



TENANT ENGAGEMENT EXPERTS

tpas

From Devolution to Participation

How to **embed resident voices** in regional government





For more than 35 years, Tpas has championed the principle that tenants and residents should not simply be consulted on housing decisions, but should actively shape them. Founded in the late 1980s to strengthen tenant participation in social housing, Tpas has grown into England's leading tenant engagement organisation, working with over 340 landlord members and representing around four million tenants and residents. Throughout that journey, one principle has remained constant: services and places work better when the people affected by decisions are genuinely involved in making them.

That belief has helped drive significant national change across the housing sector. Tpas has consistently worked alongside tenants, landlords, government and regulators to embed resident voice into policy and practice. From influencing the development of the Consumer Standards and strengthening expectations around Transparency, Influence and Accountability, to championing the role of tenants within building safety reform following Grenfell, Tpas has helped ensure that resident experience is recognised not as an optional extra, but as a core part of effective governance and accountability.

We have also played a leading role in shaping national conversations around Tenant Satisfaction Measures, resident scrutiny, Awaab's Law, competency and conduct requirements for housing staff, and reforms designed to improve access to information and complaint handling for social housing residents. Across these areas, Tpas has consistently argued that regulation and policy are strongest when informed by lived experience and when residents are involved early, openly and meaningfully.

Yet while the resident voice has become increasingly embedded within housing regulation, there remains a significant gap within wider regional and devolved governance structures. As powers over housing, regeneration, transport, planning, economic development and public services increasingly move toward combined authorities and regional bodies, many residents still feel distant from the decisions shaping the future of their communities. Too often, engagement remains inconsistent, transactional or focused only on formal consultation after key decisions have already been made.

This paper comes at a critical moment. England is entering a new phase of devolution and regional governance reform. New powers, funding arrangements and strategic responsibilities will shape communities for decades to come. The challenge — and opportunity — is to ensure that these new governance structures are built with residents, not simply around them.

At Tpas, we believe resident voice must become a fundamental part of regional governance infrastructure. Effective engagement improves decision making, strengthens legitimacy, builds trust and leads to better long term outcomes for communities. Residents bring expertise rooted in lived experience, local knowledge and everyday realities that institutions alone cannot replicate.

This position paper sets out why resident involvement in regional governance matters, the risks of failing to embed meaningful participation, and practical recommendations for creating systems that genuinely place communities at the heart of decision making. It draws on decades of engagement experience, national policy work, conversations with tenants and residents across England, and the growing recognition that democratic renewal depends upon stronger relationships between institutions and the people they serve.

The future of regional governance should not simply be about devolving powers between layers of government. It should also be about devolving influence to the communities whose lives those decisions affect every day.

Jenny Osbourne
CEO, Tpas



A Tpas Policy Position Paper

By Caritas Charles, Head of Policy at Tpas

Tpas believes resident voices must be embedded within devolved housing governance from the outset. Engagement cannot remain limited to landlord level activity while major decisions affecting neighbourhoods are taken elsewhere.

Three Headline Policy Asks

Tpas recommends that government and mayoral combined authorities take three immediate steps to strengthen resident voices within devolved housing systems.

1 Establish regional resident advisory structures linked to combined authority housing portfolios so that residents can influence investment priorities and regeneration strategy at an early stage.

2 Create formal mechanisms that connect landlord level engagement evidence, including tenant scrutiny insight and Tenant Satisfaction Measures, to regional housing strategy development.

3 Align housing engagement within combined authorities with wider Local Democratic Renewal participation frameworks so that residents experience a coherent approach to influence across local governance.

These steps would ensure devolution strengthens democratic legitimacy while improving the quality of strategic housing decision making.

What This Could Look Like in a Combined Authority Area

In a mayoral combined authority area, strengthening resident voices within devolved housing systems could be achieved through a small number of practical steps.

A regional housing resident panel linked to the mayoral housing portfolio could provide early insight on investment priorities, regeneration programmes and retrofit strategy

Tenant scrutiny evidence from housing providers across the region could be reviewed collectively to identify shared service challenges and inform regional strategy development.

Cross tenure engagement structures could ensure that social housing tenants, private renters and leaseholders are all represented within strategic housing conversations.



Regional engagement activity could align with wider Local Democratic Renewal participation initiatives such as citizen panels or deliberative forums so that housing becomes part of a consistent approach to community influence across devolved governance.

Councillors could be supported through access to structured resident insight at regional level, strengthening their ability to scrutinise housing investment decisions and represent neighbourhood priorities within combined authority structures.

Together, these steps would create a clear connection between neighbourhood experience and regional housing decision making while strengthening democratic accountability across the combined authority area.

The Tpas Perspective

Tpas works with over 340 landlord members representing around 4 million social housing tenants across England.

Our experience supporting tenant engagement, scrutiny and participation across local authorities, housing associations, and regional partnerships provides a clear understanding of what effective resident influence looks like in practice.

Residents already shape services and accountability at landlord level. The next step is ensuring their insight informs strategic housing decisions at regional scale.



Why Resident Voices Matter in Regional Government (Devolved Housing Systems)

Strategic housing decisions shape the long term future of neighbourhoods. They influence housing supply priorities, regeneration investment, retrofit programmes, infrastructure sequencing, affordability mix and land use direction.

Without structured resident influence, decisions risk becoming more distant from lived experience even as they move geographically closer to communities.

