

The Community Gateway Model is an approach to shaping the future of housing organisations which is based on intensive tenant involvement. It was developed in partnership by the CIH and the co-operative movement through the Confederation of Co-operative Housing, and described in the report *Empowering Communities*. The model can be applied to stock transfer, to ALMOs, or to the reshaping of an existing housing association.



King's Lynn and West Norfolk

Another transfer based on gateway principles – although without the same resources for tenant empowerment as Preston, featured earlier in the CD - has gone ahead in the town of King's Lynn and the extensive rural area (550 square miles) around it. This has brought its own challenges for the council and the transfer team – how to get effective involvement when the housing stock is so scattered.

Freebridge Community Housing, the stock transfer vehicle for the council, used the transfer process to put tenants at the heart of decision making. At the beginning of the consultation process, although the tenants group 'Tenants of West Norfolk' (TOWN) had a good grasp of the issues, there was little understanding among tenants generally. A programme of tenant-led road shows was initiated across the borough – visited by over 400 tenants. Of those that came, 70% supported the proposals. Later, a two-day selection exercise had to be organised as 250 volunteers came forward for the five tenant board member positions.

Some of the early investment is now showing benefits, for example a tenant panel has now been trained and developed that carried out the final selection of contractors that will deliver the decent homes programme. A tenant award scheme has been created to promote positive communities.

Innovation into Action funds have been used to develop the Tenant Empowerment Strategy. At a strategic level, the process is being used to link a revised Tenant Compact, the tenant board member succession policy and the association's governance rules.

The board have agreed a tenant empowerment structure that creates a close link between TOWN and the board. This relationship is central to the development of policy and to ensuring that tenant empowerment is sustained through the decision-making process.

A key feature of this transfer is a big push to build tenants' capacity in IT, business skills and other areas. The TOWN Academy has been launched through which 15 tenants have commenced a year-long training programme which will equip tenants to play a more active role.

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Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about gateway

What are the key elements of the Community Gateway Model?

These are set out in *Empowering Communities*. A landlord body based on CGM principles should have:

- a tenant majority membership- to give a sense of ownership and community guardianship of the gateway's key values and directions
- a membership which can participate in shaping the gateway's strategies and policies
- tenant board members elected in some way by the membership
- defined *local community areas* reflecting community perceptions
- a structured programme of *community option studies* carried out in local community areas to define community vision and aspirations, to develop the ability of communities to achieve their vision, and to enable communities to engage with service providers
- a staircase of housing options available to local communities, from informal engagement to tenant management & community ownership
- working with partners to provide options wider than housing to local communities
- all of this set out in a written *community empowerment strategy* and built into the rules and structure of the organisation

Of course, some organisations may not want to go as far as including all these elements, but then they would only be applying parts of the model. There is a need for clarity about what is on offer in any particular area, to avoid confusion for tenants and others involved in decision making.

Is the Community Gateway Model only suitable for stock transfers?

No. This type of organisation can be used to manage council housing (as an ALMO), to take ownership of homes as a registered social landlord (a housing association), or in a number of other situations.

With registered social landlords, an organisation could be a not-for-profit limited company, an industrial and provident society, a stand-alone landlord or part of a bigger group structure.

Can tenants become the majority stakeholders in a community gateway association?

Yes, subject to meeting the Housing Corporation's overall registration and regulation requirements. Guidance on this is given in bulletin no.4, available on the CIH website (see below).

Is this model suitable for parts of an organisation's housing stock, as well as wholesale transfer?

Yes. It can be used for some, or all, homes. Every neighbourhood or community's needs are different, so it's important to be flexible.

What are the main duties of a Community Gateway Association?

Tenants are at the heart of a gateway association and shape everything they do. Initially, new associations usually focus on improving the condition of homes and of the housing service. But over time, the organisation could develop a wider role in improving communities through regeneration.

What are the main steps involved in setting up a Community Gateway Association?

There are six steps crucial to getting started:

1. Build awareness among tenants, leaseholders, staff, councillors, the media and local communities.
2. Decide which areas would be covered by the community gateway approach.
3. Agree the size, legal structure and responsibilities of the organisation.
4. Work with tenants and leaseholders to promote the model and recruit members.
5. Set up the shadow board(s) for the new organisation.
6. Develop a community empowerment strategy and business plan with sufficient resources to ensure that it can be carried through.

If stock transfer is likely, it's important to build community empowerment programmes into the offer to tenants and leaseholders.

Is the model only about housing issues?

No. The idea of the community options study is to enable local people to have a broader say in shaping what happens on all the issues of importance in their area, of which housing is perhaps only one.