion to community-led housing organisations
- Tenants should have more involvement in regeneration of estates
- Housing associations should be subject to freedom of information requests
- The Government should stop changing the Housing Minister
- Tenants should be able to know their rights
- Concerns were expressed about costs of housing in London
- There should be more police
- There should be more affordable housing
- What you regulate is what gets taken seriously
- Upkeep of gardens, pollution through dumping, dog mess are all problems
- Smoking is still happening in communal areas
- There should be more information about fire safety
- Rents should not be based on what market rents are but on tenant ability to pay
- Tenants should have a legal Right to Buy after 5 years
- Complaints should be responded to properly and tenants should not be pushed aside
- We need to change the perceptions of social housing
- Social housing tenants are part of the electorate
- Remove fear of victimisation if speaking out
- Strengthen regulation of standards
- Tenants are treated as second class citizens
- There should be a full review of all housing associations
- The issues being raised go much wider than Grenfell
- There should be an independent Ombudsman
- It should be written into the tenancy agreement that tenants have a right to be heard

Criticisms

In the interests of balance and fairness, all the negative comments made about the AV4T proposal are set out below:

- “A national voice for tenants is not a national voice for tenants but the voice of elite select tenants who do nothing to find out the views of other tenants. It is little more than a few individuals using tenant voice as an excuse to spout their own opinions. It is the same as occurs at the landlord level. The simple fact is the majority of tenants do not wish to be involved at local level, never mind any other, any more than most want to be involved in anything else. There is no need for a national voice, just because a few self-important individuals/organisations want to be seen as the voice of all. They would not be representing my views as they would not bother asking for them so they are hardly a national voice”.
- “As a tenant myself, I do not wish to have a few politically minded individuals appointed through an unrepresentative process using being a *tenant* as an excuse to forward their own political agenda. They would not be speaking for tenants, but for themselves”.
- “Politics always gets in the way of national organisations which claim to be representative”.
- “It’s a waste of resources. Tenants should be represented by Shelter”.