

# The annual report to tenants: a toolkit

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This report has been produced in partnership with:

**NATIONAL  
HOUSING  
FEDERATION**

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**TPAS**

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## Contents

- 1. About this toolkit ..... 2
- 2. Purpose of the annual report to tenants ..... 3
- 3. Annual report to tenants: TSA requirements ..... 4
- 4. Developing the annual report to tenants ..... 5

### Appendix

- What tenants want from their annual report – TPAS research ..... 18

## 1. About this toolkit

At the time of finalising this document, significant change is afoot in the social housing sector, not least of which is the proposed review of regulation which will take place over summer. While the detail and timescale of the review and any changes are yet to be determined, Grant Shapps, the Housing Minister, has commended the regulatory framework which is likely to remain in place and with it the requirement to produce an annual report for tenants. For the time being, the TSA's line is that "it is business as usual."

The regulatory framework is the product of real consultation between tenants, providers and the TSA about what is wanted from providers. A significant degree of consensus has been reached, based on a shared view of good practice. The regulatory framework provides the basis for a new deal between tenants and providers, regardless of the size, shape or location of the regulator.

The aim of this toolkit is to help providers and their tenants think through their approach to the annual report so that what is produced is "fit for purpose." That means fit for what tenants want from *their* annual report. While the TSA will take an interest in the content of the report, this is first and foremost a report for tenants.

Accordingly, we have deliberately avoided recommending a specific format or template and instead explore broad principles, which we hope will be helpful to all types of provider and their tenants.

This toolkit:

- is intended for use by those involved in the process of producing the annual report: governing bodies, senior officers and tenants
- builds on existing good practice in respect of reporting to tenants
- is not regulatory guidance or prescription – you take from it only what you need. It is comprehensive to assist those who "could do with all the help they can get." However, we do not wish to stifle innovation or distract you from defining what is wanted locally as a product of the dialogue between provider and tenants.
- draws on research undertaken by TPAS specifically for this document (see Appendix)

Throughout this document, we use "tenant forum" as a generic term for any existing arrangements that enable "involved" tenants to hold the governing body to account. We are not suggesting that you need set up anything new or that a specific structural solution is required – build on your existing arrangements.

This toolkit was written by HouseMark and overseen by a steering group which included the National Housing Federation (NHF), Local Government Association (LGA), Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and National Federation of ALMOs (NFA). It was funded through the TSA's Tenant Excellence Fund.

A first draft was shared with a readers group. We thank them for their valued input on what was a very tight timescale. The readers group comprised:

Gordon Perry	Accent Group
Roger Jarman	Audit Commission
Helen Jaggard	Berneslai Homes
Gemma Duggan	Birmingham City Council
Nick Cummins	Bromford Group
Marella Hoffman	Cambridge City Council
Mike Owen	Carrick Housing
Trystan Hall	Carrick Housing
Adam Waller	Cheltenham Borough Homes
Nic Bliss	Confederation of Co-operative Housing
Blase Lambert	Confederation of Co-operative Housing
Ann Cornelius	Green Square Group
Nick Atkin	Halton Housing Trust
David Sherrington	Homes for Haringey
Simon James	Homes for Islington
Kate Russell	Metropolitan Housing Partnership
Michael Gelling	National Tenant Voice
Tracey Innes	North Star Housing Group
Steve Finegan	Northwards Housing
Phil Saunders	Nottingham City Homes
Nick Cross	Southampton City Council
Wendy Pittendrigh	Spectrum Housing Group
Sandra Coleing	Stockport Homes
Darren Hartley	TAROE
John Baldwin	Thames Valley Housing Group
Sue Brockleback	Wigan & Leigh Housing
Kate Hughes	Wolverhampton Homes

## 2. Purpose of the annual report to tenants

The annual report to tenants is a key component of the regulatory framework. There are three principal strands to its purpose. It provides a means of:

- setting out a clear service offer in respect of the national standards so that tenants know what to expect from their provider. The service offer should be developed and agreed with tenants. Expressing it in the annual report serves as a commitment on the part of the provider to deliver the service offer.
- being held to account for delivery of the commitment - through the availability of transparent information - by tenants and ultimately the TSA. Essentially, the service offer is a local expression of meeting the national standards. Therefore it follows that failure to deliver the service offer is a failure to comply with the national standards.
- improving accountability and transparency by involving tenants in the development of the annual report

Providers need to engage with their tenants at the earliest opportunity to find out what *they* want from *their* annual report.

Tenants should expect an informative, honest and accurate annual report – a “warts and all” account of cost and performance, though this does not mean it has to be complicated or lengthy.

The annual report is also a source of information on which the TSA assesses risk<sup>1</sup>. However, the TSA is keen to stress that its use of the annual report should not detract from what tenants want in *their* annual report.

The level of assurance the TSA derives from the annual report will be influenced by “*the degree to which providers are transparent, involve their tenants in scrutinising performance and adopt external validation such as benchmarking, peer review and third party accreditation.*”

In summary, therefore, the intention is that providers issue the annual report to their tenants and then share it with the TSA.

### **3. Annual report to tenants: TSA requirements**

The TSA’s requirements with regards to the annual report are summarised at page 40 of The regulatory framework for social housing in England from April 2010<sup>2</sup>. In the interests of brevity, we have not reproduced them here. The TSA has modified its requirements for smaller providers – these are set out at page 44 of the regulatory framework document.

For the first annual report, due on 1 October 2010, the TSA expects providers to include their plans for developing local offers. Local offers<sup>3</sup> should be in place for the TSA deadline of 1 April 2011. This means that there is no expectation to report performance on local offers until the second annual report is due on 1 October 2011.

You should note that whilst value for money (VFM) is set out as a stand-alone standard, the TSA’s expectation is that it should be embedded across the range of provider activities. Similarly, “understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants” is a cross-cutting requirement that applies to all standards. This means that providers must demonstrate that they know who their tenants are, including the seven diversity strands<sup>4</sup> and those tenants with additional support needs, and show how they are applying this knowledge to meet the needs of all their tenants.

Local authorities and ALMOs should also be aware that the Governance and Financial Viability standard does not apply to them. Therefore, there is no formal regulatory requirement on local authorities and ALMOs to include an account of Governance and Financial Viability in their annual report to tenants. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that this is an annual report for tenants and tenants might wish to have some coverage of these activities.

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<sup>1</sup> The TSA’s approach to assessing compliance is set out in *The regulatory framework for social housing in England from April 2010*, TSA, 2010 at page 37

<sup>2</sup> [www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20175](http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20175)

<sup>3</sup> [www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20175](http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20175)

<sup>4</sup> The seven equality strands are: race, disability, sexual orientation, age, gender, religion or belief and gender identity.

## 4. Developing the annual report to tenants

The following five steps for developing your annual report are simply one way of going about the process:

Step 1 Agree your approach to the annual report with tenants

Step 2 Check the extent to which your service offer for the coming year complies with TSA requirements for each service delivery standard

Step 3 Build an evidence base and make a self-assessment judgement

Step 4 Determine future improvement plans

Step 5 Publish the annual report: communicate the self-assessment, improvement plan and offer for the coming year

**It is for providers and tenants to determine the right approach for them.** Under each of the steps we have set out a comprehensive list of issues for you to consider. Again, these are not meant to constrain, restrict or over-complicate the annual report but provide a starting point for providers and tenants to decide how they go about the process and what is included in the annual report.

Clearly, the process you adopt needs to dovetail with your existing approach to business planning – it is not a separate, additional exercise.

