



Homes & Enterprise

Supporting BME Communities

Resident involvement strategy

2011 – 2013



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1. Let's start with success!

As an independent, black & minority ethnic (BME) housing association, Unity has always had a non-traditional, innovative approach to resident involvement. Our small estate sizes and diverse tenant base mean that the usual approaches just don't work for us, so we've had to create new ways of working within our communities. Here are some of our recent successes.

- **Involving different kinds of residents.** Our flexible Tenant Panels and other involvement methods attract a wide range of people from different age groups, ethnicities and personal circumstances.
- **Work experience placements for residents.** In the last two years, three residents have been successful in moving into employment after working within Unity to build up their skills. Well done them! We now have another three tenants on placement, as well as trainees from local community organisations.
- **Environmental improvements programme.** Rather than make decisions while sitting around a table, we took seven of our tenants on a grand tour of our estates. This panel wisely prioritised the spending of a £200,000 budget on fencing, security and environmental improvements.
- **Tenant Panels.** Unity's monthly panels give interested residents a platform to get active, challenge managers and change things. We use a novel, multi-meeting format to attract people from a wide range of ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. They are also good fun!
- **Children's play projects.** By innovating and sharing costs with other landlords, we ran three successful kids' clubs in summer 2010. Unity staff used the opportunity to get to know the kids better on our estates, leading to an improvement in their behaviour.
- **Priority neighbourhoods.** By using resident feedback from our STATUS survey to identify problem neighbourhoods, we dealt with a drug-dealing problem in Crossgates. Residents told us they were far happier living there as a result. The Stonegates estate in Meanwood is now our priority estate for change.
- **Focus groups with dissatisfied residents.** We identified groups of people who were more likely to be unhappy with Unity's services, then held meetings to talk to them. These groups were great at pinpointing the problems that bugged them. For instance, we found out about the problems that residents with mobility difficulties were having with stair lifts, and have done something about it.

“Bad participatory practice creates mistrust, wastes people's time and money and can seriously undermine future attempts...

“Any subsequent proposals for involvement are likely to be greeted with cynicism and suspicion. A positive history of participation seems the key determining factor in the willingness of people to get involved again.”

(Gerry Stoker, Manchester University, quoted in Involve's *'People & Participation'*, 2005).

2. Resident involvement – what we want to achieve

Unity aims to deliver:

- Quality housing services;
- Socio-economic development; and
- Related neighbour services,

To:

- Our tenants;
- BME communities; and
- Neighbourhoods,

Aimed at:

- Providing choice
- Improving life opportunities; and
- Addressing inequalities.

Over the past decade, Unity's resident involvement has been targeted at improving services, as tenant satisfaction levels were unacceptably low. As the figures below show, this approach has been successful in meeting its aims.

Survey	STATUS 2004	STATUS 2006	Mini-STATUS 2009	STATUS 2010
Satisfied or dissatisfied with overall services	56% 23%	62.1% 24.0%	66.6% 18.0%	79.4% 11.9%

Although Unity needs to build on these positive results to become a top-performing organisation, we are now in a position to widen our focus. Improving services is still our primary aim, but we now have a wider agenda and more ambitious aims.

Our resident involvement aims

- **Improving services**
- **More tailored services through local offers**
- **Focussing on three priority neighbourhoods**
– **Chapeltown, Harehills & Beeston**
- **Open and transparent scrutiny to promote co-regulation**
- **Using involvement to build up our residents' work-related skills**

3. How we identified what we needed to improve

In 2010, Unity embarked on several exercises to test its resident involvement function and to establish the direction in which it needed to move over the next three years. These included the following.

- A full **STATUS survey**
- A **mock inspection** of the resident involvement service by Housing Quality Network (HQN)
- A series of **focus groups** with residents in summer 2010
- The annual resident involvement **impact assessment**
- Producing our first **annual report to tenants**

The HQN inspection showed that although there had been good, estate-based involvement over the previous year, the service also had the following weaknesses.

- A lack of **formal structures** where residents could influence strategic direction
- An **organisational culture** that left involvement to the designated officer, rather than embracing it throughout the organisation
- A lack of **training** for residents, who often did not have the skills to participate fully (e.g. no information pack for gardening monitors, who didn't know what standards they should expect)
- The need for **better communication** with staff and residents about the involvement activities on offer and the outcomes of these activities

There is already a wide range of ways in which residents can become involved. Unity introduced its new Tenant Panels in autumn 2010, which created the formal involvement structure that residents and regulators expected. As the panels become established, we will train and build capacity with our active residents. This will enable them to take on a scrutiny role within Unity. It will also create a platform where some residents can progress on to Board membership.

“Providers we spoke to emphasised the importance of context – customer profile, geography, history, size and so on – in determining their approach to involvement. What works is likely to be different from one organisation to another, depending on the operational environment and the profile of tenants housed.

The principal limitation of traditional structures is that they tend to restrict involvement to those who have the time and motivation to go to meetings. This means that they tend to be dominated by white people, often over 50, who cannot be expected to represent the views and experiences of all tenants.”

(Tenant Services Authority's *'Making Voices Count'*, 2010)

4. Resident involvement in this strategy

We held a series of focus groups in summer & autumn 2010, looking at our involvement service and how residents want to get involved in how Unity is managed. We also used information from our 2009 mini-STATUS survey, in which 283 residents voted for their favourite involvement methods.

As our panels have developed, we have listened to active tenants' opinions on what works and what they want to see more or less of.

Resident feedback from STATUS and the focus groups showed that active residents felt that there had been a real improvement over the past two years in how well Unity worked with them. They said that Unity should prioritise improving the following issues.

- **Timeliness** – not being 'last minute' and giving residents enough notice to be able to plan ahead.
- **Trust** – building up residents' confidence that Unity will deliver on its promises and won't forget about them.
- **Focussed on residents' concerns** – dealing with the issues that residents want to see addressed, rather than the ones that suit Unity or its regulators.
- **Information** – giving residents appropriate information that's attractive, relevant, concise and easy to understand.
- **Attracting more active residents** – advertising opportunities and promoting them more, to get more people involved.
- **Making involvement easy** – keeping things short, accessible and in bite-sized chunks. Where possible, there should be a benefit to residents, e.g. new skills learnt that will help them find work.
- **Seeing results** – publicising changes that have happened as a result of residents' involvement, to encourage others and to give them something to be proud of.

Knowing about the bigger regulatory picture or getting involved at a national level was a low priority for our residents. However, we will continue to make information available to them, as their priorities may change as they build up their skills and experience.

This strategy has been written with active input from our Tenant Panel and has been reviewed and approved by its members.

“The conclusion from many examples in the UK and more widely is not that more participation is needed but that better participation is needed.”

(Involve's *'People and Participation'*, 2005)

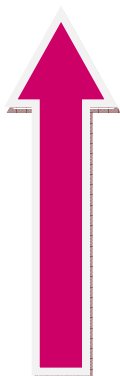
5. Involvement methods

When involving residents, it is not the method that counts – it’s the outcome. Outcomes are the difference that a process makes. Holding a meeting is not an outcome, but improving a service as a result of the meeting is. We will vary our involvement methods according to the situation, but will always focus on producing quality outcomes for our residents.

We will continue to make our involvement structures accessible by paying for travel and childcare. We will also hold daytime and evening sessions of each meeting where possible, to make them accessible for residents with different occupations or family commitments.

Unity recognises that it is important for residents to have the power to influence decisions as much as possible. We seek to build up residents’ skills to enable them to make informed decisions and to move up the ladder of participation. To do this, we will provide relevant information and varied, flexible opportunities for training.

The ladder of participation



- Empowerment:** Residents control decision making at the highest level.
- Collaboration:** Residents share decisions and responsibility, influencing and determining outcomes
- Participation:** Residents can make suggestions and influence outcomes.
- Consultation:** Residents are asked what they think but have limited influence.
- Information:** Residents are told what is happening but have no influence.
- No control:** Residents are passive consumers.

Formal involvement structures include:	Informal involvement methods include:
Monthly Tenant Panels	Focus groups
Board membership	Surveys
Service review groups	Scheme visit walkabouts
Residents associations	Gardening & cleaning service monitoring
	Mystery shopping
	Comment cards

“Traditional structures of tenant involvement still have their place, but they also have their limitations – particularly in terms of involving the full range of a provider’s tenants.”

