

Spring Scrutiny and Empowerment Partners (SEP) Update

Spring 2013



Welcome to our Quarterly Newsletter

The last newsletter featured as the main food for thought - appraisals and training needs analysis for involved tenants, have you completed yours yet?

The theme this time is the TSAs swansong. The Housing Standards are now 12 months old - So how are you doing on co-regulation and meeting the requirements of the standards?

Co-regulation – one year on - do you meet the requirements?

We are going to be swapping good practice on this at our Scrutiny.Net Officers meeting on 1st May. No need to reinvent the wheel, just join us and learn from others

I have devised a little test for you:

Give yourself 4 points for each standard fully met and a zero if you are not meeting that standard

Sitting on the fence is uncomfortable – no half points and no middle ground possible!

No cheating either!

- ✓ It's the whole sentence your reviewing, not part of it
- ✓ If it is something you are working on, which is resourced and has a planned target date, which you will achieve - that's 3 points (not 4)
- ✓ If it's not resourced, your behind time and you are achieving this without tenants, then it's a 1 or 2 at best
- ✓ If your part delivering and part not – that's for you to say

Why not do this with your involved tenants, or your Board to see if they agree with your score? It will start a debate and can help you with your 2013 work programme, work plan and training needs analysis.

The co-regulatory requirements:

Have your tenants given their valuable opinions and time to meaningful conversations and actions from landlords about the following:

	Regulatory Requirement	Your Evidence	Score (0-4)
1	Choice: Including tenant cashback. Have you had a full conversation on choices? Did you lead the conversation with your opinions first? Have you started a pilot on tenant cashback?		
2	Right to Manage: Have you shared the options with tenants? Don't forget management can include a small piece of land maintenance completed by tenants (no service charges sounds attractive when money is tight), or small services can be commissioned by tenants		
3	Definitions of vulnerability: Alongside more traditional equalities work. Are you defining vulnerability with tenants and increasing their understanding of all vulnerable groups? Are you capturing the needs and opinions of the most vulnerable people during consultation?		
4	Monitoring performance: Have tenants received detailed training on interpreting data? Are you benchmarking what others are doing with tenants? Is this a long timed item and full discussion item on your agenda with tenants?		
5	Setting and monitoring of standards and policy input which is transparent: Are you using recent service users to gain opinions prior to writing/reviewing the policy/standard as well as review of the final documents? Are you reviewing your local offers so they deliver current needs?		
6	Scrutiny of specific services: Do your Panel have full access to information which officers would use and access to good practice sites? Are they writing their own reports and presenting them to a Board/ Council meeting or Sub-Committee?		

7	Tenancy: Have you engaged on whether to use fixed term tenancies? Have you discussed the operation or options for probationary tenancies?		
8	Rents: Have you had conversations with tenants on social, affordable and market rents, when they will be used and the tolerance allowed in social rents and how rents will be increased?		
9	Complaints: Are you reporting annually to tenants on outcomes, categories of complaint and sharing all lessons learnt? From the Localism Act – are you engaging tenants in the potential for a Designated Tenant Panel on complaints?		
10	VFM: Are you sharing and reviewing evidence of VFM gains with tenants? Are you having conversations on how VFM gains are achieved and spent? Have you started your stakeholder (including tenant) consultation for your September 2013 HCA VFM return for your Board to sign off? Have you completed a VFM review of services? Does your Involvement service deliver VFM?		
11	Governance: Have you engaged tenants in the best way to involve tenants in governance? Are tenant board members given as much training and investment as your Scrutiny Panel?		
12	Repairs and Improvements: Have you had conversations on budget allocation? Maintaining the decent homes standard? Achieving right first time repairs? The planned and cyclical maintenance priorities of tenants? Achieving health and safety through gas servicing, fire safety and the adaptations services – have you had these conversations with tenants?		
13	Allocations: Have you discussed the best way to handle over occupancy and under-occupation. Have you discussed the operation and priorities awarded in your allocations policy or in choice based lettings?		

14	<p>Neighbourhoods and Communities: Have you discussed: the role you play in communities where you have homes and what is different across your stock base; How you keep areas safe and clean; Your co-operation with local partners and why; Your legal powers to tackle ASB and how you use them in a decisive way; and your support for victims and witnesses?</p>		
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So how did you score on co-regulation?

Below 20 points:

Co-nfession required to the HCA – you are far from meeting the minimum co-regulatory requirements? Support is required, you are probably at the back of the pack on this subject – or maybe coming to life from a late start and you have a plan to catch up for co-nsistency with the standard?

20- 35 Points:

Co-aching required – you’re probably aware of what you need to do, but you may not have resourced the plan, or you may be co-vering up and papering over the cracks – you know you have work to do to close the gap.

36 – 42 points:

Co-regulating wonderfully – just one more stretch to be the best in class. Co-nversations with tenants are happening on important issues which affect both their services and the business of the landlord.

43 – 56 points – wow!

Co-manding position at the top of the co-regulatory tree. Well done – share some of that with us and we will show off your co-nstrutive relationship with your customers.

Let us know anything you are proud of and we will showcase your work on the website.

Complaint and Designated Persons Panels - News

As many of you know, Yvonne has been working with Rafael Runco on delivering training for Board members, Councillors, Tenants and Staff on Complaints – including good practice in complaints and setting up and running tenant internal panels and the new Designated Panels.

We can now offer this to individual organisations for Boards, Councillors, Staff; Internal Tenant Panels; potential Designated Panels - so why not get together a group in your area and get this delivered and also achieve VFM?

