

# Merseyside Community Voice: A BME Citizen's Panel



## An evaluation report

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# **Executive Summary**

## **Introduction & Background**

Merseyside Community Voice, a BME Citizen's Panel was established to enable RSL's, local authorities and BME community organisations to work together to consult with BME communities in order to improve key services. The panel includes BME tenants and residents across Merseyside.

The Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford were commissioned by The Housing Corporation to undertake an independent evaluation of the BME Citizens Panel established in Merseyside. The work began in November 2002 and was initially expected to be completed in July 2003. However, by mutual agreement and in the light of issues surrounding the implementation and development of the panel a revised deadline was set for December 2004.

## **Research Aim & Objectives**

As indicated above, the main aim was to provide an independent evaluation of Merseyside Community Voice (MCV), a BME Citizen's Panel while specific objectives included the following:

- identification of areas of good practice and problems encountered in the development of the panel
- identify national examples of good practice in involving members of BME communities and use these to evaluate the performance of MCV

## **Methodological Approach**

The research contains the following elements:

- a desk-based review of development of citizens' panel in the form of a literature review;
- a literature review focussing on issues and good practice surrounding BME consultation;
- initial semi-structured telephone interviews with panel members and steering group (interim evaluation). Access to panel members was via the steering group; and
- final stage evaluation involving telephone interviews with panel members using translation services where necessary and with steering group members using follow up interviews where appropriate. Access to panel members was via random sampling from the data base provided to the steering group by the consultant.

## Summary of Findings from Interim Evaluation

An interim evaluation of MCV was produced in November 2003. The purpose of this evaluation was to identify any issues in setting up the panel and to assess the process to date. This was based on interviews with steering group and panel members, which took place in March and April 2003. A number of issues were raised which are summarised below.

- There was a perceived need for more clarity on the role of the panel and its members.
- Greater clarification was needed on how the panel will work in practice: because the panel is not tied to anything 'concrete' there were concerns about nothing being contingent on it.
- It was felt that clearer definition of how the panel and steering group will work together was needed.
- It was felt that there was a need to recognise that there is a legacy of consultation fatigue in Liverpool and historically difficult relationships with RSLs which could have implications for the panel.
- It was cited that more Black people were needed on the steering group.
- It was felt that the size of the panel brings inevitable difficulties in terms of communication and the logistics of management: however, this appeared to be balanced by the drive for inclusiveness.
- Concerns were raised about the potential representation of panel members and including particular underrepresented groups.
- It was suggested that ideally a high profile Black person would champion the panel and promote it to communities.
- In spite of expressed concerns and issues around implementation there was a good deal of positive feeling about the potential of the panel and balanced views about obstacles and logistics.

## **Emerging Key Issues: Interviews with Steering Group Members**

### **Introduction**

All steering group members were sent a copy of the questionnaire and asked to return it by post by a specified date (see Appendix 2). By the deadline only 3 completed questionnaires had been received, so several reminders were sent out. The final yield was just 7 returned questionnaires from current steering group members with a further 6 telephone interviews being carried out with ex members and those who were instrumental to the development and running of the panel.

### **Summary of issues**

- The response rate to the evaluation research was low. This could be a consequence of the high turnover of steering group members and the fact that they are all in employment with little time to devote to the panel. This was further evidenced by the fact that 3 of the 7 respondents had only very recently joined the steering group and did not feel able to participate fully in the evaluation.
- All steering group members felt they were cognisant of the aims of the project but none had received training and a number felt they needed clearer guidance on how to promote it. It was felt that training was crucial for steering group members
- The consensus was that the model has the *potential* to transform participatory decision making in Merseyside but it was felt that this had not yet happened, nor has the panel yet included or benefited BME groups
- Interviewees felt that MCV had not fulfilled its aims to date or has operated properly but that there were a number of reasons for this including lack of funding at the outset, lack of a coordinator role, the other commitments of steering group members and issues around the consultants and their recruitment of panel members
- It was felt that lack of resources had had a profound impact on the panel's success so far
- Several barriers to joining the panel were identified, some encompassing the usual obstacles to participation but additionally lack of activity and limited communication with panel members were highlighted
- Steering group members felt that the profile of the panel needed to be raised

- There was a good deal of optimism about the project coordinator and their role in raising the profile of the panel and promoting the concept
- When asked what lessons had been learned so far steering group members cited the need for training in commissioning and managing research consultants, the value of local knowledge and creating links with community groups
- The priorities for the next 12 months were identified as increasing inclusion and activity of the panel and improving communication with communities

## **Emerging Key Issues: Interviews with Panel Members**

### **Introduction**

Telephone interviews were undertaken with 19 panel members who were English speaking and 5 with members who did not speak English. (Translation services from Liverpool City Council were used for this purpose). In terms of ethnicity, the following were cited: Bengali (1), Arabic (2), Somali (3), Irish (3), Indian (3), African / Caribbean (7), Chinese (3) and other (2).

Prior to undertaking interviews with panel members a random sample was selected from the database. The aim here was to do an authenticity check based on steering group members' concerns about recruitment to the panel. Of the 14 randomly sampled 5 had never heard of MCV and the remainder had incorrect telephone details. This issue was to emerge again when the interviews were undertaken: of the non-English speakers, not a single respondent had heard of MCV and had not to their knowledge signed up to be a member. Of the 19 English speaking interviewees, 7 explicitly stated that they had not agreed to join the panel and thought that they were engaging in a 'one-off' survey when approached by the consultants. Therefore the following analysis is effectively based on 12 interviews with panel members.

### **Summary of issues**

- A significant number of panellists when interviewed revealed that they did not agree to, or did not know that they had joined MCV.
- Levels of awareness about consultation in general and the role of the panel in particular and its purpose were extremely limited.
- Panel members were also unclear about their role and who they were representing.
- Panel members were unclear about the skills they had to bring to the panel and why they had been recruited.

- None of the respondents had been consulted so far.
- Panel members felt that communication from MCV had been poor.
- Improved information dissemination and environmental improvements were cited as priorities for the next 12 months

## **Implications, Recommendations & Good Practice Considerations**

### **MCV: complying with statutory and good practice requirements**

There is a high level of support for the concept of a citizens' panel in Merseyside although there is recognition that MCV is not yet fully operational. The panel has a good deal of potential to impact on participative decision making and complies with the spirit of participation underpinning Best Value in terms of strengthening the role of residents for RSLs and LAs. It also has the potential to address and redress the general legacy of service providers knowing less about BME communities than their white counterparts.

Further, it fits with legal and regulatory requirements, for example the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), the CRE Code of Practice in Rented Housing (1991), ODPM and Housing Corporation (2002) and also reflects good practice guides in this area (National Housing Federation (1998) Equality in Housing Code of Practice, Housing Corporation BME policy (1998), Race and Housing Inquiry's Challenge Report code of practice and the CIH and FBHO and Housing Corporation (2000) good practice guide). All of the above maintain that the key to inclusive involvement is providing a number of different opportunities for people to participate so they can choose what suits them. Crucially, a full time coordinator is now in post at MCV and the launch event has taken place.

### **Summary**

Essentially, the issues facing MCV can be reduced to the following areas:

- lack of resources at the outset;
- at outset no ownership of the project;
- difficulties and delays regarding the consultants recruiting to the panel;
- unresolved issue of membership of steering group and its strategic role; and
- limited activity so far coupled with poor communication

## **MCV – achievement to date**

In spite of the issues outlined above, it is useful to summarise the achievements of MCV so far:

- There is a real commitment from steering group members. As has already been indicated, all members are in full time employment.
- Real commitment from partner organisations.
- The future Action Plan is now in place.
- The panel has attracted positive attention on a national scale.
- The project coordinator post is now in place, funded by a successful innovation into Action grant bid.
- The launch event was a success, being well attended and publicised and momentum has been maintained.
- Following the launch event, an independently run session, facilitated by BMETARAN was run for steering group members. This identified the need for a skills audit and addressed the future training needs for steering group members.
- At a steering group meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2005, it was agreed that issues raised in the action plan would be addressed by working sub-groups within the steering group.

## **Action plan**

Listed below is a set of priorities for action for MCV to address the issues outlined above:

- need to look for other sources of longer term funding for project coordinator post;
- MCV needs to make links into with other agendas;
- the steering group needs to be refreshed and issues surrounding representation need to be resolved;
- there is a need for training for steering group members;
- explicit commitment from provider organisations needed;
- a marketing and communication strategy needs to be developed with panel members being kept informed;



- there needs to be refreshment of the panel and a further recruitment drive is needed (would be useful to contact all members and ask them if they wish to continue); and
- need to be realistic about what can be achieved and this needs to be communicated properly.

### **Good practice guidelines for new BME Citizens' Panels**

Based on the experiences of MCV and undertaking an evaluation of the project the following good practice guidelines for establishing new panels are suggested:

- find out who and where the BME communities are;
- make sure that funding is in place at the outset;
- be very clear about aims and objectives and link explicitly into other agendas;
- be clear about what agendas communities need to be consulted on;
- make sure that the steering group is strategic **and** representative of BME communities and allows for aims and objectives to be fulfilled;
- ensure that training is provided for steering group and panel members;
- have a communication and marketing strategy in place as early as possible;
- engage with established community groups as well as recruiting to the panel by other means;
- be clear who owns the panel and the database of panel members; and
- find out early on how residents want to be consulted (postal surveys appeared to be the favourite but combine with other methods, e.g. focus groups).
- Panel membership for some could be linked to 'outputs', e.g. could then be trained to become a board member



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## **Structure of the Report**

The report is divided into 7 sections. Section 1 provides information on the background to the research while Section 2 reiterates the aim and objectives of this research and Section 3 describes the methodological approach. Section 4 provides a summary of the key findings of the interim evaluation, conducted in November 2003 while Sections 5 and 6 outline and discuss the findings from the final stage evaluation. Finally, in Section 7 the implications arising from the work are discussed in conjunction with recommendations and identification of good practice considerations for MCV.

A review of the literature is attached as appendix 1 to this report, with the executive summary as appendix 2.

## **Introduction**

Increasing, attention is being paid to the issue of how to involve Black and Minority Ethnic communities in decisions around service delivery in neighbourhoods. However, it is becoming recognised that an approach directed towards *individual* neighbourhoods may not be appropriate for more dispersed communities, where participation with a wider scope has potential benefits. Further, research evidence suggests that neighbourhood-based arrangements for resident involvement could exacerbate rather than alleviate social problems, thus in this sense, there is the potential to address broader issues affecting diverse and dispersed communities.

## **Section 1: Background to the Research**

### **How the panel was set up**

In 2002, a group of social housing providers in Merseyside got together to discuss ways to involve BME residents in consultation activities. The group recognised that by working together they could combine resources allowing them to more effectively target appropriate communities. The group undertook desk-based research looking at a range of involvement tools. They became interested in the idea of citizens panels and thought this might be a new approach. Although these had been widely used in the past by local authorities, they had never been used specifically as a BME engagement tool. The group were successful in securing a Housing Corporation grant to fund a pilot project to investigate the feasibility of using a citizens' panel as a BME engagement tool and to set up a pilot panel. At this stage the group also sought to involve members of community organisations, which formed the basis of the panels' steering group.

