



## **Resident involvement impact assessment 2009/10**

**This impact assessment was carried out with the assistance of the following tenants. We are grateful for their time and thoughtful input.**

**Samantha Fray**

**Michelle Hall**

**Layla Mehdi**

**Anthony Rooke**

**Carol Smith**

**Alicia Whittaker**

# Contents

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Impact summary**
- 3 Assessment of different kinds of involvement**
  - 3.1 Formal group involvement**
    - Tenant Board membership
    - Tenant Maintenance Panel
    - Environmental improvements panel
  - 3.2 Informal group involvement**
    - Gardening service review
    - Cleaning service review
    - Service charge consultations
    - Environmental improvements consultations
  - 3.3 Individual involvement**
    - Mini-STATUS 2009
    - Unity News comment cards
    - Repairs call-backs
  - 3.4 Information**
    - Tenant newsletter – Unity News
  - 3.5 Community projects and events**
    - Stonegates children's project
- 4 Additional areas for improvement**
- 5 Looking ahead to 2010/11**

## 1. Introduction

Resident involvement is a key part of Unity's business. By working in partnership with Unity, residents can not only influence what happens in their home and where they live, but can have a greater strategic influence on Unity's housing policies and services.

Unity tenants are more likely to be younger and from a Black & Minority Ethnic Group than most other residents in social housing. Unity's homes are also in smaller, more dispersed developments. This means that traditional methods of involvement have not always suited residents. Unity has had to be creative in using a range of personal, easily accessible involvement methods to ensure that its involvement methods reflect its tenant base.

Resident involvement is a key priority of the Tenant Services Authority, with their emphasis on co-regulation and robust tenant scrutiny.

*Our standards emphasise that providers need to involve their tenants in shaping how services are delivered. Only by doing this can their work meet local priorities. Our standards also involve tenants being able to scrutinise performance. Discussions about service delivery and improvement should be between providers and their tenants, rather than between the regulator and the provider...*

*And for co-regulation to work, landlords must assess their performance honestly, robustly and using evidence.*

What does the regulatory framework mean for you?  
Tenant Services Authority, April 2010

This report contains an assessment of each key involvement activity in April 2009 – March 2010. Each activity has been assessed in detail and then given a score, based on the following criteria.

- Input from active residents
- Performance against measures
- Testimony from residents
- Positive impacts for residents and Unity
- The cost in terms of resident time, staff time, money and other resources to produce the impacts achieved

Each activity has been given a score of 1 to 5.

**1 Very poor assessment (falls way below aims, no outcomes)**

**2 Poor assessment (falls below aims, poor outcomes)**

**3 Fair assessment (meets aims, has areas to improve)**

**4 Good assessment (exceeds aims, promising prospects)**

**5 Excellent assessment (excellent outcomes)**

The findings of the Resident Involvement Impact Assessment will be used together with other information, e.g. the outcomes of the Housing Quality Network mock inspection, to inform Unity's forthcoming strategy and revised Resident Involvement Statement.

## 2. Impact summary

<b>Resident involvement activity</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Tenant Board membership	<b>2 Poor</b>
Tenant maintenance panel	<b>3 Fair</b>
Environmental improvements panel	<b>4 Good</b>
Gardening service review	<b>4 Good</b>
Cleaning service review	<b>3 Fair</b>
Service charge consultations	<b>3 Fair</b>
Environmental improvements consultations	<b>5 Excellent</b>
Mini-STATUS 2009	<b>4 Good</b>
Unity News comment cards	<b>4 Good</b>
Repairs call-backs	<b>2 Poor</b>
Tenant newsletter – Unity News	<b>3 Fair</b>
Stonegates children’s project	<b>4 Good</b>

### 3. Assessment of different kinds of involvement

#### 3.1 Formal group involvement

---

Activity: **Tenant Board membership**

Description:

Unity's Board can have up to 13 Board members, of whom 3 can be tenants. Currently there are no tenant Board members, although one tenant terminated his tenancy with Unity in 2010 but remains on the Board.

