



National Tenant Voice plans agreed - an update for tenants

Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

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Communities and Local Government Publications
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 030 0123 1124
Fax: 030 0123 1125

Email: communities@capita.co.uk
Online via the Communities and Local Government website:
www.communities.gov.uk

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National Tenant Voice plans agreed – an update for tenants

Last summer the Project Group set up by Communities and Local Government to advise on the National Tenant Voice (NTV) consulted on proposals about what the NTV might do, how it could be governed, and how it might be set up. It held a series of regional events (organised by TPAS and facilitated by tenants from the Project Group) attended by over 1,000 tenants, and many tenants and tenants' organisations responded in writing.

Taking account of what tenants said in the consultation, the Project Group wrote a report for Communities and Local Government including a series of recommendations. These recommendations have now been considered by Communities and Local Government ministers.

This note sets out what has happened since the consultations, how we see the NTV being set up and how tenants can find out more and get involved.

The consultation paper made proposals under four headings:

- vision and values
- the roles and remit
- organisation and governance
- next steps

Vision and Purpose

Most tenants agreed with the vision and values as set out in the consultation document. The statement was shortened and some minor changes were made to the wording in light of comments from tenants.

The government has accepted the recommendations on the vision and values.

The roles and remit

The consultation document proposed that the NTV have four key roles:

- collective advocacy – enabling or facilitating tenants to speak for themselves
- research – to ensure that the views and experiences of tenants, particularly those who are not in tenants organisations, are taken into account
- supporting national and regional tenants organisations – helping build and strengthen tenants organisations at regional and national level

- communication – to develop mechanisms to communicate information to tenants as well as communicate tenants' views to others

The Project Group's report expands on these roles. In response to suggestions from tenants in the consultations, it also proposes that the NTV operates to defined and published accountability standards, so tenants (and others) know how it will communicate, particularly with tenants and tenants' organisations. It also clarifies that the NTV will not replace or duplicate the work of the existing national and regional tenants organisations.

The government has accepted the recommendations on the roles and remit.

Governance and organisation

The consultation proposed that the NTV be an independent stand-alone organisation, rather than it being part of another organisation. The Project Group made it clear in the consultation that the NTV would have to be what is called a 'Non-Departmental Public Body' (NDPB). Any organisation set up and funded by government has to be an NDPB. Being an NDPB means that a Government Minister is accountable to Parliament for the organisation, and therefore the Minister has to approve the Board membership.

The consultation proposed a structure with three parts:

- a National Tenant Council made up of around 50 tenants, some nominated from regional and national organisations, some appointed through an open recruitment process
- a Board that will be the executive arm of the NTV. It will be made up of 15 members, with a majority of tenants, chosen for skills knowledge and experience
- an Accountability Committee, which will select the Council members not appointed by existing organisations, select the tenant Board members from those Council members interested, and scrutinise the accountability of all parts of the structure. This committee to be made up of people nominated by the national and regional tenants' organisations, plus nominees from Communities and Local Government

Following the consultation, the Project Group amended its proposals. It proposed that the majority of places (26) on the National Tenant Council should come through a transparent recruitment process open to all tenants, and a minority of places (24) will be filled by nomination from existing organisations.

The Accountability Committee will need to be relatively small to be effective. The Project Group's report recommends seven people – five nominated by national tenants' organisations, one by TPAS and one by Communities and Local Government.

The government has accepted the recommendations on the governance and organisation – though has raised practical issues relating to the setting up process (see below)

Next Steps

The consultation document envisaged the NTV being fully functional by summer 2009, but accepted that this may take longer if the government needed legislation in order to fund a stand-alone organisation. This has turned out to be the case.

The project group will continue to meet with revised terms of reference and slightly expanded membership with three priorities:

- to operate as far as possible as an 'interim' NTV – holding discussions with the Tenant Services Authority and others
- to advise Communities and Local Government on setting up the NTV, for example the constitution
- to update tenants on progress through a series of road-shows and other communications and to explain how tenants could get involved in the NTV

The government has accepted the recommendations on the setting up of the NTV except for some practicalities:

- *when setting up a new legal body, the governing body (ie the Board) has to be set up first. This means that the Accountability Committee can't be set up formally at the outset and has to be, in the first instance, a sub-group of the Project Group*
- *the NTV will be a Non Departmental Public Body. As Ministers are accountable to Parliament for such bodies, the appointment of the Boards and Chief Officer has to comply with a Government code of practice. This is to ensure the process is open and transparent. Therefore the Project Group will need to involve a specialist Advisor (not a civil servant) who is knowledgeable about the code in the work of the Accountability Committee*
- *legislation is needed for government to fund the NTV as a stand-alone body. Powers are being sought in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill currently going through Parliament*
- *the government is restricted on what money it can spend on setting up a new organisation until it has the legislative powers. This may delay the final form of the NTV*

A Proposed New timetable

January 09	New terms of reference and additional representation on project group
February 09	Accountability Committee set up initially as sub-group of project group
March 09	Project group agrees principles and processes by which Tenant Council, board members and chair will be selected
April – June 09	Tenant road-shows and other events for tenants
May 09	Project group seeks advice / recommends on legal structure / staffing structure / location
May - July 09	Recruitment to the National Tenant Council
June 09 (possibly)	Royal Assent of Bill giving government powers to fund NTV
September 09	First meeting of National Tenant Council
September 09	Accountability Committee recruits tenant Board members from the National Tenant Council
September – October 09	Accountability Committee recruits non-tenant Board members
December 09	NTV Board set up

How you can get involved

If you are interested in being involved in the NTV, this is what you should do:

- attend one or more of the road shows and other events that will take place between April and June
- think about standing for the National Tenant Council. You will be able to get information about what is involved at the road shows and other events
- watch for information on the Communities website www.communities.gov.uk/tenantparticipation.
- register your interest at: nationaltenantvoice@communities.gsi.gov.uk

If you do not have access to a computer please write to us at the address below.

When the NTV is set up, with a Board and staff, one of its first tasks will be to develop communications with tenants' organisations and tenants' federations, so there are ongoing opportunities for tenant's organisations to input into the work of the NTV, and to receive helpful information from the NTV. We will want your views on how best to do this at the road show events in the spring.

Communities and Local Government
Tenant Empowerment Team
1/A1 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU