

# CITIZENS OF EQUAL WORTH

## **Executive Summary of the Project Group's Proposals for the National Tenant Voice**



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# Executive Summary and Recommendations

**Project Group:** In February 2008 Communities and Local Government established a Project Group with a majority of tenant members to take forward the proposal that a 'National Tenant Voice' should be established with funding from the Government. This is a summary of the Project Group's report to Communities and Local Government Ministers.

**Consultation:** The Project Group has developed proposals and conducted a major consultation exercise. Sixteen regional seminars were attended by 1,000 tenants and 162 written responses were received in response to our detailed consultation paper, two-thirds of which were from tenants or tenants' organisations. The consultations broadly supported the interim proposals, and each of the key elements, suggested by the Project Group, but many detailed points have been considered and our proposals amended accordingly.

**Vision:** The Project Group recommends a vision and values statement for the NTV that emphasises that it is an independent resource for tenants of all social landlords, which is accountable to tenants and makes the case for change, with clear values of inclusion, accountability and transparency. It will be business-like in working for tenants, with a strong emphasis on good communications, and will work in partnership with government and other national organisations seeking to benefit tenants.

**Social tenant:** We propose that the NTV should work to a wide and inclusive definition of social tenant, including for example leaseholders and shared ownership tenants, and will work on behalf of anyone receiving housing services from a social landlord. It should not in the first instance cover private tenants but discussions should be held on extending its remit in the future.

**Partners:** A key job for the NTV will be to develop effective partnerships with central government and national bodies working to benefit tenants. In particular, it will need to help tenants to influence the new system of regulation for social housing that will be introduced over the next year or so. The NTV will not be the regulator, nor will it take up the complaints of individual tenants. Instead, it will establish clear protocols with the Tenant Services Authority and the Ombudsman services.

**Key roles of the NTV:** These will be:

- **advocacy** – helping social tenants collectively to speak for themselves as a distinct group in society and to put their views to government and other bodies on any issue affecting social tenants
- **research** – identifying the impact that policies will have on social tenants and discovering the views of a wide range of tenants on policy issues

- **communication** – providing good information to tenants and developing a two-way dialogue with them
- **support** for the representative tenants' movement – to help it to develop and strengthen.

**National and regional tenants' organisations:** The NTV will develop strong and co-operative working links with the national and regional tenants' organisations and will support their development as effective organisations. It will not seek to replicate their representative role. It will also work closely with the tenant participation movement.

**A voice for all tenants:** The NTV should place particular emphasis on seeking and promoting the views of tenants whose voices are rarely heard, especially those who are not actively involved in organisations or tenant participation structures.

**Equalities and accountability:** The NTV should develop excellent practice in equalities and diversity and should actively support the promotion of community cohesion. It should be accountable to tenants, both through its own structures and its relationships with other tenant organisations, through effective business planning and the adoption of achievable annual goals and targets, and by publishing standards for its work that enable monitoring of its progress and performance.

**A stand-alone Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB):** Achieving credibility in the eyes of tenants is a key criterion in determining the NTV's structure and governance arrangements. The consultation supported the Project Group's view that the NTV should be an independent stand-alone organisation rather than being part of a larger body. Its formal status should be as a non-departmental public body, like the Housing Ombudsman, which we believe would put it in a stronger and more secure position than if it was a grant-receiving voluntary organisation. Additional legislative powers are necessary to enable government to fund the NTV, and Communities and Local Government has included the necessary clauses in proposed legislation.

**Governance and recruitment:** We believe it is important to have a significant number of tenants involved in the governance structures of the NTV – to build its base, to allow the structure to reflect the diversity of the sector and the people living in it, and to draw more people into policy discussions. We are proposing that there should be an NTV Council of around 50 tenants to consider policy issues, a Board of nine tenants and up to six independents to take legal responsibility for and to manage the organisation, and an arms-length Accountability Committee to operate an open recruitment process for the Council, to recruit the Board, and to scrutinise the governance of the NTV. We propose that the Chair should be a tenant member of the Board who is appointed by the Board (rather than being recruited separately) and that all participants in the structure should receive expenses but not payment.