### Step 1 Agree your approach to the annual report with tenants

#### ***About this step***

Before developing your annual report, you need to:

- have a plan (a skim through all five steps will help here)
- have an understanding of what the annual report will look like
- decide whether responsibility for the development of the annual report will be delegated to a managing agent

#### ***Issues***

##### *a) Planning the annual report process*

You will have probably started preparations for the production of the annual report. However, we suggest the following points to consider:

- remember this is an annual report for tenants. Providers need to engage with their tenants at the earliest opportunity to find out what they want from their annual report – what is in it and how it looks (see Appendix for TPAS's research on this issue). Some providers are already using their existing tenant editorial groups to shape their annual reports.

- it is also important, from the outset, to be clear about the role tenants will have throughout the annual report process:
    - is there an appropriate tenant body in place that can represent what tenants want and, where required, challenge the provider on the approach taken? How will you ensure such a body is representative and reflects the needs of the wider tenant body?
    - what can the provider do to ensure that tenants have a meaningful role? Are there capacity issues that need to be addressed, for example, through training and independent support? What can realistically be achieved now and what needs to happen over a longer timeframe?
  - prepare a project plan and set out key milestones – this needs to include sourcing the content, its consideration and sign-off by the governing body and tenants, production and dissemination. Some decision points will need to coincide with your governance and tenant consultation timetables.
  - identify a senior officer to lead on the annual report
  - identify adequate resources of sufficient authority and expertise to co-ordinate the activity associated with the annual report process
  - ensure someone is specifically tasked with considering the presentation, writing style and design aspects of the report from a very early stage. Pay particular attention to ensuring that financial information is presented in a way that is accessible to tenants and people unused to interpreting financial information.
  - communicate to the governing body, senior management team and tenant forum the purpose of the annual report, their respective roles, the associated process and timescales. It is particularly important that the board and tenant forum understand the significance of their role in the annual report process and sign-off. They have to be sure that the annual report will serve its purpose as an accountability tool.
- b) *Agree what the annual report will look like*
- will the report be produced at group level or subsidiary level (for housing associations)? The TSA has left this decision to you. Providers and tenants should consider the pros and cons here. One housing association we have spoken to aims to demonstrate compliance with the national standards at a group level and provide supplementary information on local offers at the subsidiary level.
  - how does this annual report to tenants relate to any existing annual reporting arrangements? For example, you might already issue an annual report to:
    - tenants that follows an agreed format and includes content they have been consulted on. If you are a local authority, it might also convey certain statutory requirements.
    - stakeholders to meet company law requirements, provide information for the annual general meeting (AGM) and meet public relations objectives

If providers and tenants decide to combine an existing annual report with the new annual report to tenants, you will need to consider how you manage the combined content in a way that enhances the reader's experience rather than detracts with what might be seen as superfluous additional reading. The key, once again, is to find out what your tenants want and build on what you are already doing.

c) *Issuing different versions of the annual report to tenants*

Another consideration is whether to provide the tenant forum with a more detailed report than that given to the wider tenant body, where summary information is probably sufficient. Previous research has suggested that there are essentially two main tenant audiences for such information. The tenant forum wants comprehensive information to properly inform their scrutiny role and the wider tenant body tends only to need a summary<sup>5</sup>.

Those providers with a sophisticated approach to profiling their tenants could take this kind of differentiation a step further by targeting an element of the content to specific groups of tenants. TPAS research (see Appendix) confirms that tenants want information tailored to specific communities where possible. This could be achieved by having sections or supplements targeted at distinct communities or client groups. As suggested above, this could also include information associated with any local offers.

If you do opt for more than one version of the annual report, you will need to avoid confusing your various audiences by differentiating the documents, for example through clear labelling and branding arrangements.

Providers and tenants will also need to be aware of the VFM implications of differentiating the annual report.

d) *Delegating responsibility for the annual report*

There may be situations where a provider delegates responsibility for producing an annual report to a managing agent acting on its behalf. The TSA's regulatory framework document is silent on this issue.