### **The purpose of Merseyside Community Voice - MCV (The Panel)**

Merseyside Community Voice (MCV), a BME Citizen's Panel was established to enable RSLs, Local Authorities and BME community organisations to work together to consult with BME communities in order to improve key services. The panel includes BME tenants and residents across Merseyside.

### **The independent evaluation of MCV**

The Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit based at the University of Salford were commissioned by The Housing Corporation to undertake an independent evaluation of the BME Citizens Panel in Merseyside, Merseyside Community Voice (MCV). This work began in November 2002 and was initially expected to be completed in July 2003. However, by mutual agreement and in the light of issues surrounding the implementation and development of the panel a revised deadline was set for December 2004.

## **Section 2: Aim & Objectives of the Research**

As indicated above, the main aim was to provide an independent evaluation of Merseyside Community Voice (MCV), a BME Citizen's Panel while specific objectives included the following:

- Identification of areas of good practice and problems encountered in the development of the panel.
- Identify national examples of good practice in involving members of BME communities and use these to evaluate the performance of MCV.

## **Section 3: Methodological Approach**

The research contains the following elements:

- a desk-based review of the development of the citizens' panel in the form of a literature review;
- initial semi-structured telephone interviews with panel members and steering group (interim evaluation). Access to panel members was via the steering group; and
- the final stage evaluation involving telephone interviews with panel members using translation services where necessary and with steering group members using follow up interviews where appropriate. Access to panel members was via random sampling from the database provided by the consultant to the steering group.

Essentially, the research was conducted in three phases and involved qualitative research methods. The questionnaires used for interviewing panel members and the steering group were developed with the involvement and feedback from key members of the Steering Group and the Housing Corporation.

This involved a review of the literature available and collation of existing data on the development of citizens' panels. There is at this stage limited literature on this topic area, therefore for the purposes of the study we have provided a synthesis of this material and focused specifically on acknowledged 'good practice'.



## **Section 4: Summary of Findings from Interim Evaluation**

### **Introduction**

An interim evaluation of MCV was produced in November 2003. The purpose of this evaluation was to identify any issues in setting up the panel and to assess the process to date. This was based on interviews with members of the Steering Group and the Panel, which took place in March and April 2003. A number of issues were raised which are summarised in the key findings below.

### **Key findings**

- There was a perceived need for more clarity on the role of the panel and its members.
- Greater clarification was needed on how the panel will work in practice. This is because the panel is not tied to anything 'concrete' there were concerns about nothing being contingent on it.
- It was felt that a clearer definition of how the panel and steering group will work together was needed.
- It was felt that there was a need to recognise that there is a legacy of consultation fatigue in Liverpool and historically difficult relationships with RSLs which could have implications for the panel.
- It was cited that more Black people were needed on the steering group.
- It was felt that the size of the panel brings inevitable difficulties in terms of communication and the logistics of management: however, this appeared to be balanced by the drive for inclusiveness.
- Concerns were raised about the potential representation of panel members and including particular underrepresented groups.
- It was suggested that ideally a high profile Black person would champion the panel and promote it to communities.
- In spite of expressed concerns and issues around implementation there was a good deal of positive feeling about the potential of the panel and balanced the views about obstacles and logistics.

## **Section 5: Findings from Interviews with Steering Group Members**

### **Introduction**

All steering group members were sent a copy of the questionnaire and asked to return it by post by a specified date. By the deadline only 3 completed questionnaires had been received resulting in several reminders being sent out. The final yield was just 7 returned questionnaires from current steering group members with a further 6 telephone interviews being carried out with ex members and those who were instrumental to the development and running of the panel.

### **Findings from current members**

All 7 interviewees were employed by service provider organisations in Merseyside and had either been invited to join the group or nominated by their employers. Their ethnicity comprised Irish (2), African (1) and White British (4) and all had prior experience of sitting on steering groups throughout the course of their work. Of the 7 respondents, only 3 had been involved for the last 3 months, although 1 of these had joined the group in August 2003 but due to work commitments were unable to attend until October 2004. The remaining 4 respondents had been involved with the panel from the outset with 1 person being involved in the project before the steering group was established. The ethnicity of the 6 follow-up interviewees comprised of White Irish (2), White British (1), not specified (2), Black British/Mixed Race (1). Members of the Steering Group were asked a number of questions about their experiences, expectations and perceptions of the operation of the panel so far as well as how they thought it would run in the future. A number of issues were identified and these are discussed below.

All respondents felt that they had been fully briefed about the aims and objectives of the project when they joined the group and were cognisant with these, although none received any training in relation to this. When asked about their role in the project to date, the 3 newcomers to the panel did not feel that they were able to respond to this and many of the other questions due to lack of knowledge and experience, while the remaining members had been involved with the recruitment of consultants, coordinating consultation exercises and developing the inclusion of excluded groups. All respondents promoted MCV to their organisation but some commented that they felt that clearer guidance on how to promote it would be welcome. In general respondents felt positive about expanding the panel outside the Merseyside area but felt that it had to work here first for this to be a success.

When asked about whether the panel differed from previous involvement in consultation mechanisms, interviewees felt that the concept was radically different and could potentially transform participatory decision making. However, concerns were expressed that this had not yet happened and that historically excluded groups, for example the Irish/Irish Travellers had still not been targeted. Further to this, when asked whether the panel has changed the character of consultation in Merseyside, respondents had overwhelmingly felt that this had not happened. Interviewees were clear about the role of a citizen's panel but did not feel that MCV had achieved this as yet and a number of obstacles were identified as contributory factors here, with the primary ones being: the approach used by the consultants to recruit members; the lack of a coordinator at the outset; the high turnover of the steering group members; and, financial constraints. As a result interviewees did not feel that the panel had yet benefited BME communities in Merseyside since limited consultation had actually taken place.

Steering group members were asked about their views on how the panel had worked in practice. Of the 7 respondents only 3 felt that they could answer and all felt that it had not yet had the chance to operate properly due to a number of issues concerning the consultants which led to delays. Only 1 consultation exercise has been carried out and interviewees felt that the momentum of the panel had been somewhat lost. One respondent felt that the panel had become a futile exercise since none of the suggestions made were ever taken up and the represented group remain marginalised. When asked about whether the panel was inclusive of all BME groups in Merseyside respondents indicated that this is not the case. Travellers, refugees and the Irish are groups that are not represented by the panel but it was hoped that the newly appointed coordinator would be able to address this issue.

Steering group members were asked about their knowledge of and views on the mechanisms used to recruit panel members. Respondents were aware of how members were recruited and cited various mechanisms (door knocking, canvassing, newsletters etc), however, the consensus was that the consultants did not follow up contacts given, for example with established community groups and that they did not do everything that they agreed to in this case. When asked about their views on how the panel has been promoted among BME communities, only 4 were able to respond and all felt that it has been poorly promoted to date. All felt that this was an area that needed urgent attention and again the coordinator post was seen as a way to address this.

Steering group members felt that there were a number of potential barriers to joining the panel some of which mirror the usual barriers to participation in general: apathy, time, lack of confidence, feeling valued and not being properly kept informed. In addition, the issue of the panel's credibility came up with the consensus being that it does not yet have a high enough profile to attract members. In terms of retention of panel members, the lack of activity over the last 12 months was cited as a problem along with limited ongoing communication with recruited members. All interviewees that felt able to respond when asked about whether resource issues had impacted on the development of the panel said yes, with the uncertainty over funding and the lack of a coordinator in place at an early stage being perceived as instrumental in the panel's lack of activity and profile. And, both factors were cited as being barriers to the future success of the panel, along with maintaining panellists' interest, ensuring that it is wholly representative of the communities it serves, commitment from social landlords and being able to make it financially viable in terms of selling consultation services to service providers.

Respondents were asked about their experiences of being a steering group member. Only 2 felt able to answer this and both indicated that it was more difficult than they had anticipated because of the high turnover of steering group members, resulting in time being wasted at meetings due to the need for repeated recapitulation of the business of previous meetings. One felt that it was not working effectively in that steering group members were uncertain of their role and another did not feel that it had been a positive experience from the point of view of the community that they represented since they still remained excluded. In terms of perceptions of the future role of the steering group and their continued role, only 2 were certain that they would continue to be members. Of those who were not the reasons put forward were other organisational representatives may take on the role and one interviewee cited lack of inclusion of represented group as a reason to leave. It was suggested that the steering group was needed to maintain and develop the panel and oversee consultation but one respondent indicated the possibility of the group splitting into sub-groups and reporting back to the coordinator, whose role was seen as central to the running of the panel. It was also suggested that training was needed for steering group members to make the meetings more efficient and effective.

When asked about MCV in general and how they saw the future role of the project as a whole, steering group members were unanimous in their optimism about the role of the coordinator. The consensus was that the project is far-sighted and innovative with enormous potential to connect with BME communities that can be capitalised on. It was acknowledged that the project is still in its infancy and there is a good deal of work to be done not least building up the database of panel members.

## Findings from follow up interviews

As indicated above, 6 follow up telephone interviews were undertaken with ex-steering group members and selected current members who have had an instrumental role in developing the panel.

When asked about how they felt the panel was viewed by the wider community in Merseyside the consensus was that it did not have a high enough profile and that there was a need for increased publicity and activity to promote this, so in this sense the wider community would not be able to have a view. It was suggested that the project coordinator role could go some way to address this. Respondents were asked what the steering group should do differently if the panel were to be launched now, or what has been learned from the experience so far and the primary focus here was that the steering group should be made very clear about its aims and purpose and that training should be provided for all members. One respondent referred to an incident where a government initiated survey was amended prior to completion with the implications of standardising data collection (e.g. STATUS) not being registered by the steering group. However, this was countered by comments from two other respondents indicating that steering group members did not feel that the questions were appropriately worded for a BME context. Furthermore, it was suggested that a written contract, including penalty clauses should have been signed with the consultants at the outset. This did not happen due to the logistics of the panel's ownership in the early stages. The issue of the effectiveness of the consultants was raised by all interviewees with the consensus being that it would have been preferable to use a company that had local knowledge and were more accountable to the commissioners. It was also suggested that links should be made with community groups to encourage sustainable panel membership and that these groups should also be represented on the steering group.

Follow up interviewees were asked what they would like to see the panel achieve over the next 12 months and the consensus was greater inclusion of under-represented groups and raising the profile. It was also suggested that promoting a degree of stability for the panel and engaging in consultation mechanisms were also priorities. Two respondents indicated that implementing the project plan should also be a priority but it was acknowledged that this was rather ambitious a task given progress to date. Generally however, interviewees felt that the aims cited above were achievable although there were issues that needed to be overcome in terms of overseeing the project and expanding outside the Merseyside area. Improving communication between organisations was also seen as an issue that needs to be addressed.

