Going local
Landlords and tenants working together to raise standards
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Introduction

The TSA has always been clear that its new approach to regulation should not be a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach. Our model of co-operative regulation is all about landlords and tenants working together to design and deliver services to meet local needs.

Local is key. Each community has its own needs and aspirations. We want to encourage landlords to take these differences into account and tailor some of their service delivery according to the priorities of their tenants.

Last August we invited landlords to volunteer to start this work ahead of our formal powers kicking in this April. The invitation proved extremely popular with landlords. We received 181 applications to join the programme and the successful 39 trailblazers include all shapes and sizes of landlords – housing associations, local authorities, ALMOs, co-operatives and a tenant management organisation.

Grassroots engagement with tenants is the starting point for local offers. The new Empowerment and Involvement Standard requires all providers to "demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants" and "provide opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery". The idea is that by engaging with your tenants you are better able to provide a service that meets their needs and avoid wasteful expenditure.

This report sets out the progress of the trailblazers and the main learning points for landlords, tenants and the TSA. An accompanying toolkit gives practical advice on setting local offers. This report covers the first six months of the trailblazers and covers the period up until most of them went live with their offers. A further report on the standards in operation will be published in November.

The TSA’s approach is summed up in the words of the prospectus for trailblazers, “Each local community has their own needs and aspirations. We want to encourage landlords to take these differences into account and tailor some of their service delivery according to the wishes of their tenants… We are looking for landlords who can be at the forefront of our emerging regulatory framework to trailblaze this approach.”
Key points

• The local standards approach works. Reduced burdens and local freedoms were grasped enthusiastically by tenants and providers working in a variety of circumstances
• There was strong enthusiasm from social housing providers for the trailblazer programme
• Trailblazers spanned a diverse range of providers
• The trailblazers addressed the key areas in the new standards framework
• They effectively consulted and engaged tenants in drawing up local offers, often using good techniques to involve harder-to-reach tenants
• Many worked well with a number of other organisations, overcoming some of the challenges involved with multi-partner working
• The trailblazers demonstrated that tenants involved in drawing up local offers are asking for sensible improvements, with relatively predictable variations
• Boards have engaged well in the process, showing they can effectively assess and monitor the local offer process
• More work is needed on value for money and on the way organisations and tenants can work together when performance falls short of what is promised in the local offer
• There will be challenges ahead in ensuring that local offers fit well with other initiatives in their locality and with the wider policy agenda
• Work is needed on how local offers will be communicated via annual reports
What are local offers and how do they fit in the TSA regulatory regime?

The work of the local standard trailblazers marks a break from the past. Local offers are a different approach to regulation which is less about telling people what to do, and more about decisions affecting local people being made locally.

The local standard trailblazers are a test bed for a new co-regulatory approach which sees providers designing services shaped around tenants’ needs. These local offers take the TSA’s national standards and shape them to meet the needs of local tenants. The trailblazers have started to find new and interesting ways to agree what is important to local people, set out how that service will be monitored, delivered and reported to tenants. The trailblazers show that by reducing burdens and extending possibilities, the TSA can create an environment which helps to promote responsive, and better, services.

The TSA has published its regulatory framework for social housing that applies from 1 April 2010. Co-regulation is the name given to the TSA’s new approach. The TSA defines co-regulation as, “Robust self-regulation by the boards and councillors who govern the delivery of housing services, incorporating effective tenant involvement, subject to a backbone of regulation by the TSA.”

National standards are set in the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National standard</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tenant involvement and empowerment</td>
<td>• Tenant service, choice and complaints</td>
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<td>• Involvement and empowerment</td>
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<td>Neighbourhood and community</td>
<td>• Neighbourhood management</td>
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<td>• Local area co-operation</td>
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<td>• Anti-social behaviour (ASB)</td>
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<td>Value for money</td>
<td>• Value for money</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance and financial viability*</td>
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<td>• Financial viability</td>
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*Not applicable to councils
These national standards lay out clear outcomes, which the TSA wants to see all providers achieve. But a one-size-fits-all approach will not meet the varying needs of tenants up and down the country. So providers will be expected to tailor their services according to the needs and priorities of their residents. This marks a big shift: providers will have to ensure they fully understand their tenants’ needs and will need to ensure they are responding to them.

In practice, they will need to consult with tenants on setting local offers against the national standards for:

- tenant involvement and empowerment
- home
- neighbourhood and community

Landlords can develop local offers on other national standards if their residents wish.

All providers must tell tenants how they will put local offers in place in their annual report issued no later than 1 October 2010. The offers must be in place by 1 April 2011. For the trailblazers, the timescales have been challenging: the TSA wanted them to have their local offers in place by April 2010 so that others could benefit from their experience.