The primary reason for considering this is that tenants might associate the service with the managing agent rather than the "registered provider"<sup>6</sup> who is statutorily responsible for producing the report. Obvious examples include where:

- an ALMO manages the stock for the local authority (the registered provider)
- a housing association (the registered provider), within a group structure, has an arrangement for some of its stock to be managed by another subsidiary
- any registered provider contracts with another to manage some or all of its stock

Other models of delegated provision could include Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) and where the service is delivered by a private sector provider.

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<sup>5</sup> For more see *How to develop and monitor local performance measures*, HouseMark, 2009 [www.housemark.co.uk/hmkb2.nsf/2/3BE847A1B1A5292380257467004725C1?opendocument](http://www.housemark.co.uk/hmkb2.nsf/2/3BE847A1B1A5292380257467004725C1?opendocument)

<sup>6</sup> Within the meaning of the Housing and Regeneration Act 1998

If the managing agent is to publish the annual report, we suggest the following should be made clear in the report:

- the nature of the relationship between the registered provider and managing agent
- the extent of delegation – which activities is the managing agent responsible for and which are retained by the registered provider? This is important in terms of tenants understanding which organisation they are holding to account.
- the way in which the registered provider assures the performance of the managing agent, including the extent of involvement in the annual report process and sign-off. Ultimately the registered provider is responsible for ensuring the TSA standards are met.

## **Step 2 Check the extent to which your service offer for the coming year complies with TSA requirements for each service delivery standard<sup>7</sup>**

### ***About this step***

The starting point for ensuring compliance with regulatory standards is to have a clear view of what each standard requires. Then it is a case of checking your service offer for the coming year against each of the five service delivery standards to assess the extent of compliance.

For example, there might be certain regulatory requirements that are simply not yet in place, such as a “right first time” approach to repairs or a clear policy on the prevention of and response to anti-social behaviour. This is why we have set out the assessment of performance as a separate step (step 3) simply to differentiate between:

- broad compliance issues – where the provider might not be doing something that is now expected under the regulatory framework (step 2)
- current performance – the self-assessment of how well the provider is performing (step 3)

You might not choose to differentiate in this way.

Arguably, this first year of “measuring up” to the TSA’s standards is likely to be different to subsequent years when providers, in conjunction with their tenants, will have had time to properly:

- consider and set out a service offer that complies with the national standards (and any local offers)
- monitor performance of the offer and any local offers

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<sup>7</sup> The five service delivery standards are: tenant involvement and empowerment, home, tenancy agreement, neighbourhood and community and VFM. Whilst it is not necessary to set out a service offer in respect of Governance and Financial Viability – because they are internal activities rather than services – it may be that tenants want some coverage of these functions featured in the annual report. Providers should be guided by their tenants here. As previously noted, the TSA’s requirements with regards to Governance and Financial Viability do not apply to local authorities and ALMOs.

Aligning to the TSA's framework is likely to be a work in progress that extends beyond October 2010.

### **Issues**

- consider:
  - both the “required outcome” and “specific expectations” of each of the TSA’s standards<sup>8</sup>
  - your offer for the coming year

To what extent does your offer for the coming year (including any local offers) comply with these standards? What are the areas of compliance and non-compliance? It is important to be honest and transparent about areas of non-compliance.

- to what extent has your offer for the coming year been shaped by tenant involvement in service design and/or tenant insight? Many providers carried out “local conversations” last year as part of the TSA’s National Conversation which can be considered here.
- how do your tenants know if the offer is weak or strong? Tenants will need to compare the offer with what was previously available as well as what is available elsewhere. Most service offers are underpinned by some form of measurement system against which targets (or standards) are set. These can be compared as can the cost of service provision.
- in terms of the areas of non-compliance, what are the priorities and what is your timetable for addressing them, taking into account costs, performance quality, resident feedback and other factors?
- what are your plans over the coming year to involve your tenants in further developing the service offer, including the development of local offers?