When asked for any other comments regarding the panel, the issues of inclusion was raised once again with particular groups (the Irish, Irish Travellers, refugees and those communities outside the L8 area) being cited. It was suggested that BME community representation was needed on the steering group and that work was needed here to ensure this. It was felt that there was limited joined up working in Merseyside and that this, and the need to market the panel, should also be a priority. Interviewees also suggested that the steering group should be clearly strategic and this might mean recruiting people to the group on the basis of the skills they possess in addition to community representation. Respondents did not feel that the panel has been used properly in the sense that little consultation has actually happened and it is not linked in to other initiatives (e.g. the Pathfinder) and there is little incentive for panel members to participate. The issue of poor communication with panel members and the 'stop/.start' nature of activity over the last 12 months were also raised. It was suggested that there should be specific 'outcomes' for panel members, for example as a result of training and their involvement they should be able to sit on boards. On the whole, interviewees still felt that the model of a citizens' panel was a good idea but it needs a high level of support and funding at the outset; the steering group needs to be strategic from the beginning and have clear objectives and it should not be allowed to become a talking shop.

### **Summary of issues**

- The response rate to the evaluation research was low. This could be a consequence of the high turnover of steering group members and the fact that they are all in employment with little time to devote to the panel. This was further evidenced by the fact that 3 of the 7 respondents had only very recently joined the steering group and did not feel able to participate fully in the evaluation.
- All steering group members felt they were cognisant of the aims of the project but none had received training and a number felt they needed clearer guidance on how to promote it. It was felt that training was crucial for steering group members.
- The consensus was that the model has the *potential* to transform participatory decision making in Merseyside but it was felt that this had not yet happened, nor has the panel yet included or benefited BME groups.
- Interviewees felt that MCV had not fulfilled its aims to date or has operated properly but that there were a number of reasons for this including lack of funding at the outset, lack of a coordinator role, the other commitments of steering group members and issues around the consultants and their recruitment of panel members. This issue was raised at the December 2003 steering group meeting when it was acknowledged that contacts for the Chinese and Irish and Irish Traveller communities had not been taken up by the consultants.

- It was felt that lack of resources had had a profound impact on the panel's success so far.
- Several barriers to joining the panel were identified some encompassing the usual obstacles to participation but additionally lack of activity and limited communication with panel members were highlighted.
- Steering group members felt that the profile of the panel needed to be raised.
- There was a good deal of optimism about the project coordinator and their role in raising the profile of the panel and promoting the concept.
- When asked what lessons had been learned so far steering group members cited the need for training in commissioning and managing research consultants, the value of local knowledge and creating links with community groups.
- The priorities for the next 12 months were identified as increasing inclusion and activity of the panel and improving communication with communities (for example, the launch was advertised in the December 2003 newsletter but only actually took place in December 2004 and to date there has only been 1 newsletter).

## **Section 6: Findings from Panel Member Interviews**

### **Introduction**

Telephone interviews were undertaken with 19 panel members who were English speaking and 5 with members who did not speak English. (Translation services from Liverpool City Council were used for this purpose). In terms of ethnicity, the following were cited: Bengali (1), Arabic (2), Somali (3), Irish (3), Indian (3), African / Caribbean (7), Chinese (3) and other (2).

Prior to undertaking interviews with panel members a random sample was selected from the database. The aim here was to do an authenticity check based on steering group members' concerns about recruitment to the panel. Of the 14 randomly sampled 5 had never heard of MCV and the remainder had incorrect telephone details. This issue was to emerge again when the interviews were undertaken: of the non-English speakers, not a single respondent had heard of MCV and had not to their knowledge signed up to be a member. Of the 19 English speaking interviewees, 7 explicitly stated that they had not agreed to join the panel and thought that they were engaging in a 'one-off' survey when approached by the consultants. Therefore the following analysis is effectively based on 12 interviews with panel members.

### **Key findings**

When asked how or where they were approached about MCV respondents cited door knocking, being recruited in town or receiving information through the post, although 4 interviewees could not remember. The reasons panel members gave for deciding to join the panel included wanting to put something into the community, to have something to do and that it sounded interesting, however, when asked about their thoughts on consultation in general in Merseyside there was very little awareness of the issue beyond being aware that community groups existed.

Panel members were asked whether they felt there were any barriers for people to join the panel and the general consensus was that there were not any significant ones beyond time and lack of transport. When asked about whether the purpose of the panel was made clear to them at the outset only 6 respondents felt that it was and there was a general lack of clarity about the purpose of the panel beyond helping the community in abstract terms. When the purpose of the panel was explained to them all interviewees commented that they agreed with it, but could not say whether this purpose had been fulfilled. None of the panel members interviewed believed they had been consulted since joining but it was unclear about 2 of these who stated that they had received information but were not sure where it was from.



When asked whether the panel had benefited BME communities only 2 respondents felt able to answer this with one expressing the hope that it had and the other commenting on the potential for this to happen. Panel members were asked about whom they felt they were representing on the panel, a number were not sure and the remainder gave different versions of their local areas, but, when asked about the skills and knowledge that they bring to the panel none of the respondents felt able to comment.

Panel members were asked about how they would like the panel to be promoted, again there were difficulties in answering this question and similarly when asked about what their priorities for consultation were only 2 respondents commented, citing unemployment and improvements to the area. When asked about how often they would be prepared to be consulted, the timing ranged from every other week to every month, all respondents were happy to be consulted regularly and preferably in writing. Only 4 of the 12 respondents said they had received a newsletter from MCV but 11 of the 12 were happy to continue being a panel member, the respondent who felt that they no longer wished to continue said they would be prepared to be involved if contact from MCV improved.

When asked about the ways they would like to become involved in the work of local housing organisations, none of the interviewees felt able to answer the question, and, no respondents felt able to describe their experience of the panel so far because they did not feel that they had had any to date. Panel members were asked what they would like to see the panel achieve over the next 12 months; these covered the following issues: better information dissemination; physical improvements to localities and people coming together to solve common problems; and 7 of the 12 said they would be willing to become more actively involved in the steering group.

### **Summary of issues**

- A significant number of panellists when interviewed revealed that they did not agree to, or did not know that they had joined MCV. This issue was in fact raised with the consultants at the October 2003 steering group meeting when it became apparent that some people had not signed up to being panel members. The line taken was that this confusion was down to an individual researcher. However, through the process of undertaking the final stage evaluation it is clear that a significant number of people on the panel database did not knowingly agree to become panel members and it is unlikely that the scale of this could be narrowed down to one person.
- Levels of awareness about consultation in general and the role of the panel in particular and its purpose were extremely limited, as indicated earlier only 1 newsletter has been sent out so far
- Panel members were also unclear about their role and who they were representing

- Panel members were unclear about the skills they had to bring to the panel and why they had been recruited
- None of the respondents had been consulted so far (in fact only 1 consultation exercise – the community cohesion survey has been undertaken so far)
- Panel members felt that communication from MCV had been poor (only 1 newsletter)
- Improved information dissemination and environmental improvements were cited as priorities for the next 12 months

## **Section 7: Implications, Recommendations & Good Practice Considerations**

### **Introduction**

The following final section will discuss the implications of the issues raised for MCV and make recommendations for its future operation and also draw out a good practice 'checklist' for the future development and operation of BME Citizens' Panels. It is evident that both steering group and panel members are very positive about the concept of a BME citizens' panel in Merseyside but there are strong feelings that this has not yet operated successfully. It should be noted that there are a number of extraneous factors which have impeded this, in addition to some strategic and operational problems that have impacted on MCV. These will be outlined and discussed in detail below. It should also be noted that although the idea of MCV was developed in November 2002, due to the difficulties facing the project it has only effectively been operating for 1 year at this point, and, from an evaluation point of view, more meaningful feedback would be gathered at a later point.

### **Complying with statutory and good practice requirements**

As indicated above there is a high level of support for the concept of a citizens' panel in Merseyside although there is recognition that MCV is not yet fully operational. The panel has a good deal of potential to impact on participative decision making and complies with the spirit of participation underpinning Best Value in terms of strengthening the role of residents for RSLs and LAs. It also has the potential to address and redress the general legacy of service providers knowing less about BME communities than their white counterparts.

Furthermore, it fits with legal and regulatory requirements, for example the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), the CRE Code of Practice in Rented Housing (1991), ODPM and Housing Corporation (2002) and also reflects good practice guides in this area (National Housing Federation (1998) Equality in Housing Code of Practice, Housing Corporation BME policy (1998), Race and Housing Inquiry's Challenge Report code of practice and the CIH and FBHO and Housing Corporation (2000) good practice guide). Further, the Housing Corporations Good Practice notes 4 and 8 (Race Equality and Diversity and Equality and Diversity) and the Audit Commission's guide to resident involvement ([www.auditcommission.gov.uk](http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk)) are also complied with. All of the above maintain that the key to inclusive involvement is providing a number of different opportunities for people to participate so they can choose what suits them. Crucially, a full time coordinator is now in post at MCV and the launch event has taken place.

## **External impediments**

It has been acknowledged above that communities in Liverpool have historically suffered from consultation fatigue; this was an issue raised in the interim and final stages of evaluating the panel. Furthermore, although there is evidence of a great deal of goodwill from steering group members, until the appointment of the coordinator in November 2004, all members were in full time employment with full workloads. In addition to this no particular organisation 'owned' the project which rose issues surrounding accountability. In addition to resources being limited in terms of staff time, crucially, there was a lack of funding available at the outset. It is worth noting that in general that funding for TP is limited and this raises questions about government commitment to properly involving communities in decision making. Finally, when the panel was incepted, other parallel initiatives were also being developed, for example the Pathfinder and links have not yet been made between these ongoing agendas.

## **Strategic issues**

As indicated, servicing and sustaining the steering group has not been without problems and there has been a fairly high turnover of members and variable commitment to the panel. The issue of its composition has perhaps not yet been fully resolved and there are difficulties and implications here: the balance appears to be managing to recruit high calibre strategists to carry the scheme forward and also include representatives from communities, without this appearing to be mutually exclusive. This was a focus of the early steering group meetings and there was concern about how to properly achieve this. It could be argued that the steering group is not strategic at this point and needs to reorganise and refresh in order to carry the project forward. This is also where providers need to be clear about their commitment to the panel in terms of time allowed for staff not just to attend meetings but undertake delegated tasks. It is encouraging that the coordinator role is now in place but this is only funded for 12 months rather than 2 years (as applied for in the Innovation Into Action proposal). Due to the issues raised above there is no communication or marketing strategy in place and also could have impacted on the management of the consultants.

## **Operational issues**

Some of the issues above have inevitably impacted on the day to day running of the panel and have contributed to the fact that only 1 consultation has been carried out (the Community Cohesion Survey) and 1 newsletter having being sent out in December 2003. This has impacted on levels of communication with panel members and service providers. However, there are other factors that have contributed to this, not least the processes used for recruitment by the consultants. There was also a significant delay in the steering group receiving the draft report and when it did eventually arrive there were significant problems in terms of how the different BME groups were weighted. Furthermore, there were serious delays in the consultants handing over the database to the steering group (this was passed over in February 2003) and

wrangles over who actually owned this impacted on the running of the project. Other difficulties have subsequently come to light: the consultants did not follow up suggested leads with community groups suggested by the steering group and the final stage evaluation revealed that a significant number of 'panellists' had not in fact agreed to be such. In light of these difficulties and the very recent appointment of the project coordinator the project plan may be overly ambitious: it appears that there is a need to consolidate activity before expanding into other areas.

## **Summary**

Essentially, the issues facing MCV can be reduced to the following areas:

- lack of resources at the outset;
- no ownership of the project;
- difficulties and delays regarding the consultants recruiting to the panel;
- unresolved issue of membership of steering group and its strategic role; and
- limited activity so far coupled with poor communication.

## **MCVs achievements to date**

In spite of the issues outlined above, it is useful to summarise the achievements of MCV so far:

- there is a real commitment from steering group members. As has already been indicated, all members are in full time employment;
- real commitment from partner organisations;
- the future Action Plan is now in place;
- the panel has attracted positive attention on a national scale;
- the project coordinator post is now in place, funded by a successful Innovation into Action grant bid;
- the launch event was a success, being well attended and publicised and momentum has been maintained;
- following the launch event, an independently run session, facilitated by BMETARAN was run for steering group members. This identified the need for a skills audit and addressed the future training needs for steering group members; and
- at a steering group meeting held on 19.10.5 it was agreed that issues raised in the action plan would be addressed by working sub-groups within the steering group.

## Action plan

The list below sets out the priorities for action for MCV to address the issues outlined above:

- need to look for other sources of longer term funding for project coordinator post;
- MCV needs to make links into with other agendas;
- the steering group needs to be refreshed and issues surrounding representation need to be resolved;
- there is a need for training for steering group members;
- explicit commitment from provider organisations needed;
- a marketing and communication strategy needs to be developed with panel members being kept informed;
- there needs to be refreshment of the panel and a further recruitment drive is needed (would be useful to contact all members and ask them if they wish to continue); and
- need to be realistic about what can be achieved and this needs to be communicated properly.

## Good practice guidelines for new BME Citizens' Panels

Based on the experiences of MCV and undertaking an evaluation of the project the following good practice guidelines for establishing new panels are suggested:

- Find out who and where the BME communities are.
- Make sure that funding is in place at the outset.
- Be very clear about aims and objectives and link explicitly into other agendas.
- Be clear about what agendas communities need to be consulted on.
- Make sure that the steering group is strategic **and** representative of BME communities and allows for aims and objectives to be fulfilled.
- Ensure that training is provided for steering group and panel members.

- Have a communication and marketing strategy in place as early as possible.
- Engage with established community groups as well as recruiting to the panel by other means.
- Be clear who owns the panel and the database of panel members.
- Find out early on how residents want to be consulted (postal surveys appeared to be the favourite but combine with other methods, e.g. focus groups).
- Panel membership for some could be linked to 'outputs', e.g. could then be trained to become a board member.





# Appendix 1: Literature Review

## Introduction

Within the public sector and arguably amongst other service providers there has been increasing emphasis on user involvement in the delivery, development and management of services. Quality, choice, user involvement and satisfaction have become key to the provision of services. Within the social housing sector there are new duties on providers and enablers to deliver services to clear standards of cost and quality, by the most economic and effective means available. The introduction of Best Value and the development of tenant participation (TP) are designed to deliver improvements in service quality and value for money, create new channels for dialogue between service providers and users, and develop mechanisms to encourage the scrutiny of performance and enhance accountability (DTLR<sup>1</sup>, 2002).

Such mechanisms include the development of performance indicators (by the DTLR for local authorities) and Performance Standards<sup>2</sup> (by the Housing Corporation for HAs) to measure satisfaction with services and opportunities to participate in management and decision making. These and other legislative and regulatory developments – from Part IV (*Tenants' Choice*) of the Housing Act 1988, and Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT), through to the implementation of (LA) reports to tenants, the Citizen's Charter and Housing Inspectorate have encouraged social landlords both to inform tenants and to survey tenants' opinions in more systematic and regular ways. Tenant satisfaction surveys are the established mechanisms for assessing the standard and quality of services provided and are integral to the Best Value approach.

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<sup>1</sup> All references to material produced by the DTLR formally the DOE/DETR and now ODPM relate to the title used at the time of publication of the material cited.

<sup>2</sup> Performance Standards have now been replaced by the Housing Corporations Regulatory Code and Guidance (2002), but the requirements referred to continue to apply.

## **Section 1: The Policy Context:**

### **Local authorities**

For local authorities there are certain legal requirements with reference to TP and consultation, particularly in relation to Best Value. A key aim of Best Value is to strengthen the role of residents. It places a statutory duty (since 2000) on local authorities to review all services they provide for local people and improve them by the best means available, in consultation with the people who use the services and the wider local community.

Tenant Participation Compacts (TPCs) are an important tool in this respect. Representing agreements between councils and their tenants, which set out how tenants can be consulted and involved collectively in local decisions on housing matters that affect them. This includes strategic housing matters, investment options and housing services. The aim of TPCs is to place LA commitment to TP activities on a secure and formal footing and subject those commitments to regular monitoring and review.

TPCs are intended to enable engagement at two geographical levels: at a council-wide level to input into strategic decision-making on housing, including the Business Plan for council housing and the broader Housing Strategy; and at a more local level through neighbourhood-wide compacts, the geographical area being flexible e.g. estate or neighbourhood level, and determined by tenants. There is also the scope for drawing up themed compacts, for example, for engaging BME communities, older people, or in undertaking specific regeneration programmes.

### **Housing Associations**

The Housing Corporation has made a concerted effort to push the boundaries of TP (or consumer involvement) in recent years. 'Making Consumers Count' (Housing Corporation, 1998) outlines a number of key policy objectives for the Corporation in relation to encouraging greater involvement by tenants. These are: to improve accountability of HAs to their tenants and to provide opportunities for participation and control where appropriate; to use TP to enable HAs to deliver better services; to encourage the use of TP as a means of promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of local communities; and to support Best Value and Housing Plus approaches to involving tenants, residents and local communities in the work of HAs.

'Communities in Control' re-affirms and extends the Corporation's commitment to TP. It sets out a range of policy objectives that are centred on the idea that tenants should be able to exercise as much or as little control as they choose. This ranges from a minimum of residents being given the opportunity to influence the decision-making process through to full ownership and control through housing co-operatives (Housing Corporation, 2000: 10).

To help support these aims the Corporation introduced the Community Training and Enabling Grant (CTE) as part of its well-established I&GP Programme. The main aims of CTE grants are to help and encourage residents to take part in management and investment decisions about their housing and neighbourhoods through capacity-building and to link new initiatives to the priorities that residents themselves set (Housing Corporation, 2001: 7).

The Housing Corporation has also issued a voluntary framework for HAs drawing on the principles of Best Value (Housing Corporation, 1999). As in the case of LA tenants, Best Value is seen as a valuable means of empowering HA tenants to help shape, monitor and review the housing services they receive. As part of this general commitment to the Best Value regime, the Corporation has also encouraged HAs and their tenants to use the DETR framework of TPCs as good practice.

### **The impact of policy**

Recent developments in policy of the sort outlined above represent a clear commitment on the part of policymakers to extend opportunities for TP across the social housing sector. In general, most social housing landlords are still applying the processes and procedures involved in implementing these policies and are at an early stage in making changes to specific services. However, a number of recent studies do provide insights into this initial implementation phase and reveal the extent to which the Best Value regime and TPCs have begun to shape the TP agenda of local authorities and HAs.

Research jointly commissioned by the DETR and the Housing Corporation (Aldbourne Associates, 2001a), indicates that the majority of local authorities and HAs have been forced to rethink and review the way they deliver housing services as a result of the introduction of Best Value and TPCs. Many thought that Best Value and TPCs had forced them to change the way they engage with their tenants; change the way they undertake business planning; and had helped to improve service delivery. As an integral part of Best Value, almost all local authorities and HAs reported that they had consulted with tenants – typically through the use of surveys and focus groups. However, the research suggests that some social housing landlords were simply conforming to the requirements of Best Value rather than embracing the principles and spirit of the policy within their organisation.

The research also reveals important insights into the impact of Best Value and TPCs on the views of tenants (or consumers). It suggests that:

- Involvement in the development of TPCs tends to be limited to formal tenant groups
- Most tenants have not heard of Best Value and TPCs (although they believe the principles underlying them to be sound)

- Tenants would welcome the development of neighbourhood TPCs relevant to local needs and experiences.

The initial impact of the Housing Corporation's commitment to Best Value on the work of HAs, in particular with respect to TP, is examined by Aldbourne Associates (2001b). It reveals that:

- Almost three quarters of HAs have a formal TP strategy (with the majority of those who did not, intending to develop one shortly)
- Three quarters of HAs have formal tenants' groups
- 17% of HAs were developing TPCs and 36% indicated that they planned to do so in the future
- 35% of HAs do not have a separate TP budget
- In 81% of HAs the TP budget represents less than 1% of the revenue budget and in 25% of cases a proportion of the TP budget remained unspent
- Just 1% of TP budgets are controlled by tenants

The research also suggests that while the vast majority of HAs believed that their TP strategy influenced their business planning process, there was little evidence of how such influence worked in practice.

A common theme in the above reports is that tenants are keen to be involved but they tend not to want to do so 'formally', particularly in meetings or through tenants' associations. This is a view supported by research from Sheffield Hallam University based on an analysis of Housing Investment Programme data for 2000 (DTLR, 2002). It suggests that a greater awareness amongst local authorities of the differences between informing, consulting and involving tenants has given rise to a range of participation options that can be used in different circumstances and according to how much or how little participation tenants choose to have. The research suggests that one consequence of this recognition of different levels of participation desired by tenants is a shift away from formal tenants' associations as the primary mechanisms for consultation and representation. In order to achieve their participation objectives, local authorities are increasingly turning to non-elected, area-wide forums and/or are consulting with tenants individually, through surveys and face-to-face interviews, rather than existing tenants' associations.

A similar process may also be at work amongst HAs. In their review of HA Best Value pilots, Walker et al (1999), suggest that HAs have begun to differentiate between types of tenant involvement. Where the aim was to involve tenants in driving forward the Best Value review process, HAs tended to rely on 'traditional' mechanism of TP – most especially tenants' associations. However, where HAs sought to involve tenants as consumers, a range of alternative consultative methods were employed including surveys, focus groups, tenants' surgeries and social audits.

### **Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) tenant participation**

There are several key reports that look at the performance of social housing landlords in encouraging BME tenant participation. The evidence they present suggests that the impact of policies to extend TP opportunities (culminating in the developments outlined above) on the level and quality of BME involvement have been limited and more work needs to be done to turn these policies into accountable action.

'A Question of Delivery' (Tomlins et. al., 2001) examines the work of almost 200 HAs in meeting the needs and aspirations of BME communities and reveals a widespread lack of consultation on the part of HAs. The majority of HAs covered did not consult BME communities about their housing needs and almost half did not know the ethnic breakdown of their tenants. In addition, only 27% of HAs preparing for the Best Value regime had taken account of race-equality issues in their preparatory work. The perception that most HAs have so-far failed to turn TP policies into strategic activities of benefit to BME communities is reinforced by a Housing Corporation report which suggests that of those HAs with a tenant participation strategy only 22% make any reference to BME tenants (Housing Corporation, 2001: 20).

In respect of HA tenants' views about current levels of communication, consultation and participation, forthcoming analysis (Kalra et al, 2002) of data from the 1999 RSL Tenants Survey (Housing Corporation, 2000) reveals that:

- Black and Asian tenants are less likely than whites to be positive about how well informed they are kept by landlords.
- White tenants are more positive about HAs taking their views into account than other ethnic groups. Black men were the least satisfied about their views being taken into account.
- Black and Asian tenants are more likely to want more involvement in the management of their housing than white tenants. Black women emerge as the group who most want more involvement.
- There is little difference in actual participation in tenants' groups by ethnic group (5-7% involvement). However, Black women are most likely and black men least likely to be aware and involved in a tenants' association.

- BME tenants are less likely to be satisfied with their landlord, accommodation and area than White tenants.
- BME tenants are less likely to be satisfied than White tenants even where they feel their views are being fully taken into account.

The National Housing Federation's standardised tenant satisfaction survey (STATUS) has begun to furnish combined data on levels of satisfaction amongst LA and HA BME tenants. Based on a collective sample of 4000 BME tenants STATUS data shows that BME tenants are consistently less satisfied with all aspects of the services they use than White tenants. The data also suggests that BME tenants are more positive about their communications with BME HAs than they are about their communications with mainstream HAs.

Blackaby and Chahal's (2000) survey of the work undertaken by local authorities' to encourage BME tenant involvement suggests that here too there remains a great deal of work to do to translate TP policy into practice. The survey found that (of non-stock transfer authorities):

- Only 15% of authorities have specific mechanisms to consult with BME tenants and applicants. Of those authorities where BME populations were 10% or more of the total, the percentage with specific mechanisms was 43%.
- Consultative forums and consultation via letter are the most frequently used method.
- Only 18% of authorities have mechanisms to check whether consultative structures have adequate representation of BME tenants.
- Of those authorities where tenants'/residents' associations covered their area, 88% of authorities suggested that they expect associations to comply with race equality policies.
- 31% of authorities have, in the last five years, provided or arranged training in race equality issues for tenants'/residents' representatives. Of those authorities where BME populations were 10% or more of the total, 90% have provided such training.

## Regulation and Guidance

While the commitment to expand opportunities for tenant involvement extends to all tenants, the evidence reviewed above points to specific problems faced by BME tenants trying to exercise these options. It is suggested that BME tenants often face institutional barriers to their effective participation and are often subjected to racist language and behaviour that may deter them from seeking further opportunities to be involved. Recognition that these barriers continue to result in under-representation of BME groups in TP activities has stimulated the development of regulation and guidance more directly focused on the empowerment of BME tenants and residents.

The main legal and regulatory requirements are:

- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000

The Act extends the scope of existing legislation and places a general statutory duty on a wide range of public authorities (including the Housing Corporation and individual local authorities) to promote racial equality and prevent racial discrimination. Amongst the specific duties imposed by the legislation is the requirement for public authorities to publish a Race Equality Scheme setting out how the organisation will fulfil its general and specific duties. The CRE (2002) advises that, as part of their schemes, public authorities must consult people from all racial groups, and take their views into account when developing various policy options and tailor the consultation methods they use to the groups they want to reach. While Race Equality Schemes are not a statutory requirement for HAs, the Housing Corporation has urged associations to produce Race Equality Schemes as a matter of good practice.

- The CRE's Code of Practice in Rented Housing (1991).

This sets out clearly the legal obligations on providers of rented housing, advice on the development of equal opportunities policies for customers (and staff); and strategies for good practice. The practical suggestions made in the code include those relating to the need to ensure race equality in all aspects of tenant consultation and participation. The Code of Practice is backed up with more detailed guidance on involving BME tenants in *Room for All – Race Equality in Tenants Associations* (CRE, 1993). For LA landlords, implementation of the Code of Practice is the basis for the only Best Value Performance Indicator on Race and housing (BVPI 164).

- The DTLR's National Framework for TPCs

This states that local TP strategies should set race equality objectives and standards for consultation. This should include monitoring levels of involvement and representation of all groups, including BME groups.

- The Housing Corporation's recently-issued Regulatory Code and Guidance (2002).

This sets out what the Corporation regards as the fundamental obligations of HAs and the principles on which they should conduct their business. In respect of their obligations to promote race equality and prevent discrimination, the guidance requires HAs to set a number of targets in respect of BME groups. TP-related targets cover BME representation in tenant/resident associations (these should reflect the ethnic mix of the association's tenants in the relevant area) and BME tenant satisfaction levels (these should be at least as high as for non-BME tenants). The Corporation expects HAs to consider work towards the first of these targets to be a criterion for recognition and funding of tenant/resident associations.

The main good practice guidelines are:

- The National Housing Federation's Equality in Housing code of practice

This sets out broad principles that HAs can adopt or develop (NHF, 1998a). The code is backed up by guidance on how these principles relate to issues of race equality (NHF, 1998b) and practical suggestions as to how race equality in housing can be achieved (NHF, 1998c). The latter document focuses on four key areas for HAs including TP and offer examples of good practice in respect of BME groups.

- The Housing Corporation's BME Housing Policy (1998)

A central theme of the Policy is the empowerment of BME communities. A prerequisite for the achievement of that goal requires HAs to 'ensure that tenants and others from BME communities are involved in the design, delivery and review of housing and related services.' TP is a pivotal mechanism in this process and in keeping with the general thrust of existing policy is a matter for individual tenants with regard to how much involvement they choose to have. (Housing Corporation, 1998b:10).

- The Race and Housing Inquiry's Challenge Report (2000)

This report is the result of the Race and Housing Inquiry. It identifies a series of race equality challenges across the social housing sector including those covering resident and community involvement. According to the report, positive outcomes in this area would include 'a level of community involvement among BME communities to reflect the composition of the community with involvement in all aspects of RSLs' businesses, including service reviews and evaluations'. (ibid: 18)



- The Race and Housing Inquiry's Race Equality Code of Practice for HAs

This builds on the Challenge Report offering practical guidance to HAs on integrating race equality into their business planning, service delivery and review. The Code is made up of a series of race equality outcomes covering key business activities, with corresponding standards to enable outcomes to become a reality. In respect of Resident and Community Involvement, the Code provides a comprehensive list of outcomes and standards that HAs can use to inform their TP strategies.

The CIH, FBHO and Housing Corporation report - 'Black and minority ethnic housing strategies: A good practice guide (Blackaby and Chahal, 2000). This discusses ways of providing opportunities for BME groups to be involved in designing strategies and services;

There are a number of other sources of practical advice for landlords in respect of BME involvement:

- Cole et. al. (1999) and Jeffrey and Seager (1995) offer practical suggestions based on examples of LA good practice in encouraging BME participation;
- The CRE's *Room for All* offers useful practical examples of encouraging BME involvement in tenants' associations;
- Standards on BME involvement (1994) offers a guide to good practice in HAs and co-ops; and
- The Tenants' Participation Advice Service (TPAS) has produced two guides of relevance - on equality policies for tenants' associations (TPAS, 1993) and involving black tenants in TP (TPAS, 1994).

What these reports and guides reveal is that the key to inclusive involvement is providing a number of different opportunities for people to participate. Having a range of involvement methods enables tenants and residents to choose those that suit them and offers an alternative to 'formal' structures that many BME tenants and residents are reluctant to participate in. Specific approaches to involving BME communities include focus groups, recruitment of ethnic-specific community development workers; neighbourhood conferences; community surveys (carried out by BME people in their own communities); local forums; citizen juries; residential events; and using the local press.

Another common theme is the importance of ensuring that formal and semi-formal participatory structures are representative of the communities they represent. This includes whether BME people are involved; whether they are heard and their views given equal weight; and whether they have the opportunity to hold official positions (NHF, 1998c). Mechanisms to ensure that BME people are not excluded from participatory structures include the development of separate participatory structures for BME communities; enabling participation in the community rather than at council offices; making recognition and funding of residents' and tenants' associations dependent upon the existence of effective equal opportunities and/or race equality policies and practices; providing anti-discrimination training for community representatives.

Monitoring is also seen as an integral component of any landlord's attempt to increase the involvement of BME tenants in TP arrangements. Monitoring will ensure that landlords have accurate profiles of their tenants enabling them to set and review targets on BME involvement; provide more accurate guidance to tenants'/residents' associations in recognition exercises; and communicate more effectively with their tenants. Blackaby and Chahal (2000) provide a useful list of the sorts of things social housing landlords should be monitoring with regard to consumer involvement. These include:

- profile of BME people participating in consultative activities (surveys, meetings, focus groups, etc) compared with the profile of the community as a whole
- comparison of rates of participation by different ethnic groups in various consultative activities
- ethnic origin profile of tenants'/residents' association committees
- comparisons between the various ethnic groups of views about the way they are being involved
- the mother tongues and language needs of consumers

Examples of Best Practice reported in the literature include:

Example 1:

Focus Group Recruitment: Southern Housing Group had a poor response in trying to recruit members of the Bangladeshi community to participate in a focus group. As an alternative it was decided to approach a local community centre. As a result facilitators were able to attend a sewing circle for Bangladeshi women. A female translator and female facilitator were essential to encourage participation by the group. (Housing Corporation, 2001: 22)

Example 2:

Tenant Participation: The Northmoor Road Initiative in Longsight, Manchester aims to build on existing community structures to foster the active involvement of BME groups. A full time community link worker has been employed to facilitate the contributions of BME groups to physical, social and economic programmes within the area. (Blackaby and Chahal, 2000: 47)

Example 3:

Community Training: Manchester City Council Housing Department has developed an extensive consultation programme through a community consultative forum, involving BME community representatives, which meets quarterly. At the request of the forum, the housing department has developed a housing awareness training programme for volunteers from BME communities. The aim is to equip the volunteers with sufficient knowledge to enable them to deal with queries from community members. (Blackaby and Chahal, 2000: 45)

## **Section 2: Analysis of Survey Data**

Best Value is a key vehicle for TP. It places a requirement on landlords to consult and in the context of Best Value performance indicators, a requirement to survey tenant opinion on specific topics. This section looks at how HAs and LAs are ensuring BME tenants are included in surveys of tenants and other consultation mechanisms.

### **Methodology**

Between January and April 2002 the Archive carried out a survey of LAs (50) and HAs (78, including 28 BME) to assess what mechanisms were in place to ensure inclusion of BME tenants in tenant satisfaction surveys and other consultation exercises. The sample was selected from the Archives database, which has been developed over the last two years and reflects the range and size of organisations in the social housing sector. A short questionnaire was used to collect data. It was intended that the survey would be conducted by telephone and, therefore, initial contact was made by telephone, but respondents were advised that they could also respond by email or through the post to try and maximise the response rate. The response rate was somewhat disappointing with responses being received from only 42 organisations as detailed in the chart below. This represents a response rate of 32%. Postal and email responses were the most popular (twenty-two and fourteen respondents respectively), whilst only a small number completed the questionnaire by telephone (five respondents) and one by fax.

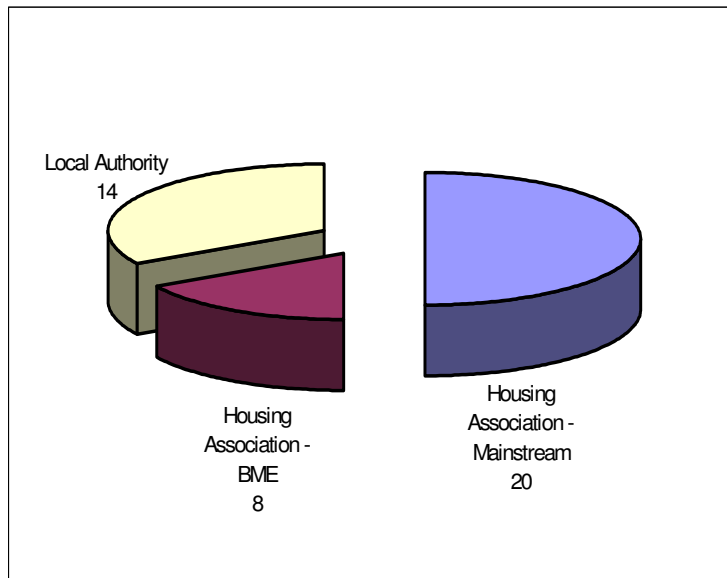
### **Scope of survey**

Information was sought on the size of the organisation, the profile of their tenants in terms of ethnicity, whether they had conducted a survey recently and included questions on ethnicity and/or questions specific to BME community members or had carried out a separate survey. Information was also sought on other methods used to assess tenant satisfaction levels and on other mechanisms of consultation and the arrangements made to include BME groups in each case. In addition respondents were asked whether their organisation had conducted an audit to test knowledge/views of the community about their services and what opportunities there were for tenants to participate in and influence policy and practice in the organisation and specifically in relation to BME tenants. A key aim of the research was to identify good practice in promoting inclusion of BME communities in participation/consultation mechanisms.

## Characteristics of respondents

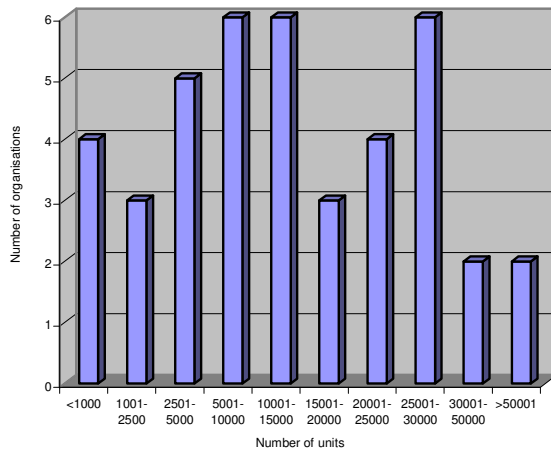
Mainstream HAs made up the largest group in terms of responses (see graph 1).

Graph 1: Profile of responses received



A wide range of organisations responded in terms of size (see graph 2).

Graph 2: Size of organisations



## **Data on ethnicity of tenants**

In terms of information on ethnicity around one quarter (twelve of the forty-two respondents) could not provide this. Of those that indicated that they had such data (twenty-five organisations), only nine appeared to use the Census categories recommended by the CRE. A small number of HAs indicated that they collected data on ethnicity for new tenants through CORE (five associations) and one LA through the housing register. Given that CORE is a regulatory requirement for HAs with 250+ units/bed spaces this is surprisingly low and supports Tomlins et al (2001) findings that records kept for external purposes are not being used for internal policy review.

## **Tenant satisfaction surveys**

The majority of those surveyed (thirty-nine organisations) indicated that they had conducted a survey in the last five years, but of these only twelve supplied copies of reports detailing their survey findings (these are analysed in the next section and have been supplemented by reports from three organisations that did not complete the questionnaire). It is not clear why the majority of organisations did not send their survey reports and we can only speculate on the reasons for this, but it is possible that we received only those with favourable findings, i.e. the 'best'.

Almost all those organisations that had conducted a survey (thirty-six of the thirty-nine organisations) indicated that they included a question on ethnicity, but only five had separate questions for the BME community and just four had carried out a separate survey of their BME tenants. There is currently no expectation that social landlords should conduct separate surveys for BME tenants, only that they ensure inclusion in such surveys and there are likely to be as many proponents against this as in favour. Separate surveys do, however, offer a number of distinct advantages. They can help ensure a sufficient sample of BME groups get an opportunity to voice their opinions about services and, therefore, demonstrate compliance with the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000). They allow a somewhat different approach which takes account of cultural/ language issues in terms of methodology and issues covered. They send a positive message to BME community members and can help build communication channels. They could also provide opportunities for capacity building if BME community members were involved in conducting the survey.

## **Arrangements in place to ensure BME inclusion**

Those organisations that had not conducted a separate survey of BME tenants were asked what arrangements were in place to ensure BME groups were included in tenant satisfaction surveys.

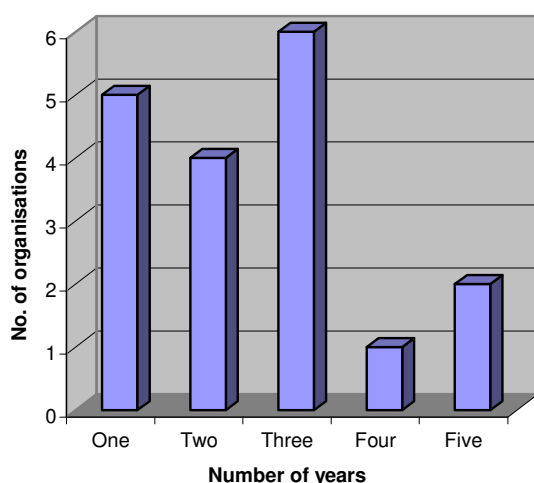
Some twenty-eight organisations provided details of the arrangements in place. The provision of some form of translation service was referred to most (twenty-one organisations). The proportion of local authorities and HAs referring to translation services were similar, but given that the LA sample was

smaller it seems LAs were more likely to provide such services. Introductory letters or information accompanying surveys in community languages were also referred to (nine organisations) with this being more likely in the case of local authorities. A minority indicated that the survey was available in community languages or referred to the use of face-to-face interviews or telephone interviews in locally spoken languages. A minority of organisations also indicated that they boosted the sample for BME groups to ensure they had sufficient data to allow meaningful analysis and/or used random sampling techniques to ensure inclusion of BME tenants. Individual organisations took steps to ensure inclusion by selecting specific schemes or controlling the profile of the sample. Another organisation indicated that they asked specific questions which they felt were relevant to the BME community for example, on health, whilst another used follow-up focus groups and interviews. A small number of organisations appeared to use a combination of these methods.

### Frequency of tenant satisfaction surveys

Just under half (eighteen organisations) of those that indicated that they had conducted a survey in the last five years provided information about the frequency with which they surveyed their tenants as illustrated in the table below.

Graph 3: Frequency of conducting tenant satisfaction surveys



### Other methods used to assess tenant satisfaction levels

Respondents were asked if they had used other methods to assess tenant satisfaction levels amongst their tenants. The majority (thirty-five organisations) indicated that they had, but most (twenty-two organisations) referred to other types of surveys, particularly in the case of HAs. For example, ten respondents mentioned sending out satisfaction surveys/cards following repairs. Others referred to surveys for new tenants relating to services and of tenants that had used specific procedures such as the complaints procedure or the racial harassment procedure (one MBC had

conducted a survey of the services provided to victims of racial harassment). Exit surveys for tenants who had moved were also referred to. One Midlands Council had conducted a survey of their lettings service targeted specifically at BME groups but included a white control group.

Other means of assessing tenant satisfaction levels included focus groups (referred to by eleven respondents), seminars, conferences, workshops, meetings, mystery shopping and a comments book (referred to by a minority of respondents).

In addition consultation with a range of different forums was referred to by individuals such as consultation panels, residents groups, steering groups, tenant forums, tenant federations and tenants associations (TAs) to assess tenant satisfaction levels.

A North West Council has set up 'task groups' of tenant representatives and officers for all key housing services. There are twelve groups reflecting service development and policy areas which meet on a regular basis.

### **Inclusion of BME groups in other methods of measuring tenant satisfaction**

Almost all of those organisations that indicated that they had used other methods for assessing tenant satisfaction levels suggested that they had included BME groups (thirty-one of thirty-five organisations) although in most cases it was not clear how. Twelve stated that separate arrangements had been made for BME groups. Focus groups for BME tenants were the main method referred to by respondents with groups being held with older and younger members of the community and 'difficult to reach' groups such as Bangladeshis. Some LAs had set up specific groups, for example, one has developed a participative forum to ensure all sections of the community have a voice on the quality and standard of services available, one has a borough wide BME tenant consultation group and another are setting up a BME task group to develop and agree a draft BME TPC. One was also developing an Asian TPC. Other arrangements referred to ensure inclusion of BME tenants included consultation with local BME groups, "feedback forms", quarterly meetings and the use of interviewers/facilitators who speak community languages.

A small number of organisations indicated that they had not used other methods for assessing tenant satisfaction levels, but were considering developing these. For example, one HA was intending to set up BME focus groups to assist monitoring BME resident satisfaction with services following their survey of BME residents. They were also reviewing their resident involvement strategy with more emphasis on engaging tenants at a local level and were working towards a national tenant's forum. Another HA was looking to actively recruit BME tenants to their focus groups and customer panel by targeting community leaders and another was considering the development of a BME forum following on from a housing needs study to engage further participation working with other HAs and LAs in the area.



## **Other mechanisms developed to consult with tenants**

Apart from assessments of satisfaction almost all those organisations that took part in the survey (forty of forty-two) suggested that they had developed other mechanisms to consult with tenants and involve them in service provision. A range of mechanisms were in place or being developed to ensure the involvement of tenants in management structures. However, less than half appeared to have developed mechanisms specifically to ensure BME tenants were included and these are detailed below and are similar to the methods referred to for 'other' methods of assessments of tenant satisfaction.

- Developing BME consultative/ participative panels/groups/ forums
- Ensuring or developing representation on consultation forums by profiling membership, targeting BME tenants or setting targets for BME tenants
- Focus groups
- Informal localised meetings
- Mentoring scheme to encourage BME involvement on regional committees
- Identification of potential board members through surveys of BME tenants
- BME residents newsletter
- Leaflets/literature in community languages
- Development of BME TPCs
- Conferences/seminars
- Providing information to local mosques and tenants groups on consultation events
- Telephone and postal surveys
- Translation and interpretation services, e.g. "language line"

## **Community audits**

Information was also sought on whether respondents had conducted a community audit to test views and knowledge of their services. Just under half indicated that they had (eighteen). However, in the main, those that indicated that they had appeared to have a limited interpretation of 'community' referring to tenant surveys and their tenant satisfaction survey process. A small number of organisations indicated that they intended to carry out an audit in the future. A small number had or were in the process of conducting housing needs assessments for BME groups and had included assessments of knowledge of services.

## **Opportunities for tenants to participate and influence policy**

The research revealed a range of opportunities for tenants to participate and influence, at least in principle, policy/practice. Board membership, support for residents/ TAs, representation on committees e.g. sub/area/ regional/ service were referred to most, but respondents also mentioned a wide array of other structures. For example, various forums, panels, groups and federations, such as those referred to earlier. Opportunities were also provided through:

- Best value review teams/ workshops
- TPCs
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Mystery shoppers
- Tenants seminars/conferences
- Meetings
- Estate management boards
- Umbrella groups for members of TAs and residents groups
- Tenant inspections

To encourage involvement one BME Housing Association offers courses on how to become a committee member.

## **Opportunities for BME tenants to participate and influence policy**

Almost all those that participated in the survey (thirty-seven) indicated that they included BME groups in opportunities to participate, but less than half of these were actively taking steps to ensure inclusion. A number of organisations (five) had set up specific groups such as those referred to earlier to ensure inclusion of members of the BME community. Other examples included: a BME customer focus group, a borough wide BME panel and a housing equality forum.

A minority of respondents indicated that they had BME members on tenant structures or were looking at ways to increase BME membership. A minority were also monitoring/auditing BME representation on tenant/resident associations. However, a small number suggested that their structures were open to all and that no specific arrangements were in place to encourage BME participation.

*“BME groups have the same opportunities as other groups, however, no special arrangements are made”.*

*“All tenants [are] invited to join/ participate in [the] consumer panel – invitations [are] produced in community languages”.*

This approach ignores the barriers faced by BME tenants to participation.

Individuals referred to a number of other mechanisms to encourage BME involvement:

- A requirement that TAs include equal opportunities in their constitution
- Use of informal structures to encourage participation
- Through contact with various BME groups
- Mentoring scheme to encourage BME representation on tenant structures
- Providing information in community languages and on videos
- Provision of interpretation/ translations services

### **Section 3: Analysis of Tenant Satisfaction Surveys**

Respondents who had conducted a tenant satisfaction survey in the last five years were asked to provide a copy of their survey report. However, as noted earlier, only twelve organisations actually supplied copies of their reports. For the purposes of analysis these have been supplemented by three other reports received by the Archive. It is important to note that the analysis is based on the information provided. In some cases, however, it is possible that this is incomplete, although in most cases it appears clear that full reports were provided.

#### **Profile of organisations providing survey reports**

The proportion of LAs and mainstream HAs that provided surveys were equal (six in each case), whilst three BME associations also did so. Of the mainstream associations two had conducted BME specific surveys and one had targeted BME tenants but had included a control group of White tenants.

#### **Use of STATUS**

In terms of the format of the questionnaire four organisations had used an unabridged version of STATUS, whilst nine had used an adapted version or a format that closely approximated to STATUS. Two organisations appeared not to have used STATUS at all.

The lack of uniformity in data collection makes it difficult to assess whether the patterns on satisfaction levels identified by the NHF in their analysis of STATUS data by ethnicity are replicated. Moreover, the levels of comparative analysis by ethnicity varied quite considerably. Where comparative data in terms of ethnicity on PI questions was provided this has been included in the analysis here.

#### **Analysis of data by ethnicity**

More than one-third of organisations (seven) had not undertaken any comparable analysis of data by ethnicity and one had done so only in a very limited way. Those that had undertaken some analysis (seven organisations) tended to use a narrow range of classifications. For example, providing comparable analysis for BME/White tenant groups or White/Black and Asian groups, with only two organisations having carried out more detailed analysis i.e. with a breakdown of the experiences of different minority ethnic groups. For the most part the samples of BME tenants were too small to allow meaningful analysis by sub-groups, but this means the diversity of experience of tenants remains unexplored.

## **Surveys with no comparative analysis by ethnicity**

Those survey reports that provided no comparative analysis by ethnicity included three local authorities, three mainstream HAs (including the two associations that had undertaken BME specific surveys) and one BME HA. Of these two organisations had conducted general tenant satisfaction surveys (a HA and a LA) and appeared to have very small samples of BME tenants. This might explain why there was no comparative data analysis. However, no other mechanisms appeared to have been used to try and gauge BME satisfaction levels, although the LA indicated that they were developing a borough wide translation and interpretation service. The other two LAs had more significant samples of BME tenants, but had still undertaken no comparative analysis by ethnicity even for the key PI questions. However, both had carried out service specific surveys targeted at BME tenants/customers. For example, one had conducted a satisfaction surveys for services provided to victims of racial harassment and for users of their translation service as well as a Best Value review of access to housing involving BME community groups. The other had conducted a survey of satisfaction with their lettings service. Both had also developed groups to help facilitate consultation with BME tenants.

All four organisations referred to above had conducted postal surveys and had sent out an introductory letter with their surveys with translations in community languages explaining the purpose of the survey. They also indicated either that, questionnaires were available in community languages or assistance could be provided in completing these.

The BME association was very small and had surveyed all their tenants, but there was no indication of the ethnicity of the respondents. Nor was the data collected comparable with STATUS. The questionnaire had been delivered to tenants and followed up with an appointment to go through the questionnaire and complete any gaps. This resulted in a relatively high response rate.

In the case of the two mainstream associations that had conducted surveys of their BME tenants there was no analysis in terms of the views of different minority ethnic groups. Both used a combination of face-to-face interviews and postal- questionnaires. In the case of one of these associations the sample was very small and although it included groups identifying as Asian, East African Asian and British was largely made up of Asian tenants. The questionnaire had not followed the STATUS format, but addressed specific issues with a high degree of relevance to BME community such as image of the organisation (e.g. multi-ethnic or predominantly white/Black), experience of discrimination by the association, difficulties communicating with the landlord and adequacy of information in ethnic minority languages. A number of specific recommendations were made in the light of the survey results.

The sample for the other mainstream association conducting a BME survey included tenants who identified as Afro-Caribbean, Black British, Asian, Somali, Chinese, Sudanese and Vietnamese tenants. Questions similar to those in STATUS had been used and satisfaction levels with the overall service provided by the landlord were relatively high (68% were either satisfied/very satisfied). To promote inclusion of BME groups in consultation forums this association had set targets for various customer panels for BME groups.

The organisation (a HA) that provided only limited analysis in their report by ethnicity did not include information about the proportion of BME tenants who responded to their postal survey. However, they did suggest that whilst the numbers were small from ethnic minority groups, it would appear that some minority groups are less satisfied 'taking everything into account' than the White British sample. They also noted that Black and mixed households felt less satisfied with their dealings with staff than White tenants. This was the only analysis in terms of ethnicity in the report. This association was involved in research and capacity building project into the accommodation needs of BME groups had been involved previously in a BME housing needs research project.

### **Survey reports which included some comparative analysis by ethnicity**

Of those organisations that had provided some analysis by ethnicity (two mainstream HAs, two BME HA and three LAs) four had conducted face-to-face interviews with their tenants, two had carried out a postal survey and one had used a combination of face-to-face interviews and telephone survey. Both those organisations (a LA and a BME HA) that had conducted postal surveys provided an introductory letter with a brief explanation translated into community languages, which indicated assistance could be provided to complete the questionnaire.

The level of analysis by ethnicity varied both in terms of the number of ethnic groups data was provided on and in terms of the issues examined. In terms of ethnic groups included, three organisations provided analysis in relation to two ethnic groups. This included a BME HA, a mainstream HA and a LA. In each case the categories used were White UK/BME, White/Non-White and White/BME respectively. As mentioned earlier comparisons are difficult because of the lack of uniformity in data collection (e.g. the questions asked and ethnic categories used), however, in terms of the two key areas on which social landlords are required to collect data it was clear that satisfaction levels were lower for BME tenants, particularly in the case of the LA. For example, in relation to the question on overall satisfaction with the services provided by the landlord the BME HAs found that 79% of White UK tenants were satisfied/very satisfied compared to 73% of BME tenants. In the case of the mainstream HA 74% of White tenants were satisfied/very satisfied compared to 62% of Non-White tenants. However, in the case of the LA 67% of White tenants were satisfied/very satisfied, whilst just 50% of BME tenants were. In terms of satisfaction with opportunities for participation in decision-making, only the BME HA and the LA had comparable data by ethnicity. The BME

association found that 63% of White UK tenants were satisfied/very satisfied compared to 45% of BME tenants. The LA figures were 46% for White tenants and 40% for BME.

In terms of the data analysed by ethnicity the BME HA analysed all the data by ethnicity and included questions relating to cultural issues. They also indicated that they used focus groups to assess satisfaction levels. In addition they held workshops on specific issues/service areas and almost half the participants were from the BME community.

The LA only provided data on the PIs and two other STATUS questions and there was no indication of the size of the BME sample included in the survey. They had involved BME tenants in the development of their TPC on participation. The compact provided a clear outline of the involvement opportunities at various levels and an approximation of the time needed at each level of commitment. They also provided funding for a full time project worker for a BME tenants group and used focus groups during the survey process.

The mainstream association provided analysis in terms of a number of issues covered by the questionnaire.

Two local authorities provided slightly more detailed analysis on ethnicity in their reports on satisfaction levels. One in terms of those who classified themselves as White, British, Asian or Other and the other in terms of Asian/Other, Black and UK/Irish. None, however, had comparable data in terms of the PI questions included in STATUS. One of these LAs had used a boosted sample for BME tenants and focus groups to try and ensure representation. This LA also had a budget to help tenants facilitate consultation with 'hard to reach groups' and were actively promoting the involvement of BME groups working with local community organisations and providing training and awareness raising sessions. The other LA had developed and largely implemented a research programme, to profile the BME communities in the borough, identify the needs of a specific BME community group through a survey, establish HA service provision for BME communities and determine the levels of satisfaction of BME households nominated to HAs through a survey.

The most detailed analysis in terms of ethnicity and issues covered in the questionnaire was provided by a mainstream HA and a BME HA. The mainstream HA had targeted BME tenants but had a control group of White tenants, whereas the BME HA had conducted a general satisfaction survey of all their tenants (which included White tenants). None, however, had included STATUS PI questions, although overall the questionnaires used closely approximated to STATUS. For the BME survey the analysis was conducted on the basis of four groups, British, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Other. The other HA had provided analysis in terms of the categories used in the 2001 Census. Both included questions related to cultural issues. The mainstream HA also used the survey to identify potential interest in involvement in focus groups to assist in monitoring BME tenant satisfaction with services. The

reports of these organisations illustrate the diversity of experience of BME tenants. For example, the mainstream HA found that tenants who identified as African and Indian were more likely to feel that they were not well informed by their landlord than other groups. Pakistani tenants tended to have least awareness of the association's racial harassment policy and tenants who identified as Other Mixed Backgrounds were more likely to indicate that racial harassment was a major problem in their neighbourhood. Similarly the BME survey found that in terms of preferred methods of participation questionnaires and completion of suggestions/comments cards were most favoured (33.9% and 23.8% respectively) particularly in the case of Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups. British tenants were much more likely to consider joining a tenant's associations. Lack of confidence, interest and family commitments were important in terms of the reasons why tenants did not want to become involved in a TA.



## **Section 4: Implications**

### **The importance of assessing BME tenant satisfaction levels**

- There are clear regulatory requirements to ensure that BME tenants are included in consultation mechanisms. Tenant satisfaction surveys are a key vehicle for such consultation and as such should include sufficient proportions of BME tenants to enable analysis by ethnicity. This may be achieved either through 'boosted' samples or a separate survey. Separate surveys have a number of advantages, but should be used particularly where communication channels are not well-developed with BME tenants.
- Given the diversity of experience of different community groups, categories of analysis of data from tenant satisfaction surveys need to be broader than BME/Non-BME and a separate survey may facilitate this.
- It is also clear from the limited amount of data available on satisfaction levels for BME groups that there are disparities between the levels of satisfaction expressed by White tenants and BME tenants. Analysis by ethnicity will allow these disparities to be drawn out so that effective steps can be taken to deal with these.