Unity's mini-STATUS survey in spring 2009 identified 23 tenants with an interest in Board membership. They were contacted and assessed in autumn 2009 and potential candidates were interviewed. The process has not been progressed past this point.

Impacts:

- Low impact, as tenants are not currently involved at this strategic level.

Assessment:

**2 Poor**

Recommendations:

- Consider a planned and timetabled tenant Board member recruitment drive.
- 

Activity: **Tenant Maintenance Panel**

Description:

Unity's Tenant Maintenance Panel is a flexible structure to enable residents to have a greater involvement in the repairs & maintenance service. Much consultation is done by email, phone or post.

Panel numbers stood at up to 14 tenants in 2009/10, with a good mix of ethnicities and ages that reflected Unity's tenant profile. Numbers have now dropped to seven. Panel activities included interviewing contractors, setting the new kitchen specification and involvement in the procurement review. However, there was no clear programme of activities or involvement in policy review, and some promised service reviews (e.g. fitting showers) were not delivered.

Impacts:

- Better kitchen standards with clear, attractive brochure
- Customer focus during appointment process for gas, cleaning and gardening contracts

Assessment:

**3 Fair**

Recommendations:

- Set clear programme of activities for 2010/11, agreed with residents.
  - Recruit more panel members.
  - Provide training for panel members.
-

Activity: **Environmental Improvements Panel**

Description:

Following mini-STATUS 2009, 70 tenants were invited to take part in a panel to assess and prioritise how Unity's £100,000 environmental improvements budget was spent in 2009/10, and how a further £100,000 was spent in 2010/11.

Seven residents toured the Unity sites where improvements had been requested and gave each one a priority rating. This was used to decide if the work should be done. Panel members were then invited to further meetings to monitor progress of the implementation of the environmental improvements programme.

Impacts:

- £200,000 budget allocated according to residents' priorities
- Increased security and attractiveness for Unity's homes

Assessment:

**4 Good**

Recommendations:

- Establish clear terms of reference for ongoing panel.
  - Increase effectiveness of monitoring by holding more frequent, regular panel meetings.
-

## 3.2 Informal group involvement

---

### Activity: **Gardening service review**

#### Description:

Following low satisfaction with Unity's gardening service in 2008/09, involvement structures were put in place to enable residents to scrutinise the service.

- Resident satisfaction monitoring system set up – freepost cards.
- Satisfaction cards and gardening service monitored by a tenant on a weekly basis.
- Review of service in autumn 2009 (80 questionnaires sent out, 14 returned).
- Four residents took part in the recruitment of new contractors.

#### Impacts:

- Poor performance from contractor identified, resulting in an improvement to the service and increased resident satisfaction
- The review led to the retendering of the gardening contract, resulting in a cheaper service with contractors who were judged to have a better customer focus.

#### Assessment:

**4 Good**

#### Recommendations:

- Set up working group of residents and staff to monitor and improve gardening service.
  - Recruit more active tenant monitors and regularly provide contractors with updated list.
  - Increase effectiveness of card monitoring system by providing tenants with training pack so that they can accurately monitor standards.
- 

### Activity: **Cleaning service review**

#### Description:

Following complaints about the communal area cleaning service in 2008/09, involvement structures were put into place to enable tenants to scrutinise the service.

- Resident satisfaction monitoring system set up – freepost cards.
- Satisfaction cards and gardening service monitored by a tenant on a weekly basis.
- Review of service in autumn 2009 (80 questionnaires sent out, 8 returned).

#### Impacts:

- Areas of good and poor performance were identified and fed back to the contractor, resulting in an improvement to the service and increased resident satisfaction

#### Assessment:

**3 Fair**

#### Recommendations:

- Tie in future reviews with other services (e.g. gardening) to avoid survey fatigue.
  - Set up working group of residents and staff to monitor and improve cleaning service.
  - Recruit more active tenant monitors and regularly provide contractors with updated list.
  - Increase effectiveness of card monitoring system by providing tenants with training pack so that they can accurately monitor standards.
-

Activity: **Service charge consultations**

Description:

Some residents on the following developments expressed a wish to opt out of certain services and hence to pay lower rent.

- School Mews (gardening – car parking areas)
- Reyden Mews (gardening – front lawns)
- Reginald Street (gardening and lighting of shared pathways)
- Devon Close (water charge to communal area supply)
- Kimberley Place (gardening – car parking area)
- Fieldhouse Drive (communal hallway heating)

Staff consulted with all residents on these developments to determine whether the consensus was to remove or keep the relevant service.

Impacts:

- Residents on four developments chose to opt out of the service.
- Residents on one development (Reginald Street) chose to keep the service.
- Residents on one development (Devon Close) did not respond.

Assessment:

**3 Fair**

Recommendations:

- Future consultations need to be tightly timetabled so that they are resolved quickly, especially where residents are slow to respond.
- 

Activity: **Environmental improvements consultations**

Description:

Following prioritisation of environmental improvements by the tenant panel, residents living in schemes that had been chosen were consulted about the planned works. They were sent a plan of the proposed works and given the opportunity to change them.

More involved consultations were held on Devon Close and the Stonegates to ensure that proposed fencing programmes met people's needs. However, the programme fell behind schedule due to competing demands on the maintenance team.

Impacts:

- Residents were empowered to have an input into their immediate environment.
- One development (271 Chapeltown Road) completely changed the planned works, from fencing that would benefit three households, to the resurfacing of an access road that benefited 15 Unity households and two other properties.

Assessment:

**5 Excellent**

Recommendations:

- Consider looking at ways of resourcing the maintenance team to enable the current and future environmental improvement programmes to go ahead on schedule.
  - Routinely collect data on resident satisfaction with the programme.
-

### 3.3 Informal group involvement

---

Activity: **Mini-STATUS 2009**

Description:

Unity carried out a mini-STATUS survey in spring 2009, with the aims of collecting the following information.

- Satisfaction data on key performance indicators
- Priorities for local lettings (to feed into local lettings policies)
- Suggestions for environmental improvements (to feed into a five year plan)
- Areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (to feed into area improvement plans, and to enable us to deal with any unresolved problems)
- Individuals' involvement preferences
- Which tenants were interested in the TSA's 'National Conversation'

This survey formed the basis of work to improve services in 2009/10, creating the following outcomes.

- Staff dealt with over 70 unresolved problems.
- 45 tenants were sent information about the TSA's National Conversation.
- Three estates were consulted about local lettings policies, with two being set up.
- An Area Improvement Plan was sent to all Unity tenants in August 2009, with at least one action for improvement for each development or neighbourhood.
- 115 tenants expressed an interest in at least one type of resident involvement – they were all contacted and encouraged to get involved.
- A SMART action plan was created to record and log progress on carrying out actions promised as a result of feedback from the survey.

Impacts:

- Resident satisfaction with Unity's services increased from 67% in mini-STATUS 2009 to 79% in STATUS 2010.
- Certain key ethnic groups – Black Caribbean, Asian Pakistani and Mixed race – had comparatively low satisfaction rates in mini-STATUS 2009, but this had increased proportionally in STATUS 2010.

Assessment:

**4 Good**

Recommendations:

- Some problems took a lot of chasing to resolve. Unity needs to put systems into place to work towards a 'right first time' culture.
  - Consider doing another mini-STATUS 18 months after STATUS 2010 (November 2011).
  - In future, create opportunities for non-resident-involvement staff and residents to work together to find solutions to problems, to promote ownership of planned actions.
-

Activity: **Unity News comment cards**

Description:

To encourage informal feedback from residents, Unity introduced freepost comment cards, which were sent out with each issue of Unity News for four issues. Residents were given the incentive of £1 to a local children's charity for each card received.

In total, 82 cards were returned, containing 29 compliments. Outstanding problems were tackled and tracked until they were resolved, unless the resident failed to make contact.

Impacts:

- Following a complaint about the tone of Unity's low-level rent arrears letters, they were re-written with improved customer focus and in Plain English, before being approved by the complainant.
- A tenant who was dissatisfied with the support she received when suffering from ASB reviewed the ASB procedures.
- Staff morale was improved by the frequent compliments.