**Staffing:** The NTV will have paid staff, with a Chief Officer accountable to the Board for NTV matters and to Communities and Local Government as the sponsoring NDPB department for matters relating to NDPB status. At this stage the Project Group has not discussed a staffing structure or a detailed budget.

**Implementation Plan:** The Project Group has adopted an implementation plan in the event that our recommendations are approved by Ministers. It will be necessary for the Project Group, with some additional members, to continue to drive the project forward before giving way to a Shadow Board. It is hoped that the NTV can go live in Autumn 2009. In the interim, the Project Group/Shadow Board will fulfil as many of the NTV's roles as possible, especially in relation to the national conversation being launched by the Tenant Services Authority on the future of social housing regulation. In addition, it will also organise a series of roadshows to inform tenants of progress and consult them on next steps, and develop training for tenants wishing to become involved in the NTV or to become tenant advocates.

### **Recommendations to Communities and Local Government Ministers:**

The Project Group recommends that:

1. NTV should adopt the vision and values statement set out in chapter 2 of our report
2. NTV should be an inclusive organisation that works to the widest practical definition of 'social tenant'
3. NTV, once established, should consider whether and how the remit of the NTV should be extended to include private tenants
4. NTV should give high priority to establishing clear and close working relationships with Government, the Tenant Services Authority, as it develops the new regulatory regime, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the Ombudsman services, and other national and professional bodies working to the benefit of tenants
5. NTV's role and remit should be focussed around the four key roles of advocacy, research, communications and support for the representative tenants' movement, and that there should be published standards for the key services it will provide
6. the name 'National Tenant Voice' should be retained
7. NTV should be established as an independent stand-alone body
8. NTV should become a Non-Departmental Public Body and that powers to fund the NTV should be included in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill; further discussions should take place between the Project Group and Communities and Local Government on the detailed arrangements

9. NTV should comprise:
  - a National Council of around 50 tenant members, which seeks to reflect the characteristics of tenants country-wide in so far as is practicable
  - a Management Board to manage and have legal responsibility for the organisation, with nine tenant directors drawn from the National Council on the basis of their skills and expertise and up to six independent directors who will bring specialist skills and knowledge to the organisation
  - an arms-length Accountability Committee of seven members who are not on the Council or the Board, who may or may not be tenants, appointed by Communities and Local Government, TPAS and the National Tenants' Organisations to manage the process of appointment to the Council and the Board and to scrutinise the effective governance of the organisation
10. the Chair of the Board should be a tenant member chosen by the Board, who should also chair meetings of the National Council
11. members of the NTV National Council, Management Board or Accountability Committee should not receive remuneration for their roles, but should receive reimbursement for expenses incurred on NTV business
12. the NTV should commission independent research to assess, positively and constructively, the strengths and weaknesses of the existing national and regional tenant representative organisations, with the aim of agreeing a plan of action to strengthen them
13. the NTV Board/Shadow Board should draw up detailed financial plans for the organisation and review its future options for funding from sources other than government
14. the NTV Board/Shadow Board should review and evaluate the options for the location of the NTV and the alternative ways of securing the services it requires
15. the Project Group should continue to meet, with revised membership and new terms of reference, until a Shadow Board is appointed, with three key priorities:
  - to operate in so far as it is reasonably practicable as the interim National Tenant Voice in working with the TSA, Communities and Local Government and others to ensure that tenants have an input into policy development at national level and the development of the new regulatory framework
  - to advise Communities and Local Government on the implementation of arrangements for setting up the NTV, as agreed by Ministers, including finalising the NTV's structure and incorporation, approving a temporary and a permanent officer structure and appointing a chief officer, agreeing the geographical location of the NTV and whether it has a service agreement with any other organisation, and adopting a draft business plan and strategy for the first year
  - to make arrangements for a series of regional roadshows and associated information to update tenants on progress with the NTV, to encourage interest in joining the NTV Council and Board when they are established, to discuss training and other support for potential participants, and to start the process of consultation about the first NTV business plan to be adopted in 2009



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