The TSA will not be prescriptive about what local means. The definition of local is therefore to be agreed by providers and their tenants. Local could centre on geography, such as an estate or a local authority area, or on demographics, such as older people. This was tested by all of the trailblazers.

The TSA’s regulatory framework stresses that, although the regulator will not regulate the delivery of individual local offers, it will take performance into account as part of its overall assessment of a provider. Providers and tenants will be expected to work together if there is a failure to deliver.

The TSA says providers should explain in their local offers:

- the standard of performance expected
- how performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by tenants
- what happens when the offer is not delivered and what redress tenants can expect
- how and when the local offer will be reviewed
What are the key characteristics of the local standards trailblazers and what services did they cover?

The trailblazer programme was extremely popular among landlords. More than 180 applications were submitted to join the programme. Thirty-nine trailblazers were originally selected by the TSA, although one later dropped out. Grants of up to £9,000 from the TSA’s Tenant Excellence Fund were available to each successful bidder. HQN was appointed to report on the work of the trailblazers and to produce a toolkit to help other providers agree local offers with their tenants. Our work is based on a series of reports submitted by the trailblazers, and face-to-face interviews.

The trailblazers represented a diverse cross-section of landlords in different areas and of different sizes. Around half of the trailblazers involved groups of landlords. The highest proportion of successful bids was led by housing associations (25 trailblazers). Six ALMOs, four local authorities, the Confederation of Co-operative Housing (CCH) and a tenant management organisation headed the others. A trailblazer submitted by the 32-member Bristol Housing Partnership involved the most providers, followed by Hampshire (originally involving 13), Matrix/Accord in the West Midlands (11) and Hillingdon (seven). A full list of the participating landlords is at Appendix one. Numbers of participants calculated at the point of application for all trailblazers and variances were seen during the life of the trailblazers.

The trailblazers tested local offers under the draft TSA national standards. As expected there were some changes in the final standards published after the consultation period, but the work of the trailblazers is still wholly relevant under the final standards. The spread of the trailblazers’ work is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National standard (draft)</th>
<th>Local offer area</th>
<th>Numbers of trailblazers producing local offers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tenant empowerment and involvement</td>
<td>Tenant empowerment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenant empowerment and involvement</td>
<td>Tenant service and choice</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Quality of accommodation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Repairs and maintenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenancy</td>
<td>Allocations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood and community</td>
<td>Neighbourhood and estate management</td>
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<td>Neighbourhood and community</td>
<td>ASB and security</td>
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<td>Governance</td>
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The TSA did not try to define local – this was left to landlords and tenants to decide. Four broad approaches emerged:

**Place** – the local offer made by a group of landlords was based on a place, which could be a local authority area, a town or an estate or neighbourhood. Eleven of the trailblazers were place-based. Midland Heart, for example, agreed a neighbourhood management standard with its residents in Staffordshire, while Town and Country Housing agreed standards for cleaning, caretaking and grounds maintenance in the Sherwood area.

**Demographic** – the local offer targeted the specific needs of groups of tenants, for example, older people or residents of supported housing. Six trailblazers took this approach. Your Homes Newcastle, for example, drew up a standard for sheltered housing residents.

**Organisational** – these trailblazers set local offers for their own stock only, regardless of location. For example, national provider Hanover HA produced local offers for each of its sheltered schemes. Seventeen landlords – almost half the trailblazers – set local offers that applied only to their own residents.

**National** – the CCH produced an accreditation framework encompassing all the standards that could be applied to all co-ops.
How are the trailblazers measuring the impact of their local offers?

The prospectus asked trailblazers to outline the intended impact of their local offers on tenants and how that impact would be measured. The TSA wanted SMART aims, reliable measurement and monitoring, and effective scrutiny to be agreed with tenants. The regulator will not scrutinise local offers, except in extreme cases where standards are not being met and the provider is unable or unwilling to take responsibility for improving performance. The proper place for monitoring and scrutiny to take place is between tenants, providers and their governing bodies.

Nineteen of the trailblazers put local offers in place by 31 March, with substantial progress at a further 14. Three trailblazers have not yet rolled out their offers. We identified around 730 targets that could become SMART across 34 trailblazers. This high number of targets is explained both by the wide scope of the CCH accreditation framework and by the number of trailblazers that set distinct targets for each of the partners involved.

Target setting

The Norfolk RSL Alliance project, led by Wherry HA, aims to set a standard for neighbourhood and estate management in the multi-landlord village of Terrington St Clement. A basket of indicators to measure performance is being selected, based on priorities identified by the resident scrutiny panel. Both the panel and regular estate inspections will help check progress against these targets.

Performance information will be regularly published in a How Are We Doing? leaflet. This will come jointly from the partnership, rather than from each provider to its own tenants.

Most of the targets set by the trailblazers relate to performance improvement (for example, more reliable repairs, better cleaning and reduced anti-social behaviour). Although many trailblazer reports spoke about their work helping to boost tenant satisfaction and landlord collaboration leading to better value for money, there were very few targets in these areas. Reports written by Housemark and commissioned by the TSA may help in this area.1

A trailblazer to boost governance and performance nationwide

The CCH trailblazer seeks to improve the governance and performance of co-ops through an accreditation framework that poses questions and sets requirements across all of the TSA national standard areas. Co-ops will self-assess against the non-prescriptive guidance and submit to external validation. Although designed for co-ops, many of the tests could be applied to any landlord:

- Are there various ways our [tenants] can get involved? Do we regularly find out what our [tenants] think of [the provider] and the services it provides?
- Do the people running [the provider] have the information they need to make decisions?


• Do we have the right tenancy agreement, and do we explain it to new [tenants]?
• Do we have a high quality repairs service that fits in with what our [tenants] want? Do we check how well our repairs service is working?
• Do we have a policy for tackling and preventing ASB and do our systems for dealing with complaints about ASB operate well?
• Are we doing what we can to meet our [tenants’] changing needs?

Each trailblazer was asked by the TSA to set a baseline measure and monitor change from that point. This will be vital for all landlords in monitoring progress. But it can be challenging and the trailblazers have experienced some delays. Providers should consider in particular that:

• consultation with tenants can take longer than planned
• taking new approaches to service delivery may require new baseline measures to be put in place
• all providers need to be signed up to the offer where the trailblazer spans more than one provider

Despite these challenges, baselines are being successfully put in place. The trailblazer led by Wherry based in the village of Terrington St Clement, Norfolk is a good example. This trailblazer, which has set a local standard for neighbourhood and estate management agreed by the different providers with stock in the village and their residents, has involved a comprehensive survey of tenants’ perceptions about their neighbourhood. The project partners will monitor progress through further surveys on a quarterly basis.

The partners explained, “We were unable to directly compare the current performance of the four landlords as information is captured on a different basis. It was essential to carry out a survey of all residents to establish a baseline of data so that future improvements against the local standards can be measured.

“The same problem was found with financial information to identify the total costs of managing the estates. We have developed a costs matrix to monitor the actual costs for the different areas of estate management of each landlord on a quarterly basis over the next year. The information can then be used to identify areas of service delivery where efficiencies and value for money can be gained and evidence the value for money of partnership action.”

In this project, resident survey groups were conducted and identified issues that concerned tenants such as car parking, vandalism, rowdy behaviour and rubbish. The survey included owner-occupiers living in the town. The owner-occupier area of the town is separate from the tenanted part. One aim of the trailblazer is to improve satisfaction with environmental factors in the tenanted section of town so that it is closer to that achieved in the owner-occupied area.
What approach did the trailblazers take to co-regulation? What was the role of the board?

Grassroots engagement with tenants is the starting point for local offers. The new co-regulatory approach must be integrated into providers’ work, so that tenants involved in agreeing local offers can then monitor their success. It was therefore important for the trailblazers to examine how their trailblazer projects linked into their governance structures. Every trailblazer was asked to explain how co-regulation and tenant scrutiny would work in their organisation.

This set a challenge to providers. Many found new ways of engaging with grassroots tenants beyond traditional methods. Many tried several approaches before they hit on one that worked. The allocations trailblazer in Runcorn and Widnes led by Halton Housing Trust, for example, tried several ways of engaging with families with young children before it found a solution which worked – holding meetings in a pizza restaurant. Innovation in grassroots engagement also led many providers to consider how they continue to monitor and assess their local standards. Some started or strengthened existing tenant scrutiny measures, giving tenants the power to call in papers and hold the provider to account for performance.

Trailblazers submitted diagrams illustrating how their local offers would be developed and tested. These are useful in showing the links between formal tenant organisations and scrutiny panels. Some of the panels used expert independent chairs or advisers.

In the Bolton trailblazer, which included one ALMO and six housing associations, there was a prominent role for the overarching Bolton Community Homes Partnership, a partnership of housing providers and residents across all tenures in the town.

At Wolverhampton – a trailblazer involving an ALMO and four tenant management bodies – the role of the council was very important.

Another crucial issue is smooth and timely decision making: trailblazers with groups of providers cautioned that it was vital to ensure decisions got taken at the right level and right time in each other’s governance structure to prevent delays.

Bolton at Home

Bolton’s trailblazer looked to set service standards for tackling anti-social behaviour for different landlords in the area. The table opposite shows how progress will be monitored.

Wolverhampton Homes

Wolverhampton Homes’ trailblazer centred around tenant choice and tenant involvement. Its trailblazer saw tenants and landlord work together to agree local offers improving tenants’ experience when they contact the organisation, for example with an enquiry or a repair. It also offers tenants the opportunity to agree enhanced services, such
## Monitoring progress: Bolton at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross tenure</th>
<th>Bolton at Home (Internally)</th>
<th>Bolton at Home (tenants)</th>
<th>RSLs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCH board</td>
<td>Performance sub</td>
<td>Annual perf. report</td>
<td>Own reporting channels</td>
<td>Anually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCH performance monitoring</td>
<td>ASB staff development</td>
<td>Service quality meetings</td>
<td>Own reporting channels</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASB cross tenure group</td>
<td>Hsg services perf. reports</td>
<td>BATRA meetings</td>
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as individual gardening or enhanced concierge services for their block. The diagram on page 12 shows how tenants have been involved in the process.

Previously tenants' views in Wolverhampton were represented through more traditional tenant involvement arrangements, such as tenants' associations and area forums. The new approach allows for more genuine dialogue. The advantages are:

- scrutiny with teeth
- more representative of all tenants
- transparent over who does what
- allows for varying levels of involvement – tenants can dip in or become more committed
Tenants involvement: Wolverhampton Homes

- National Standards set by the Tenant Services authority
- Local Standards agreed by tenants locally & monitored by the review Panel
- Good practice influencing local standards

- National standards
- Local standards
- Good practice

- Board Governance
- Council

- Tenant review panel participation
  - TMO’s
  - TMO tenant to be co-opted to Review Panel on relevant service reviews

- Two way communication – both influencing each other

- Local 'get togethers'
- Focus/consultation groups, etc.
- Special interest groups

- Leasehold forum
- Grass roots tenants
- Tenant’s & resident’s associations
- ACOV
- WFTA
What happens when things go wrong?

A number of trailblazers recognised the need for formal ways for tenants to monitor local standards and step in when things go wrong. Some developed their own local approaches, but for others this is still an area where more progress is needed. There were early examples of good practice. Calico’s trailblazer involves new local offers on repairs. To monitor the landlord’s performance against what it has agreed with tenants, its tenant scrutiny panel has direct access to the board and the executive team.

Other trailblazers too are ensuring tenants are in a strong position to hold their landlords to account. Stockport Homes has taken a particularly clear approach in its trailblazer, which is focused on tenant empowerment.

At Stockport, all tenant scrutiny panel reports include an improvement plan that goes to the Stockport Homes’ executive team. If the suggested improvements are ‘quick wins’ they just get done. Otherwise, they are properly assessed by the team for Value for Money.

The performance sub-group of the board must then respond to observations, suggestions and recommendations from the tenant scrutiny panel. If the board fails to implement an agreed improvement, the tenant scrutiny panel can serve a notice to act on the board requiring it to take remedial action.

This creates a new line of accountability between tenants and the board. The processes of formal reporting, monitoring and exchanges of information between the tenant scrutiny panel and the board ensure that the activity of scrutiny can be audited. In this way, the reasons for success or failure can be identified, understood and learned from.

Stockport Homes believes that this:

- helps to make housing organisations formally accountable to tenants
- provides a defined framework for challenge and recourse
- supports housing providers to resolve issues before they are referred to the TSA
- provides auditable evidence if the issue is referred to the TSA

Overall this is how Stockport Homes explains its approach to co-regulation, “The relationship between the board and the tenant scrutiny panel will be one of open dialogue in which tenant scrutiny panel improvement plans will be reported to the board and… there will be a fall-back position in the event that improvements are not implemented. The formal process of annual reporting to tenants against TSA standards and local offers will provide a transparent self-assessment on progress that is being made and how any difficulties are being addressed.”

Other providers agreeing local offers will need to ensure they have a fully worked-up procedure for how tenants can effectively hold them to account.
What lessons are there from the tenant empowerment trailblazers?

The TSA wants tenant empowerment to be at the heart of the new regulatory regime. Its tenant involvement and empowerment standard is a crosscutting one, and agreeing local offers in a number of service areas is crucial to this new approach. The trailblazers therefore have some particularly valuable lessons for other providers.

Several empowerment trailblazers brought together tenants from different landlords so they could compare and challenge services from a better-informed standpoint – they knew what other landlords did better, or worse. Examples include the trailblazers from Hampshire, Matrix (in the West Midlands) and Hillingdon.

The work of these trailblazers is similar to the government’s Total Place initiative that asks councils and their partners to collaborate and consider how a “whole area approach can lead to better services for the tenant at less cost”.

