

Many of the drivers for change in housing services stem from the 'localism' agenda. The [Localism Act](#) (Communities and Local Government, 2011) creates a legal framework for the aims of 'Big Society', giving local communities power to make decisions about how services such as housing and planning development are delivered, as well as to take on responsibility for running local services themselves if they so wish.

The Act will result in various changes made to housing provision as outlined in the Government's consultation, [Implementing social housing reform: directions to the Social Housing Regulator](#) (Communities and Local Government, July 2011). Two aspects of tenant involvement embrace the localism agenda, by giving people greater freedom and power over how local housing services are managed.

The *Tenant Cashback Scheme*, announced in April 2011, intends to tackle inefficiency in repair and maintenance budgets, and give social tenants more control over the repair and upkeep of their homes. Through a broadening of the *Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Direction* (as laid out in the Regulatory Framework) landlords can offer a range of opportunities for tenants to be involved in maintenance services.

The scheme will be phased in from April 2012 and rather than social landlords carrying out repairs or commissioning contractors, tenants will have the opportunity to either carry out repairs themselves, seek help from neighbours or family members, or to contract local traders. Tenants will then share in any savings that they make in the maintenance budgets. The intention is to create greater flexibility in how and when repairs are carried out, whilst enabling tenants to have greater choice ([The Tenant Cashback Impact Assessment](#), Communities and Local Government, July 2011)

Whilst most social housing tenants have tenants' associations to present their views to their landlords, there is also a proposal to establish Tenants' Panels. These panels would strengthen tenants' ability to enforce landlord accountability and provide a range of opportunities to influence and participate in housing services at a local level, including the formulation of housing related policies and priorities; shaping delivery of housing related services (including offers on service standards) and scrutinising and making recommendations relating to landlord performance (see [Review of Social Housing Regulation](#), Communities and Local Government, October 2011).

In addition, a training programme will provide tenants with the skills and confidence to sit on the panels to represent neighbours and resolve local disputes.

It is expected that the Tenant and Empowerment Standard of the Regulatory Framework ([Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2010](#), Tenant Services Authority) will be strengthened to ensure landlords make a wide variety of information available so that tenants can properly scrutinise and assess their performance.

References

1. 'Localism Act', Communities and Local Government website. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/localismbill/>
2. Implementing social housing reform: directions to the Social Housing Regulator, Communities and Local Government, July 2011. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1936126.pdf>
3. The Tenant Cashback Impact Assessment, Communities and Local Government, July 2011. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1936156.pdf>
4. Review of Social Housing Regulation, Communities and Local Government, October 2010. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1936156.pdf>
5. Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2010, Tenant Services Authority website. <http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/server/show/ConWebDoc.20175>

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