Designated Tenant Panels (DTP) - joint landlords include: Greater Manchester Panel (4 landlords) are about to register with the Housing Ombudsman and **Midlands Small HAs** (5 landlords) who are setting up a joint Scrutiny and Complaints Panel.

Stand Alone DTPs: are being registered too. **Top tip**– if you are an ALMO, the Council must register your DTP.

There may be more – let us know what you are doing.

As with anything else in this newsletter - If you need more information, just give us a shout, we are supporting these groups.

Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)

Since Scrutiny & Empowerment Partners co-wrote the lessons learnt on Scrutiny and Co-regulation for the TSA with CfPS and the co-regulatory champions, we have continued to support their work.

The three publications are still available on the **events pages** of the tenantadvisor website- with advice and top tips for boards, staff and tenants with the 10 co-regulatory champions

Yvonne is a member of the **CfPS Advisory Panel**, chaired by Nick Raynsford MP (and former Housing Minister) alongside some important organisations including the Parliamentary Ombudsman; Cross Party Councilors; House of Commons Clerks; Health Watch; the Local Govt Ombudsman; OFSTED and the National Audit Office.

CfPS has a wide ranging view of scrutiny and lessons can be learnt for housing. More of this in future issues as there is much to learn from other sectors on scrutiny and governance.

Scrutiny.Net meeting, 1st May 2013.

The meeting was held in **Wulvern** in Crewe. The notes are on the website in the member area. Agenda items and presentations included:

- ✓ Sharing co-regulation good practice
- ✓ Regulatory changes consultation from the HCA March 2014 - what does it mean for tenants?
- ✓ Tenant Award Ceremonies - Do you? How?
- ✓ Tenant training - what is everyone delivering and can we afford to do this separately?
- ✓ Complaints - Designated Panels latest news
- ✓ New build development consultation and specialist care and support involvement-approaches
- ✓ Financial, technical and other support to scrutiny panels

And of course, the ever popular “on the couch”

Whats new and interesting?

Salix Senate went off to parliament to watch a Select Committee to consider their skills against those on the Committee.

Soha Scrutiny Panel are using skype to contact each other and having virtual meetings from the comfort of their home.

LMH and Calico have been training their customers as ambassadors for information to communities on Welfare Reform (WR).

Plus Dane have been sharing information on WR through high viz door knocking and “Hair, Prayer and Beer”: a project to use local amenities/meeting places used by customers to spread the news on WR changes .

Herefordshire Housing Scrutiny Panel have been scrutinising their landlords preparations for Welfare Reform.

If your doing anything innovative and are prepared to share it, let us know and we will showcase it on the website or in our next issue.

SEP website makeover – www.tenantadvisor.net

We are modernising by linking the website to **social media sites and access via phone apps**. We are really conscious that many tenants do not have easy access to a laptop or computer for good practice to support their knowledge and volunteering, but many have a smartphone - so this will make the website easier to read and use.

Passwords will be changed too when this is done. Members will receive their new passwords soon.

It will also be easier to **drag and drop** your own good practice and reports from/for tenants for sharing.

In the meantime, please do send me anything you are prepared to show off and share. Lets make this a membership of givers.

Scrutiny and Governance

There are many different models emerging. We have recently completed a review of some of the models and how they are working. Here is a brief summary of a much longer finding.

Generally there are a few ways to do this:

Preview of the Report

The most common includes a report from the Panel to the Senior Manager of the service. That way, the Panel get a heads up of the contntious issues and can rehearse how to play this with Boards and the Senior Manager gets to mention any inaccurancies in the report. Some mature Panels take their report straight to Board, though this is rare.

Which Board?

This is the point of most varience – we have seen reports go to full Board; Customer Services or Performance Committees and an emerging regularity of reports being treated like internal audit reports and going to Audit/Risk Committees. Like an internal audit – actions are reported by exception, which gives the Panel the advantage of being supported bythe Board in monitoring. We have seen so many action slip by officers without this support.

The sub-committee stage allows for the report to be challenged again at main Board if there is disagreement between the committee and the panel on some items for action.

How to monitor the outcomes?

When it comes to monitoring the report, sometimes Panels follow the report to main Board, others go with it just to the sub-committee and agree the actions with that committee. This appears to be the most efficient, but the main Board who have responsibility for co-regulation do not have the benefit of the first hand discussion.

Some reports go with an officers action plan (others allow this to be agreed with officers outside the governance agenda), this is usually a matter of when the report was concluded and the date of the quarterly committee.

Need any more information or examples of Scrutiny links with governance? – just shout up.

Other news

Our [Summer newsletter](#) in June will feature some of the lessons which can be learnt cross sectors through our work with CfPS. Feel free to share this one with colleagues and tenants - if they want to register for the newsletter, they can subscribe to the mailing list on our website homepage and receive their own copy. Do feel free to showcase your work and ask for targeted articles – just send them in. There will be a summer newsletter, even if there is no summer!

Training news

We have also placed a list of the most commonly requested training and support in 2012/13 on the website, in the events section.

Accreditation news

Don't forget the SEP accreditation scheme for involvement and scrutiny for both landlords and tenants – approx £3K for the assessment and the report – assessed by SEP and moderated by tenants and landlords. It will take you to the next level and set you some challenges – ask Soha and Salix who have been through the assessment and achieved the gold standard and still got a report with challenges to consider for further improvement.

Finally thanks for your on-going support

Please share this with your tenants and colleagues and let us know if there is anything else which you would find useful for our next edition

Enjoy the warmer weather and the Welsh daffodils!

Yvonne x

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Scrutiny and Empowerment Partners Ltd