Communities and Local Government Total Place:
www.communities.gov.uk

A trial of Total Place for housing and regeneration took place in Durham across the council, ALMO and housing association providers. Durham Total Place housing and regeneration trailblazer:
www.durham.gov.uk

HQN briefing paper – Total Place: Where Next?:
www.teamnet.org.uk

The trailblazer in Hampshire, led by Sentinel Housing Association and involving a number of other landlords and the Hampshire and District Residents’ Forum, aims to involve tenants in comparing performance across the county and playing a more effective scrutiny role. The trailblazer’s objectives, which it aims to achieve by April 2011, are to:

• improve the effectiveness of training and capacity building of residents across Hampshire
• improve feedback and communication about involvement through a countywide website and increased feedback
• increase the numbers of involved residents particularly those from under-represented groups so that services are better tailored
• improve staff’s commitment to resident involvement throughout all of the organisations across Hampshire
• use resident involvement to improve repairs and improvements, ASB policies and community facilities
• increase opportunities for choice for residents
• make resident involvement better value for money
• increase residents’ scrutiny at county level
• ensure the corporate/business planning process reflects residents’ views and aspirations by increasing resident involvement in the process

These priorities were set by members of the forum and verified through a survey of 1,000 tenants across the landlords.

The trailblazer report shows considerable progress towards these aims. Sharing good practice has worked particularly well, with tenants learning from
each other on resident inspection, neighbourhood improvement plans, and involving young people.
The trial should also make a positive contribution to value for money. A desktop review across all the landlords showed big differences on cost and quality and the forum will challenge the poorer performers to do better. A countywide website comparing performance should encourage more residents to ask their landlord to match the best.

Working across so many landlords can pose challenges. Issues identified in Hampshire included:

- maintaining the commitment of all parties (two withdrew, saying their tenants wanted to work just with their own landlord rather than across the county, although they were replaced by one new landlord)
- getting the standards right when landlord performance is mixed – uniform standards can be too demanding for some, but a step backwards for others
- the sheer size of the forum restricted attendance to one officer and two residents per provider – good feedback and consultation were needed to keep a wider group of tenants on board
- ensuring senior management was signed up across all providers (the executive director from one provider headed up the liaison)
- associations in group structures initially found it difficult to provide data for Hampshire
- the time needed to negotiate with a diversity of providers and residents
- overcoming some perceptions between council and housing association residents of the different sectors
- breaking down barriers between, and perceptions of, residents and senior managers
- making co-regulation effective – it has not been possible to involve councillors/board members across the providers yet, though plans are being worked up

A similar cross-provider empowerment trailblazer is running in Hillingdon – one of the partners, A2Dominion, participates in both of these examples. In Hillingdon, five housing associations and the ALMO are involved alongside the local authority. The draft local offer says that:

- all tenants and leaseholders of all participating registered providers in Hillingdon will be empowered to have a collective voice to ensure registered providers provide good housing in the borough
- all communications between trailblazer organisations and tenants shall be conducted with respect and courtesy
- complaints will be handled satisfactorily within a specified amount of days
- the local tenant forum shall be given adequate information to make informed decisions about the strategic priorities of the local housing partnership and the management of their homes

Before the trailblazer began, the ALMO had the most significant tenant involvement in Hillingdon. The trailblazer has successfully engaged tenants from all the landlords through an extensive programme of meetings and events, some tailored for particular audiences such as those with learning difficulties.
difficulties. This trailblazer has identified real benefits from joint working. Its analysis so far says, “Partner buy-in and commitment has been achieved through sharing of responsibilities, expertise and resources within the team. All project members have specific roles and have been extremely generous in their contributions. A2Dominion specialises in tenant quality assurance and provided free training on mystery shopping, Catalyst acts as the critical friend and is developing free scrutiny training for the forum. Hillingdon Homes has provided the publicity material and co-ordinates the transport for tenants’ meetings. Notting Hill is leading on the development of the reporting mechanism with HouseMark. Look Ahead is responsible for equality impact assessments and Paradigm leads on engaging younger tenants.

“There was some reservation at the beginning of the trailblazer that setting a collective local standard may conflict with individual organisational standards and tenant engagement structures. To date this has not materialised. Primarily this is because the issues that the Hillingdon local standards trailblazer is seeking to address are the same sorts of issues that are prevalent within the sector as a whole. The difference is the degree of emphasis that local tenants may put on a particular issue, and the effectiveness of the delivery structure.”

In common with most of the trailblazers, the Hillingdon project refined its scope as it progressed. At first the estate checks by tenants will be restricted to the three areas where the partners have the biggest concentrations of stock. If that goes well it may be extended.

Cross-working between tenants and officers from different providers has opened up new possibilities and new ways of working. In Hampshire participants now know what good practice looks like and use their partners to explain and to help implement how different approaches could work in their organisation. In Hillingdon the approach is to borrow from providers with strengths in particular disciplines. This is a step towards shared services and shows how value for money and improved services can be made possible through joint working on local offers.

The empowerment trailblazers worked with a wide and diverse group of tenants. Home Housing Association involved residents with support needs from Stonham as well as black and minority ethnic residents and those living in a women’s refuge.