### **Use of appropriate measurement instruments and methodology**

- Postal surveys appear to be the most popular method of assessing tenant satisfaction levels.
- Social landlords need to ensure that if they are using surveys, the methodology is appropriate for their BME tenant base.
- In some cases face-to-face interviews may be more appropriate, than postal surveys, using interviewers that speak local languages.
- The use of focus groups will allow specific issues identified by the survey to be explored. However, it was clear from the research that few organisations used focus groups to follow-up issues.
- A range of methods should be used to assess tenant satisfaction levels this will promote opportunities for involvement.

## **Data collection**

- For consistency and to enable benchmarking all social landlords should use STATUS when conducting tenant satisfaction surveys.
- Any adaptation should be limited to the addition of questions, but this should be kept to a minimum. Changing the wording of questions even if the changes appear only minor will limit comparability of data.
- Social landlords may wish to consider adding questions which draw out culturally relevant information.
- The use of Census (2001) categories for ethnicity in surveys and within the organisation more generally should be adopted. This will also facilitate benchmarking.

## **Including BME tenants in other consultation mechanisms**

- Clear barriers have been identified to including BME tenants in effective participation.
- Social landlords need to be pro-active in ensuring inclusion, for example, by setting targets for management structures/tenant organisations. This fits in with the Housing Corporations new Regulatory Code of Guidance (2002).
- Some organisations offered a wide range of opportunities for participation depending on the commitment tenants were able/prepared to give. Whilst others confined opportunities to traditional tenant structures such as TAs. There is evidence that such structures are less attractive to BME tenants all social landlords, therefore, should be developing a range of opportunities. Consideration should also be given to developing BME specific structures at a local level to facilitate involvement.
- Capacity building for tenants interested in participating, through training and the employment of BME TP workers have proved effective mechanisms in developing BME involvement. Social landlords should consider developing such opportunities where there is under representation of BME tenants.

## **Examples of good practice**

TPAS held a BME participation discussion forum in January 2001

The language of TP was seen as a barrier to BME involvement

Suggestions for getting the views and opinions of BME tenants included:

- Door to door surveys
- Setting up BME tenants groups/focus groups
- BME tenants being recruited within whatever TP structures the landlords had in place

Fears about racism were not the only reason for not attending tenant meetings, lack of assertiveness was also a factor.

### *Bradford City Council*

Bradford city council hired a consultant in April 2002 to encourage BME tenants to sit on the boards of community housing trusts newly set up following stock transfer.

Adverts were placed in local newspapers and on a local Asian radio station and every BME tenant received a letter explaining why they should consider applying to be one of the five tenants on each board.

There is now a BME representative on each board and one has recruited four BME members.

### *Westminster City Council*

Westminster city council held a workshop for BME tenants to boost involvement from the BME community. One in three Westminster tenants is from an ethnic minority. The council worked with the Westminster Federation of Residents' Associations and the BME tenants and residents advisory network. The result was a day of workshops where residents were shown how to get their concerns over to estate managers and told how residents associations and housing panels worked. The cultural needs of particular groups were taken into account: for example, a women's only workshop was set up for Muslims who felt uncomfortable with a mixed meeting. The council provided lunch, transport, a crèche and even entertainment including a five-a-side football match. The voluntary sector were key to getting residents to participate. They contacted 75 voluntary organisations all of whom represented those from ethnic minorities and they were able to encourage people to get involved.

### *RSL Best Value pilots*

The ways in which residents were involved

The forms that attempts at encouraging participation took were varied and most pilots used more than one approach to involving residents or users. The approaches used included:

- As a minimum, keeping residents informed of BV and its progress through the newsletter that is also used, in most cases, to encourage attendance at particular events or to elicit readers' views
- Surveying tenants either using a survey especially designed for BV purposes as in the case of Oldham Investment Partnership, or through amended versions of existing annual surveys, as in the case of Liverpool Housing Trust. These surveys are most frequently used to assist in the prioritisation of services or specific aspects of services, for subsequent BV activity and/or planned to take place later in the process to assess resident satisfaction with any changes that have been brought about.
- Holding special meetings, conferences or seminars to explain BV and collect views on what actions should be undertaken as part of the initiative. The feeling, in general, is that these have been a success.
- Consulting groups of tenants using either existing participatory structures or by recruiting residents to new bodies specifically concerned with BV. East Thames Housing Group, for example, have, essentially, used the former while Parchment have used the latter, recruiting tenants to 10 new working groups for BV services.

## **Appendix 2: Interview schedule for steering group members**

Name:

Current employment:

Ethnicity:

Role on steering group:

Date joined steering group:

### **Your role in the project**

1. How did you come to be involved in the steering group? (nominated by employer, invited to join etc)
2. Do you feel that you were fully briefed on the aims of the project when you joined? If yes say how, if no say why not
3. How would you describe your role in the project up to now? Is it what you expected? Has the role changed in the last 12 months? Is it likely to change in the future?
4. In what ways have you personally contributed to MCV? Do you feel that your contributions are valued by MCV or other steering group members?
5. Do you promote MCV to your organisation and to others throughout the course of your work? If yes please say how
6. Is your interest in the panel geographically specific? (e.g are you primarily interested in Liverpool or the Wirral etc)
7. How does your experience of the panel compare to previous involvement in consultation mechanisms with BME groups?
8. Has / will the panel changed the character of consultation with BME groups in Merseyside? If yes please give examples, if no please say why not.
9. What do you think the main role of a Citizen's Panel is? In your view has MCV fulfilled this expectation?

10. Do you think the panel has benefited BME communities in Merseyside? If yes say how if not say why not
11. In your experience how has the panel worked in practice? Is this how you thought it would operate?
12. Do you think that the panel is inclusive of all BME groups in Merseyside? If not why not and how can this be addressed?
13. Do you know what mechanisms have been used to recruit panel members? What are your views on this?
14. What are your views on how the panel has been promoted among BME communities?
15. What are your views on potential barriers to joining the panel and retention of panel members?
16. Do you think that resource issues have impacted on the development of the panel?
17. What do you think the barriers are to the future success of the panel and its future sustainability? How might these be overcome?
18. Have you any thoughts on extending the panel to other areas and any potential barriers to this?
19. Have you previous experience of sitting on steering groups?
20. What has been your experience of being a steering group member for MCV? How does this compare to previous experiences of being a steering group member?
21. How do you see the future role of the steering group? Do you plan to continue being a steering group member for the foreseeable future? If not please say why not.

22. Did you receive training and support as part of your role as a steering group member? If yes please indicate what this entailed and if not what training and support do you think was needed?
  
23. Do you feel you are given adequate opportunity to present your views at steering group meetings? Do you think your views are listened to and taken on board? Do you feel that your views are taken into account / respected? Do you feel meetings are conducted in a non-discriminatory manner?
  
24. What are your views on the project so far? How do you envisage the future of the project? How could the project be improved?

**Many thanks for completing this questionnaire  
You may be contacted for further discussion in the near future.**





## **Appendix 3: Setting up a BME Citizen's Panel: Lessons learned from Merseyside Community Voice (MCV)**

### **Introduction**

Merseyside Community Voice (MCV) is a unique organisation that it aims to give Black and Minority Ethnic people a voice in the communities where they live. It has established a Citizen's Panel made up of representatives from the culturally diverse communities and neighbourhoods across Merseyside, with the aim of engaging and consulting on a whole range of issues including housing, regeneration, health, jobs, training, discrimination issues, access to services and language barriers. In this way, MCV will offer a platform for raising and addressing issues as well as being able to offer help and advice to community members. This Panel was launched in December 2004 and now has a full time project co-ordinator in place.

Generally speaking, it is accepted that Panels on the whole have been widely proved to be a useful tool in gauging tenant opinion and ensuring regular involvement and high response rates to questionnaires and other consultation methods. They can overcome some of the traditional reasons behind consultation and participation fatigue, such as resident's aversion to significant time constraints, but still low for regular and effective consultation on the issues facing residents.

### **Complying with statutory and good practice requirements**

The Housing Corporation commissioned the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford to undertake an independent evaluation of MCVs achievements and progress so far. As part of this evaluation a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding consultation with BME groups was undertaken.

The panel has enormous potential to impact on participative decision-making in Merseyside and complies with the spirit of participation underpinning Best Value in terms of strengthening the role of residents for Registered Social Landlords (RSL) and local authorities. It also has the potential to address and redress the widespread legacy of service providers knowing less about BME communities than their white counterparts.

Further, it fits with legal and regulatory requirements, for example the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), the CRE Code of Practice in Rented Housing (1991), ODPM and Housing Corporation (2002) and also reflects good practice guides in this area (National Housing Federation (1998) Equality in Housing Code of Practice, Housing Corporation BME policy (1998), Race and Housing Inquiry's Challenge Report code of practice and the CIH and FBHO and Housing Corporation (2000) good practice guide). Furthermore, the Housing Corporations Good Practice notes 4 and 8 (Race Equality and Diversity (2002) and Equality and Diversity (2004)) and the Audit Commission's guide to resident involvement ([www.auditcommission.gov.uk](http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk))

are also complied with. All of the above maintain that the key to inclusive involvement is providing a number of different opportunities for people to participate so they can choose what suits them.

### **MCVs strengths and achievements so far**

- There is real commitment from steering group members and partner organisations.
- A strategic Action Plan has been developed and is now in place.
- The Panel has attracted positive attention in a national scale.
- The project coordinator post is now in place, funded by a successful Innovation into Action grant bid.
- Following a successful launch event, momentum for action has been gathered
- An independently run session, facilitated by BMETARAN identified the need for a skills audit and addressed the future training needs for steering group members.
- At the steering group meeting following the launch it was agreed that issues raised in the independent evaluation would be addressed by working sub-groups.
- At all stages of the process the steering group has demonstrated a willingness to learn and evolve.

### **MCVs next steps for action**

The experience of setting up and running the panel has been a steep learning curve for all involved. The points listed below summarise the next steps for action for MCV:

- sources of longer term funding need to be explored;
- links with other agendas need to be developed;
- the training needs of present and future steering group members needs to be considered;
- a marketing and communication strategy needs to be developed with involvement from panel members; and
- a further recruitment drive for panel members is needed.

## **Setting up a BME Citizen's Panel – Key lessons**

If you are interested in setting up a BME Citizen's Panel there are a number of issues that need to be addressed and these are summarised below:

- find out who and where the BME communities are;
- make sure that funding – ideally long term – is on place at the outset;
- be very clear about aims and objectives and link these explicitly into other agendas;
- be clear about what agenda's communities need to be consulted on but be flexible;
- make sure that the steering group is both strategic and representative of BME communities;
- ensure that training is provided for steering group and panel members;
- have a communication and marketing strategy in place as early as possible;
- engage with established community groups as well as recruiting to the panel by other means
- be clear who owns the panel and the database of panel members;
- find out early on how residents want to be consulted (postal surveys appeared to be the favourite in this case but combine with other methods e.g. focus groups); and
- panel membership for some could be linked to 'outputs' e.g. could then be trained to become a board member.

**If you would like a copy of the full report cataloguing the experiences of MCV please contact the Project Coordinator, Ray Quarless on 0151 706 6098 or email [ray.quarless@riverside.co.uk](mailto:ray.quarless@riverside.co.uk)**

