

# INSIDE HOUSING

## A national body for tenants would crumble without solid foundations at grassroots level

COMMENT 10/10/18 BY PAT TURNBULL

It is becoming harder for tenants to organise themselves into groups. The system needs a bottom-up approach, writes *Pat Turnbull* on #HousingDay18

[The Social Housing Green Paper](#) proposes the establishment of a national representative body for tenants.

The [London Tenants Federation's](#) view is that of course tenants should have representation at the national level – but that representative body must be answerable to well-resourced and thriving local, landlord-wide and regional democratic tenants' organisations.

A national tenants' organisation was proposed over a decade ago by Martin Cave in his 2007 review of social housing regulation, [Every Tenant Matters](#).

His report said that “the evidence the review team has received from many organisations representing tenant interests is that strengthening the voice of tenants requires resources.

The voice of tenants needs to be heard not just by their landlord but at a local authority, sub-regional, regional and national level – in other words, at all levels where decisions that affect tenants are taken”.

*“The organisation would have to be democratically answerable to social housing tenants as a whole.”*

He added that “a fully representative national tenant body that has regional and local elements would provide a level of legitimacy that the other options would not achieve”.

Unfortunately, the previous manifestation of this idea, the ‘National Tenant Voice’, fell short of this brief. It had wide gaps in representation and was

principally comprised of selected rather than elected members. Accountability was pretty much absent.

This time a national representative tenant body must have the solid foundations to provide that legitimacy.

It would have to be an organisation that was democratically answerable to social housing tenants as a whole.

And the only way to ensure that would be for it to be a bottom-up organisation, not a top-down one.

As a regional organisation, London Tenants Federation and our members are made up of elected, democratic, and accountable tenants' and residents' associations at the grassroots level.

This is the basis on which we would like to see any organisation claiming to represent tenants established. The challenge in making that a reality at national level is principally one of rebuilding solid foundations at the local and regional levels.

Stock transfers, the Right to Buy, rising rents, growing insecurity of tenure and the break-up of communities through estate regeneration have all made it harder for tenants and residents to organise at a grassroots level.

*“The shift towards individualistic consumerist models of engagement has isolated and disempowered social housing tenants.”*

At the same time there has been a reduction in funding and practical support from councils to assist in this organisation, and many housing associations are reluctant to encourage democratically elected estate level tenants' organisations.

Overall, the shift towards individualistic consumerist models of engagement has isolated and disempowered social housing tenants.