In the Matrix trailblazer the offer was adapted for young residents or those with learning difficulties. Several trailblazers suggested effective ways of involving wider groups of residents such as:

- less formal, more interactive and shorter events
- clearer explanation of the role and purpose of the regulator and why local offers were needed
- incentives for young people to attend (prize draws for iPods)
- tagging consultation onto popular training sessions, for example on low-cost cooking/employment training
Given the importance of tenant empowerment across many service areas and therefore in the formulation of many local offers, it will be important for providers to consider some of these ways of engaging their tenants. They will also want to consider the positive outcomes in those trailblazers featuring joint working across a number of landlords.
What lessons are there on tenant service and choice from the empowerment trailblazers?

Improving tenant choice has been a major driver for the reform of social housing regulation. Improving tenant service and choice is a key component of the TSA’s national standards. And several of the empowerment trailblazers were focused on this area. The main lessons were:

- landlords already know a lot about their tenants from surveys and profiling exercises that obtain information about individual tenants (for example, age, ethnicity and disability). A number of trailblazers ensured they incorporated information from tenants’ surveys: the trailblazer led by Wherry in Norfolk, for example, used previous survey information and also ran a new survey of all residents as well as focus groups and drop-in sessions. Home Group’s trailblazer on tenant empowerment featured a number of consultative events and tenant feedback was positive – as one commented, “From the off, it’s all been about us. We have been given the help needed to make sure this is a fulfilling exercise for us.” The challenge for all landlords working on local offers will be to use the information they collect or already have well
- tenants asked for sensible variations and improvements to service – not costly or unnecessary enhancements
- there was a remarkable degree of consistency in what tenants wanted
- the size and capacity of a landlord can affect the way it delivers services – but satisfactory solutions can be found
- there are difficulties in consulting with particular groups of residents, such as young people in supported accommodation, but these can be overcome
- the trailblazers are working on the measurement of the delivery of local standards – some are doing this with HouseMark

Two of the trailblazers – Workington and Wolverhampton – covered several providers in one area and there is much to learn from their experience.

Key learning from Workington trailblazer (Derwent and Solway HA, Westfield HA, Impact, Home and Allerdale BC)

Joint targets were agreed between landlords operating in Workington for tenant service and choice (such as dealing with an enquiry at the initial point of contact or referring it to the correct person and using the information provided by tenants to tailor services), repairs (such as maintaining a record of tenants’ individual needs and using that information to tailor the repairs service) and ASB (such as consulting and working with communities to agree and deliver activities to reduce ASB).

The process of agreeing the local offer is shown in the diagram overleaf. Tenants were involved in a stock take of existing standards across the providers and in deciding on future service levels.

This approach has allowed for a clear focus on the key issues. As the trailblazer explains, “The simple three-step approach provided a clear path...
to the outcome of the trailblazer and the externally facilitated sessions gave an impartiality that was appreciated by the tenants and helped them to achieve what they needed to in the limited time.

“Having a dedicated officer for the project was essential to its success. Each landlord was committed to the project and tasks were shared but there was central co-ordination and communication, which was a huge benefit to the outcome.

“Providers undergoing this process with their tenants need to ensure that the exercise does not evolve into a tick-box exercise, i.e. landlords deciding the local standards and targets then consulting with their tenants.

“The providers of existing ICT resources may not capture the data required to monitor targets adequately for the local standards decided by their tenants so alternative methods of data capture may be required… (mystery or real shopping, sample surveys, etc).

“Keep the approach, the standards and the monitoring mechanisms simple to avoid creating a monster that needs to be fed.”

Key learning from the Wolverhampton trailblazer – Wolverhampton Homes (ALMO), Bushbury Hill EMB, Dovecotes TMO, New Park Village TMC and Springfield Horseshoe Housing Co-operative

At Wolverhampton the ALMO and TMOs compared service levels, used survey findings and met with
tenants to agree local offers. These varied from provider to provider based on the wishes of tenants. For example, Wolverhampton Homes promised to deal with 80% of enquiries at first point of contact, a self-service website, parking schemes and better gardening, Bushbury Hill EMB looked at offering evening appointments for repairs, and Springfield Horseshoe TMC introduced recycling facilities at its offices, as well as promising to work with partners to reduce litter in the area.

All the providers extended involvement beyond previous structures. Previously the TMOs’ involvement strategy had relied mainly on their tenant board members. The tenants’ and residents’ associations of the ALMO were concerned that the new approach could diminish their role – but there have been meetings with the chair and chief executive to reassure them of their continuing importance. The advantage of the new approach is that it will provide scrutiny ‘with teeth’ and will be more representative of all tenants. It also allows for varying levels of engagement from tenants, who can choose to play a limited role or to become more committed.

Wolverhampton Homes’ view is, ‘The flexibility provided by the lack of any definition of local and the tenant service and choice theme made it possible for Wolverhampton Homes and the TMOs to offer an open agenda to tenants in terms of setting priorities that could translate into local standards.