Effective devolution combines representative democracy with participatory engagement. Councillors remain central to accountability, supported by structured access to resident insight.

The resident voice strengthens policy quality, programme delivery, legitimacy and public trust.



The Policy Context

Expectations around resident influence are increasing across the housing sector. The Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards place clear expectations on transparency, accountability and influence.

The Competency and Conduct Standard reinforces the importance of understanding resident experience in decision making.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures provide comparable insight into service performance.

The Housing Ombudsman continues to emphasise learning from complaints and improving access to information.

Alongside these changes, the Local Democratic Renewal Agenda highlights the importance of strengthening participation as powers move closer to communities through devolution. Housing provides a practical opportunity to embed these expectations within strategic governance structures.

The Current Gap in Regional Engagement

Across England, the resident voice within combined authorities remains inconsistent.

Engagement is often linked to individual programmes or spatial consultations rather than permanent participation structures.

Common challenges include limited resident representation at the regional housing decision making level, weak links between tenant scrutiny evidence and strategic investment planning, unclear feedback on influence, and reliance on short-term consultation activity.

This creates a disconnect between neighbourhood level engagement and regional housing strategy.

The Opportunity Created by Devolution

Devolution creates an opportunity to design engagement structures alongside governance arrangements.

Combined authorities are well placed to:

- Connect insight across landlords.
- Support cross tenure engagement.
- Align infrastructure planning with lived experience.
- Strengthen relationships between communities and regional decision makers.

Housing therefore provides one of the clearest opportunities to demonstrate how Local Democratic Renewal can operate in practice.



What An Effective Regional Resident Voice Looks Like

Strong devolved engagement frameworks typically include:

- Resident advisory panels linked to housing portfolios
- Structured engagement informing investment pipelines
- Clear reporting on influence
- Representation across housing tenures
- Links between tenant scrutiny and regional strategy development
- Support for tenant led organisations

These approaches move participation beyond consultation and towards influence.

Linking Landlord Engagement with Regional Strategy

Residents already generate valuable evidence through tenant scrutiny activity, Tenant Satisfaction Measures insight, complaints learning and local engagement programmes.

This evidence is rarely used systematically within regional housing strategy development. Creating formal links between landlord engagement evidence and combined authority decision making would significantly strengthen policy design.

Supporting Tenant Led Organisations

Tenant-led organisations provide independence, continuity, and challenge alongside landlord engagement activity.

Combined authorities can strengthen resident voices by recognising tenant-led networks, supporting collaboration between them, and creating structured routes for participation in housing strategy development.

The Role of Mayoral Combined Authorities

Mayoral combined authorities have an opportunity to embed engagement expectations across regional housing systems.

Practical approaches include regional resident panels linked to housing portfolios, resident involvement in spatial framework development, co-design approaches within regeneration partnerships, resident participation in retrofit strategy development and cross provider tenant forums connected to investment planning.

Leadership commitment is essential if engagement is to operate as part of governance rather than consultation activity.

Supporting Councillors Within Devolved Systems

Councillors remain central to democratic accountability within devolved housing governance.

Structured engagement frameworks strengthen councillor effectiveness by improving access to resident insight that supports scrutiny, advocacy, regional representation, and programme oversight.

Participatory engagement strengthens representative democracy rather than replacing it.



Practical Steps for Combined Authorities and Partners

Tpas recommends that combined authorities and strategic housing partnerships should:

1

Develop regional engagement strategies linked to housing investment planning

2

Create resident advisory structures connected to strategic housing decision making

3

Align landlord engagement evidence with combined authority housing priorities

4

Support tenant led organisations to participate in regional governance

5

Provide clear feedback explaining how engagement shapes outcomes

6

Ensure engagement reflects the diversity of housing tenures across the region

7

Link housing engagement structures to wider Local Democratic Renewal participation activity



The Tpas Offer

Tpas supports combined authorities, councils and housing providers to design engagement frameworks that connect neighbourhood experience with strategic housing decision making.

Our work includes supporting regional engagement strategy development, strengthening links between tenant scrutiny and investment planning, designing resident advisory structures, supporting councillor understanding of engagement within devolved systems and facilitating collaboration with tenant led organisations.



Why Housing is the Natural Pilot Sector for Local Democratic Renewal

Housing provides one of the most practical and immediate opportunities to demonstrate how Local Democratic Renewal can operate in everyday decision making.

Residents already participate in structured engagement through tenant scrutiny, complaints learning, service improvement activity and Tenant Satisfaction Measures. These mechanisms create an existing participation infrastructure that can be extended into regional housing governance more easily than in many other policy areas.

Housing decisions also have visible neighbourhood level impact. Investment priorities, regeneration programmes, retrofit delivery, and infrastructure sequencing shape how communities experience change in their daily lives. This makes housing particularly well suited to demonstrating how participation strengthens strategic decision making.

Combined authorities increasingly influence housing investment and spatial planning direction. Aligning these responsibilities with structured resident voices creates a clear opportunity to connect neighbourhood experience with regional leadership.

For these reasons, housing offers a strong early example of how Local Democratic Renewal can move from principle into practice across devolved governance arrangements.

Conclusion

Resident voices must be part of the next phase of housing devolution.

Housing provides a clear opportunity to demonstrate how Local Democratic Renewal can strengthen decision making by connecting strategic investment with lived experience.

Embedding engagement within devolved governance structures will strengthen legitimacy, improve delivery and ensure housing policy reflects the realities of communities across England.

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