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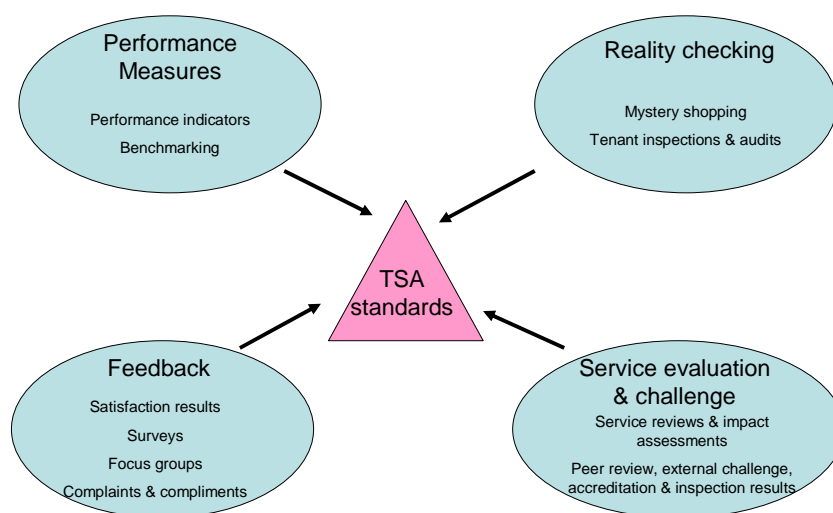
<sup>8</sup> “Required outcomes” are the high level outcomes expected of providers. The TSA states that tenants must be involved in determining how they are met. The “specific expectations” go some way to describe how to meet the “required outcomes.” If a provider can show that they are achieving the required outcomes without adherence to the specific expectations, this is permissible (for more see *The regulatory framework for social housing in England from April 2010*, TSA, 2010, p.11)

### Step 3 Build an evidence base and make a self-assessment judgement

#### *About this step*

This step is about gathering the evidence required to make a judgement of how well the provider is performing against the TSA standards and the associated service offer for the coming year. You will need to “map” your existing “used and useful” cost and performance information to the TSA’s standards and your service offer for the coming year. The evidence base is likely to include a mix of quantitative and qualitative material (see diagram 1).

**Diagram 1 The evidence base**



The sources of information that make up the evidence base shown here should be seen as complementary and not alternatives. For the avoidance of doubt, we are not suggesting this is how your evidence base should look - these are just examples. It is for providers and tenants to agree what makes for a robust account of performance.

The more tenant scrutiny you can build in, the better. Clearly tenant scrutiny work is not confined to the “Reality checking” bubble, it also includes, for example:

- monitoring performance measures and the consideration of benchmarking information
- involvement in service reviews and assessments
- monitoring complaints and other feedback, such as surveys and satisfaction results. It is important to draw on a range of feedback mechanisms from the wider tenant body to avoid over-reliance on the view of a core group of involved tenants.

Again, you do not need to develop new scrutiny activities or structures, simply build on what you have.

Based on the evidence assembled, providers and tenants should work together to develop a compelling, rounded narrative of performance against the standards and the associated service offer.

### **Issues**

#### *a) Gathering the information*

- have you undertaken an information mapping exercise as discussed above?
- what is your plan for gathering and analysing this information and have you considered the lead-in times?
- where are the gaps in your evidence? Can you say anything about the gaps? Is it possible, for example, to temporarily fill them by speaking to key staff or tenant focus groups?
- how do you plan on filling these gaps going forward?
- in terms of gathering evidence, you should be aware of any limitations in terms of its currency and scope. For instance:
  - a peer review or an externally facilitated service review that is over two years old might have limited relevance
  - an accredited service is only evidence of good performance for the service as specified by the accreditation criteria. In other words, you should be clear about which elements of any given service the accreditation covers.