(Tenant Services Authority’s *‘Making Voices Count’*, 2010)

6. Local offers

The Tenant Services Authority's new regulatory framework requires social housing providers to meet six new national standards. But these national standards have to be supplemented by local offers, agreed between landlords and their tenants on the issues that matter most on a local level.

As required, Unity published its annual report to tenants before the TSA's October 2010 deadline, telling tenants how we would put offers in place. Following extensive consultation with residents through focus groups, tenant panel meetings, questionnaires and *Unity News*, the local offers were in place for the TSA's April 2011 deadline.

By March 2011, the following local offers had been agreed with tenants.

- **Target time for routine repairs reduced** from 28 days to 21 days
- Better **repairs appointments – two-hour slots** instead of just morning or afternoon
- New **neighbourhood management standards** with improved timescales for removing dumped rubbish and abandoned cars
- Publication of a **quarterly resident involvement calendar**
- **Improved service** for tenants who use **stair- or through-lifts** (to be introduced fully as part of contract retendering in 2011)
- **Gardening service** for disabled tenants (to be agreed and introduced in 2011/12)

Since April 2011, there has been an ongoing process of negotiation with tenants, staff and contractors to refine the offers.

As the responsive repairs contract was tendered before the finalisation of the local offers, the following standards could not be introduced straight away in April 2011. They will be introduced gradually in 2011/12 through negotiation with Forrest, the contract winners.

- Target time for routine repairs reduced from 28 days to 21 days
- Better repairs appointments – two-hour slots instead of just morning or afternoon

However, some other improved standards have been introduced as part of the contract negotiations, e.g. the introduction of a new 4-hour target for contractors to attend to an emergency repair.

Progress on local offers will be reported every three months to Unity's Tenant Panel and the Ops Committee.

“Local offers from the best providers will be for the right services, in the right locations, for the right tenants and at the right cost.”

(Tenant Services Authority's *Local Offers Toolkit*, 2010)

7. Measuring progress

Each year, Unity will continue to review its resident involvement actions by carrying out an annual impact assessment in conjunction with residents. This exercise will look honestly at the effectiveness of the past year's activities and what actual difference they made to residents' lives and to the communities in which they live.

We have also set the following indicators. They will be monitored by the Tenant Panel and the Operations Committee and reviewed as part of the annual resident involvement impact assessment.

Performance indicator	Frequency
Resident satisfaction survey held	Every 2 years
Number of Tenant Panel meetings to take place	12 per year
Number of new people who have been to a Tenant Panel meeting	4 per year
Number of new people who have attended more than three Tenant Panel meetings	3 per year
Number of editions of 'Unity News'	4 per year
Number of 'you said, we did' items published in 'Unity News'	3 per issue
Number of quarterly scheme visit programmes published in 'Unity News'	1 per issue
Frequency of publication of resident involvement calendar in 'Unity News'	4 per year
Number of local flyers sent to residents each year	Minimum of 8 per year
Number of 'on site' consultations carried out	Minimum of 4 per year
Number of resident work experience placements at Unity	Minimum of 4 per year

Tenant satisfaction figures for Unity have historically been low when compared with other housing associations nationally, but have increased hugely within the last two years. With our satisfaction ratings now in the national third quartile, it is important that we build on this and aim to improve significantly within the life of this strategy.

We aspire to move into the top quartile, but are aware that our younger, BME client group is statistically less likely to report high levels of satisfaction than older, white British social housing tenants. To help us compare like with like, we will find other housing associations with demographically similar tenant profiles with whom we can benchmark our satisfaction levels.

Tenant satisfaction targets	Actual figure 2010/11	Target 2011/12	Target 2012/13
Tenant satisfaction with overall services	79.4%	82%	85%
Tenant satisfaction with how Unity takes tenants' views into account	63.9%	67%	70%

8. Resources available

Unity's tenants need staff time, resources, training and support to ensure that their involvement is effective and results in positive changes. The following resources are available to implement this strategy.