Assessment:

**4 Good**

Recommendations:

- Continue the present system of sending comment cards with each newsletter.
  - Introduce a system to consistently feed back information collected into service improvements.
- 

Activity: **Repairs call-backs**

Description:

Following concerns raised by residents about reactive repairs, a call-back system was introduced with the aim of calling 20 random tenants each month from August 2009 to check their satisfaction with a recent repair.

The call-backs were done by a trained resident volunteer on work placement. Unfortunately, she was unable to get through the anticipated volume of calls and managed only 13 in two months. On a rating system of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good), the average repair rating was 3.25.

Impacts:

- The volume of calls was too small to clearly identify trends that could lead to improvements, but indicated that satisfaction may be lower than that measured by questionnaires given out after completion of repairs by contractors.

Assessment:

**2 Poor**

Recommendations:

- Consider using the customer services team to carry out the call-backs during quiet periods.
-

### 3.4 Information

---

Activity: **Tenant newsletter – Unity News**

Description:

Unity produces a quarterly newsletter that is sent out with rent statements, to save costs. It is produced in-house and compares favourably with the costs of other associations newsletters. Informal feedback about the newsletter is good. It has one regular tenant contributor and other residents who suggest themes or areas that they would like to see more information on.

A summarised version is produced in Chinese for seven households. It is not routinely produced in any other language. It is also produced in large print for those who request it, but the improved census data has not been used to review this list. Two tenants have requested it on CD, but it has not been produced in this format due to the technical difficulties of doing this at a low unit cost.

Impacts:

- Resident involvement information included in each issue
- High level of awareness of planned maintenance programme following the publication of the 5 year plan in the newsletter

Assessment:

**3 Fair**

Recommendations:

- Use census data to review which residents need a different format to access the newsletter.
  - Ensure that the newsletter is routinely produced in appropriate formats.
- 

### 3.5 Community projects and events

---

Activity: **Stonegates children's project**

Description:

Following input from a Stonegates resident, Unity trialled a partnership project with Leeds Play Network. Three trained play workers came to the estate for two hours each week to play with the children from August – November 2009. It was monitored by a local resident and residents (including children) were consulted when it finished, identifying areas for improvement.

Impacts:

- There has been an improvement in the relationship between Unity staff and children on the estate, which it is hoped will lead to a reduction in low-level ASB.
- Similar play projects have been rolled out to two other estates, and have attracted joint funding from other housing associations.

Assessment:

**4 Good**

Recommendations:

- Consider greater involvement from housing staff to build up relationships with children on Unity's estates.
-

## **4. Additional areas for improvement**

A Housing Quality Network (HQN) inspection of the service carried out during the impact assessment highlighted that staff and active tenants were unclear about the range of resident involvement activities on offer. They stated that there needed to be more structure to the service and that resident involvement needed to be owned by all staff. Although it was agreed that there were good examples of resident involvement at an estate level, HQN judged that residents did not have sufficient involvement at a strategic level.

During this impact assessment, interviews with active tenants also showed that awareness about the TSA and the new standards was low.

This points to the need for Unity to introduce more structured involvement opportunities and clearer standards, especially in light of our commitments to meet the Tenant Services Authority's new standards.

## **5. Looking ahead to 2010/11**

Assessing the impact of these activities helps Unity to see which ones have been effective, and to see which areas we need to either improve or completely redesign. The information from this process will be used to set the priorities for our resident involvement activity in 2010/11.

Unity is committed to meeting the required outcomes of the Tenant Service Authority's (TSA) tenant involvement and empowerment standard, and to involving tenants in producing 'local offers' for tenant involvement and empowerment, home, tenancy and neighbourhood.

This impact assessment shows that the following areas should be priorities for Unity's resident involvement service in 2010/11.

- Clearer involvement structures
- More actively involved residents
- Better trained residents who are able to make more informed decisions
- More opportunities for high level involvement
- Promoting ownership of resident involvement by all staff members
- More timely follow-up of involvement activity