#### *b) Self-assessment*

- does the organisation have the capacity to undertake an effective self-assessment? Weaknesses may be present amongst the governing body, staff and tenants. In particular:
  - does the governing body and tenant forum have the skills and capacity to understand the evidence base, challenge and make an informed judgement? You should address any deficit.
  - explore how officers can ease the burden of data overload by, for example, providing governing bodies and tenants with an analysis of the various data streams and by simplifying the way that this data is presented<sup>9</sup>
- the diverse strands of evidence shown in diagram 1 need to be marshalled into a coherent, rounded narrative of performance. Assertions made in the narrative should be supported by the evidence and the source provided. The assessment should not be a snapshot on a given day, but rather a composite view of performance over the year in question.

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<sup>9</sup> For more see *How to develop and monitor local performance measures*, HouseMark, 2009

- in terms of making the judgement about how well you are performing against the TSA's standards and your associated service offer, you should consider your performance against each TSA standard at its component or activity level. For example, for the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, you should consider each of the following in turn:

- neighbourhood management
- local area co-operation
- anti-social behaviour

In making a judgement, key questions include:

- what does your evidence tell you about the cost and quality of your services?
  - what is your performance over time?
  - how do you compare to others? In the interests of transparency tenants should be offered cross-sector benchmarks<sup>10</sup>. An appreciation of what the “best in class” are achieving is also important, as comparisons limited to “nearest neighbours” might mislead where poor performance is endemic to a specific area.
  - are you delivering VFM? What can you say about your costs relative to your performance? Do you know what is driving your costs? Note the TSA specifically requires you to demonstrate to tenants:
    - how expenditure has been prioritised in relation to each of the standards and in the delivery of local offers, and in meeting other needs such as investment in new social housing provision
    - how you have ensured VFM has been secured and tested, for example, by drawing on benchmarking results, external assessment and tenant feedback
    - your plans for the delivery of further VFM improvements
  - what are your strengths and weaknesses and what is the impact of weaker services on tenants and the business? Explore strengths without spin and weaknesses honestly. What is the story associated with any service failures and how might they be avoided in the future?
  - what do you know about the preferences and needs of your key customer groups, including the seven diversity strands and those tenants with additional support needs? To what extent are you meeting them?
  - what evidence do you have that you are adhering to your statutory responsibilities, notably the health and safety of tenants, to provide assurance to tenants that their well-being is a primary concern?
  - how have you performed against your existing improvement plan?

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<sup>10</sup> Cross-sector benchmarks should be provided based on a consistent methodology. You should note that you cannot rely on national indicators for cross-sector comparisons as CLG and TSA performance indicators do not share the same definitions and are very limited in number.

For many providers, the starting point for assessing performance is likely to be their approach to performance measurement: a balanced scorecard or suite of performance measures complemented by benchmarking information. Of all the tools in the toolbox, the provider's approach to performance measurement often provides the broadest coverage of organisational performance.

Building on this, you can develop a richer account of performance by drawing on a range of other information as illustrated diagram 1. Tenant scrutiny work is particularly important in terms of building a tenant's view of the "customer experience" whilst peer review and accreditation, for example, provide an objective third party perspective. The broader the range of evidence, the richer the picture and more credible it is.

- in the interests of rigour, how much of the evidence base has been sourced via:
  - tenant scrutiny - what kind of tenant scrutiny arrangements are in place? How do these arrangements "plug in" to the governance framework? How do you plan to further develop your approach to tenant scrutiny?
  - benchmarking, external validation and peer review
- should you qualify the judgement? How confident are you in the coverage and quality of the underlying evidence?
- how rigorous is your self-assessment process?
  - has the board led and been fully engaged in the process?
  - to what extent have tenants been involved in the process and judgement?
  - how representative is your tenant forum? What can you do to improve it and ensure that it reflects the needs of wider tenant body?
  - how will you improve the self-assessment process?

#### **Step 4 Determine future improvement plans**

##### ***About this step***

Steps 2 and 3 will expose gaps in terms of complying with the TSA's standards and highlight areas for improvement, including ongoing enhancements to the current service offer and any associated local offers.