- **Staff:** Unity employs a Tenant, Neighbourhood & Involvement Officer whose primary purpose is to implement this strategy. It is central to the work of all our staff.
- **Practical support:** Unity will provide practical resources to enable tenants to get involved easily. This includes office support, space to work at Unity, use of computers and other office equipment, information and training.
- **Financial support:** Unity has a budget for resident involvement, which includes funding for community events. We will also offer support to residents' associations.
- **Work experience placements:** We will actively encourage our tenants to use Unity to build up their work-related skills and improve their employability. Work experience placements are tailored to residents' needs, supported and with clear aims.

9. Accountability to our tenants

If tenants feel that Unity has not kept to the promises made in this strategy, then they have the following options available to them if they wish to complain.

- Unity's complaints procedure
- Tenant Panel members are encouraged to report to Unity's Operations Committee on a quarterly basis. They can use this report to raise any concerns with Unity's Board.

“Participation should not be used without respect for participants. The fuel of participation is people's time, and in a time-poor world this resource is in ever-shorter supply.

Those designing participation processes cannot take this time for granted and must ensure that everything possible is done to ensure that a participant's time is well spent.”

(Involve's *'People and Participation'*, 2005)

10. Action plan 2011/12

These activities and objectives have been set in response to our residents' priorities, based on the changes that they want to see. Action plans will be produced for subsequent years during the lifetime of this strategy.

Activity	Intended outcomes	Date	Lead officer	Resources	Measure for success
Regular Tenant Panel meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better links between tenants and Unity managers. Service problems are identified and resolved. Tenants feel that their views are being taken into account. Tenant scrutiny results in better services. 	1 st Tuesday of every month	TNIO, service managers	Officer and resident time Resident expenses Training expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings are well-attended. Resident involvement log shows positive changes as a result of the meetings. Residents' testimony that they feel meetings are effective in producing change.
Stonegates priority neighbourhood initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved quality of life for Stonegates residents. Reduction in amount of anti-social behaviour. 	Apr 2011 – Mar 2012	TNIO, housing team	Officer time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stonegates residents are happier with their neighbourhood. Stonegates estate looks better and has less vandalism.
Tenant work experience placements at Unity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants have better workplace skills. More tenant scrutiny of Unity's services. 	Apr 2011 – Mar 2012	TNIO	Officer and resident time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants feel that work experience placements are worthwhile and increase their skills.
Resident monitoring of cleaning and gardening services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants get value for money for service charges Problems are identified and resolved at an early stage 	Apr 2011 – Mar 2012	Maintenance team	Card printing & mailing costs Officer time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants feel that gardening and cleaning services have improved.
Resident involvement impact assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better use is made of staff & tenants' time and resources. 	June-July 2011	TNIO	Officer and resident time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ineffective activities are changed or discontinued.

Monitoring new local standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents have better, tailored services 	Quarterly monitoring throughout 2011/12	TNIO, service managers	Officer and resident time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly reports are produced for Tenant Panels. Residents are satisfied with new standards.
Tenant Panels report to Unity's Board (Operations Committee)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active tenants have a direct influence on Unity's strategic direction. Board members are aware of active tenants' views 	Quarterly from July 2011	TNIO	Officer and resident time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly reports are produced for Operations Committee.
Disabled resident involvement in procurement of lift maintenance contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stair & through lifts are more reliable Problems and repairs are dealt with sooner 	summer 2011	Maintenance manager	Officer and resident time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Households that use stair & through lifts are more satisfied with Unity's services.
Review of Unity's website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents are better informed and have online access to more service. 	Sept 2011	IT manager	Officer and resident time Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenants feel new website is good quality and value for money.
Review of demand for social networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New technologies are used in line with tenant demand. 	Feb 2012	TNIO, IT manager	Officer and resident time Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social networking is introduced where and how tenants want it.
Full tenant satisfaction survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better information about tenants' priorities. Identification of neighbourhoods that need priority treatment. Identification of opportunities to introduce better, tailored services through local offers. 	Feb 2012	TNIO	Customer services team support In-house printing and mailing costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local offers identified. Priority neighbourhoods for 2012/13 identified. Improvement plan put in place.