“Although Wolverhampton Homes initially expected to develop local standards for different management areas it has become clear that the outcomes tenants want to see are very similar across the city. However, there are significant differences in how tenants view service delivery arrangements according to their age profile, for example, younger tenants tend to be much more receptive to self-service options via our website than older tenants.

“The vast majority of tenants are not interested in the regulatory framework… They will happily engage in consultation about service delivery issues but the language of co-regulation is meaningless to all but the relatively few tenants that are involved in the more formal structures. We have addressed this by deliberately avoiding the use of jargon… in our consultation with tenants.

“It became very clear very quickly that tenants’ aspirations are relatively modest, so nothing innovative or radical was going to come out of the trailblazer. This might be a concern for the TSA but as managing agents with limited resources, Wolverhampton Homes and the TMOs would not and could not afford to raise tenants’ expectations beyond what we can realistically deliver.”

Good practice was shared across the providers. There are also some useful pointers to the need to be practical about what works for your organisation and tenants.

“We also understood that there are some service delivery arrangements which would not be practicable or affordable to replicate across the partners. For instance, Wolverhampton Homes
operates a telephone contact centre and six one-stop shops for face-to-face payments and enquiries. These are open five days a week (two offices with reduced opening hours) and the contact centre and three offices are open on Saturday mornings. This is appropriate and reasonable for an organisation managing 23,000 homes but not for a TMO managing fewer than 1,000 homes. So when Dovecotes’ tenants indicated that they wanted longer office opening hours there was no expectation that the TMO should look to Wolverhampton Homes as a comparator – they needed to consider what was realistic and affordable for them; ultimately this resulted in their local deal being to open their office a further two mornings a week.” This realism from tenants was common to many of the trailblazers. An honest and open dialogue between providers and tenants allows both parties to work together on what is possible.

A number of the tenant service trailblazers looked beyond general needs tenants. Chapter 1 provides supported accommodation to meet a wide range of needs. Its client base includes single homeless people, care leavers and people with mental health or alcohol or drug problems. For its trailblazer, the association has drafted local offers covering staff spending quality time with residents, house rules, repairs and room allocations across five schemes. A group of residents and staff will visit each scheme to consult on standards, and scrapbooks were given to residents to record good and bad experiences. Residents will be trained as auditors to swap and inspect each other’s schemes.

Because of the difficulty of engaging with some residents, the consultation workshops needed to be participatory from the outset, providing less formal information than might otherwise be offered. Residents were not used to being treated as tenants because of their backgrounds. As most residents stay for six months, there are limits on the ability of Chapter 1 to build residents’ capacity, and residents do not see themselves as having a long-term stake in the organisation.

“The staff can be faced with the residents being aggressive and occasionally violent, the residents can also be disrespectful to staff. The staff, therefore, have to be very clear with the residents on what is and isn’t acceptable behaviour in the hostel and often have to set a level of discipline. Understandably it is difficult (though not insurmountable) then for staff to maintain a level of discipline whilst also empowering residents to challenge the staff and assert their rights as tenants.”

Residents described the sort of staff they wanted as “polite, professional, caring, bring a smile to your face, respectful, treat you as an individual”. Their views – for example, that staff could interfere too much or behave like parents rather than support staff – shaped the project.

The local offers aim to tackle these issues tailored to individual circumstances in five Chapter 1 residential schemes.
What lessons are there from the repairs and maintenance trailblazers?

Repairs and maintenance was judged by far and away as the most important service by tenants who took part in the TSA’s National Conversation consultation. This is therefore a key area in the new regulatory framework and the TSA has introduced a number of requirements, reflecting widely held tenant priorities including the completion of repairs right first time.

Calico and West Kent were among the trailblazers that tried to work out exactly what ‘right first time’ meant. Both used a discussion paper from HQN entitled Responsive Repairs – A First Time For Everything as a starting point.

Although most jobs can be done right first time, some do require a diagnostic visit beforehand, for example if they involve damp, structural problems or one-off replacement doors and windows.

West Kent agreed an offer with its tenants based on working collaboratively with residents to keep its homes in good repair. The agreement commits West Kent to providing an efficient repairs service and making it easy for tenants to report repairs, get a convenient appointment and have their repairs completed to a high standard. Residents commit to reporting repairs promptly, providing access to West Kent contractors and keeping appointment times. Both landlord and provider are expected to pay £20 to the other if they are at fault for breaking an appointment.