Providers and tenants will need to consider and agree improvement priorities within the context of the business planning cycle. This will require difficult decisions and trade-offs around what gets done and what does not. It is likely to involve the reconciliation of tenant priorities, national standards and what the business needs within the finite resources available. Providers and tenants need a mature discussion about what is possible.

### **Issues**

- set out your SMART improvement plan including your plans for closing the 'compliance gap' and proposed work on enhancing the current offer, including any local offers:
  - how will you prioritise the improvement actions identified in steps 2 and 3? Which actions are not so important, for example, those with limited impact? To what extent have tenants been involved in deciding improvement priorities?
  - what is the desired outcome of each improvement action? How will it benefit tenants and the business?
  - what are the key activities required to deliver each improvement action?
  - who is responsible for each action?
  - have resources been secured to deliver the improvement plan? Will anything not get done as a result? Will there be a diminution of service elsewhere?
  - what is the timeframe?
  - how will the improvement action plan be measured and monitored? Remember you will be reporting progress next year.
  - set out your plans for further developing your service offer
  - set out your plans for developing local offers

### **Step 5 Publish the annual report: communicate the self-assessment, improvement plan and offer for the coming year**

#### ***About this step***

Finally, having worked your way through the above steps you are now in a position to communicate your self-assessment, associated improvement plan and offer for the coming year. Essentially, providers are reporting the key messages arising from the previous steps, as agreed with tenants. The issues noted below are based on what might be required for a full report - that is the more detailed version that a tenant forum is likely to want - as discussed at step 1.

A summary report will require further paring down. It should be clear that a full report is readily available on request so that all tenants have the opportunity to fully engage at the level they choose to.

### **Issues**

#### ***a) Content***

- explain the purpose of the annual report
- provide concise contextual information. For example:
  - what kind of organisation are you? What is your mission and key objectives?

- who runs the organisation? For example, who are the governing body, senior management team and tenant forum? Has the management of the stock been delegated to a managing agent as discussed at step 1?
- what is your profile? For example:
  - breakdown of types of homes owned or managed
  - the number of lettings during the year broken down by type
  - a breakdown of the types of household to whom lettings were made
  - rent levels
- what is your tenants' profile? What do you know about what the key customer groups want? How do you use this insight to allocate resources and shape services?
- what can you say about your operating environment and customer base in terms of their effect on costs and delivery?
- have there been any significant changes in your operating environment over the past year?
- with reference to each standard at its component or activity level:
  - set out your service offer for the coming year (excluding Governance and Financial Viability), plus reference to any local offers. Note areas of non-compliance with TSA standards. Providers and tenants should consider the key messages arising from step 2 and set them out in the annual report.
  - set out how well you are performing against the standard and your associated service offer. It is important that your account of performance can be supported by the underlying evidence base – you should state the evidence source for your assertions. Set out strengths and weaknesses in the context of their impact on tenants and the business – a “warts and all” account of performance that explains any service failures and how they might be avoided in the future. You should also make reference to the robustness of the underlying evidence base, for example, the extent of tenant scrutiny, use of benchmarking, external validation, peer review and data quality arrangements. Providers and tenants should consider the key messages arising from step 3 and set them out in the annual report.
  - set out your future improvement plans including how you will address compliance gaps, enhancements to the current offer and plans for local offers. Providers and tenants should consider the key messages arising from step 4 and set them out in the annual report.
  - in terms of governance and financial viability, as discussed earlier, providers should be guided by what their tenants want covered. Some tenants might simply want the annual report to focus on the service delivery standards whilst others might want light touch coverage of these additional functions.
- consider what useful additional information should be included for specific communities or client groups as discussed at step 1
- set out how tenants have been involved in producing and signing off the annual report

- set out how tenants can complain about poor performance, available powers of redress and how you will respond to service failure where standards are not met
- set out how readers can obtain further information
- set out the range of ways tenants can get involved in service design, scrutiny and decision-making. Use the annual report as a “call to action” to encourage involvement or at the very least seek feedback and challenge on the content. You can also signpost to “real time” performance information available throughout the year from your website or offices.

b) *Presentation*

Remember this is an annual report *for tenants*. It exists so that tenants may hold their provider to account. As discussed, providers should work closely with their tenants on the form and content of the annual report to ensure that it provides the information they want in a way that is relevant, useful and accessible to them<sup>11</sup>. The earlier this is considered, the better.

Consider the following:

- the TSA has not specified how long a document this should be. Its length should be determined by the content tenants want. However, content should be kept simple, concise and specific. Avoid jargon and the urge to report everything you may have considered in the previous steps. Focus on the key messages.
- think about how the structure (and colour coding) can facilitate navigation around the key facts and enhance understanding
- set out a rounded narrative of performance over the year, as discussed, where strengths and weaknesses are explored in relation to the evidence base, impact on tenants and improvement action.
- to illustrate key points in the narrative and break up the text, use:
  - performance charts and tables – bar charts are particularly favoured by tenants. Tables should be kept simple by keeping rows and columns to a minimum and by the introduction of graphics such as “smiley” faces, trend arrows and traffic lights. Think carefully about how you present data as it has a significant capacity to confuse.
  - text boxes or panels which set out key facts or quotes
  - photos (particularly those that relate well to the local community) and illustrations
- think about the needs of your different audiences as discussed at step 1

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<sup>11</sup> For more on presentational issues see *How to develop and monitor local performance measures*, HouseMark, 2009

c) *Dissemination*

Providers and tenants will need to consider a dissemination strategy that aims to maximise readership and elicit feedback and challenge. Intelligence on the communication preferences of your tenants will greatly enhance the success of your dissemination strategy. The range of communication techniques is well understood in the sector and we do not propose to rehearse them here.

As always you should think carefully about the range of alternative formats you require, for example, for those tenants where English is not a first language, have a visual impairment or learning difficulties. Innovative providers are exploring a range of methods including pictorial literature for those with learning difficulties and DVD or on-line footage to communicate with non-English speakers and those that cannot read. Others produce translations on request to an agreed timescale. VFM is an important consideration here.

## **Appendix – What tenants want from their annual report – TPAS research**

TPAS carried out formal and informal consultation with around 160 tenants on the annual report between May and June 2010. Here is a summary of the findings. Again, the findings here are not meant to constrain your approach but simply inform.

### **What are your expectations of the annual report to tenants?**

- it should reflect what tenants want – it is a tenants' report. It is particularly important to involve younger people.
- a focused approach – enough information to properly inform but as succinct as possible
- presentation should reflect the intended audience
- tenants should be involved in the annual report process and sign it off
- attention is paid to its dissemination to maximise take-up

### **What do you want to see in the annual report to tenants?**

- explain priorities and how resources have been directed to the priorities
- explain the limitations of what is possible, that is, what cannot be done and explain why
- demonstrate that the tenant's voice has been reflected in service provision – include you said, we did information
- relevant and up to date performance information spanning housing management and maintenance, including VFM and satisfaction
- year on year performance in order to see progress made and benchmarking information to allow comparisons. Performance reported should include tenant scrutiny work. Use of traffic lights and similar devices to help make performance clear.
- no jargon, plain English
- a tailored approach to reflect different locations, complemented with other useful local information
- a clear statement of service levels with an explanation of any service failure
- information on capacity building and training.

### **How do you think the report should be published?**

- active tenants should get a full report and a headline (summary) report should be provided to all tenants. It should be clear that a full report is readily available on request so that all tenants have the opportunity to fully engage at the level they choose to.

- a range of methods can be used to signpost tenants to summaries and full reports

**What considerations should be given to equality and diversity issues?**

- availability of different formats to suit different people
- providers need to understand who their customers are in order to tailor their communications

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