Calico’s trailblazer took as its starting point the importance to its tenants of convenience, tenant service, communication, value for money and ‘right first time’ rather than strict appointment times and a box-ticking approach. To redesign its service, Calico surveyed and met tenants before drafting its standard to include the following measures:

- **jobs done as promised** – response repairs that are completed in the number of visits originally agreed and on the appointment(s) agreed
- **repairs satisfaction** – the percentage of tenants who are satisfied that the response repair is completed within the agreed time and to the specified standard
- **tenant statements** – provide tenants with regular repair statements to show how we have performed, to list repairs completed and also to identify repairs that are re-charges
- **commitment to provide a repairs warranty** – for the repairs operative to do the work to a standard, which means that the repair will last a given time period without further breakdown (subject to activity other than normal wear and tear)

As this is a significant change of approach, Calico needs to spend time changing its IT systems to set a baseline and track the new indicator. To check performance against other landlords, Calico will continue to gather and compare the traditional indicators for speed of works categorised as emergency, urgent and routine – although few tenants are interested in this measure.

Giving tenants choice over contractors is the theme of the Hanover trailblazer. Instead of putting in place a national partnering contract with one supplier, Hanover’s tenants wanted local agreements. As the
Sample: Hanover annual repairs statement

This is produced for residents of the Local Agreement. It gives a clear statement of repairs contractor performance for the period.

**Estate: Palace Mews, Belgravia Road, London**

| Scheme number | 0121 |

**Target budget:** £1,500  
**Actual cost:** £965  
**Statement period:** 01/04/2010 to 30/09/2010

| Total number of repairs completed in the year at this estate | 20 |
| Number of Post inspections completed by Hanover staff | 5 |
| Number of Health & Safety Audits undertaken | 2 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contractors used</th>
<th>Number of repair jobs completed in the year</th>
<th>Number of jobs completed on time</th>
<th>Average job cost £ (including vat)</th>
<th>Average performance score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Wrench</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(gen, builder)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivor Leak (plumber)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buzz Lightyear (electrician)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner Stopcock &amp; Co (plumber)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler Slater (roofer)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Pane (windows)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of hours contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs recharged to tenants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average score across Hanover by trade - for comparison against all other estates**
association says, this is ambitious since it manages 632 estates spread over 190 local authority areas.

The repairs service at each estate will be covered by a local agreement setting out the services tenants can expect. This will be sent to every tenant. There are four elements to the new localised repairs service:

- each estate – residents and their estate manager – has the opportunity to identify the contractors they wish to undertake repairs work on communal areas and in their own property
- Hanover will run an accreditation scheme to ensure all contractors are up to scratch and will assist smaller firms to meet the criteria
- residents will be offered a choice of appointment
- all residents will be encouraged by their estate manager to score the contractor’s performance following the completion of a job. This data may be used to decide whether a contractor is retained
- there will be monitoring of financial and performance information through an estate repairs budget and a simple repairs statement sent to all residents

It will be interesting to see how this trailblazer operates in practice, as it is such a departure from recent trends to opt for large-scale partnering contracts. Any landlord thinking of copying this approach must check that they comply with EU procurement directives and achieve value for money.
What lessons are there from the quality of accommodation trailblazers?

The TSA home standard sets requirements for quality of accommodation alongside those for repairs and maintenance. Again this was a priority for tenants consulted as part of the National Conversation. The national standard sets out expectations that tenants’ homes will meet the Decent Homes Standard. Several trailblazers have extended this approach to fit local circumstances including how to plan and deliver major improvement schemes and deliver accessible homes.

Northwards is an ALMO in Manchester that is delivering major improvement schemes. Through coffee mornings and liaison with the carers and families of elderly residents it boosted involvement and awareness with the benefit of virtually eliminating no-access cases. Northwards says that its trailblazer has developed from a service trailblazer to an empowerment trailblazer. It is worth noting that this fluidity has occurred throughout the TSA trailblazer programme. Numerous empowerment trailblazers introduced service improvements, whilst service trailblazers drove greater involvement. This is welcome.

The Hastoe trailblazer tackled the green agenda. Sustainable Homes, a subsidiary of Hastoe, identified an estate for environmental improvements. Consultation took place around a draft standard that was intended to be cost-effective for the landlord and save tenants money. Tenants wanted more done on water efficiency. Twenty homes will test the standard by October.

Bristol Housing Partnership – issues identified in developing the local standard

**The key issues**

**Tenants**
- One point of contact
- Quick decision making
- Rapid service
- Effective communication
- Minimise number of visits
- Be able to keep clean
- Be independent
- Stay put if possible

**Housing associations**
- Increase tenant satisfaction levels
- Reduce risk
- Control over work done to properties
- Value for money

**Bristol City Council**
- Maximise use of resources
- Fairness to all service users – HA/private/council tenants, owner-occupiers
- Shared responsibility for funding with housing associations
The draft standard at Hastoe involves:

- energy-efficient shower heads
- flush savers
- tap aerators
- energy-efficient light bulbs
- radiator reflectors
- water tank jackets
- electricity monitors and stand-by savers
- advice and information available

Although this standard was designed as the optimum blend of environmental impact and low cost, there are doubts as to whether it is affordable for the remainder of Hastoe’s stock.

Another quality-of-accommodation trailblazer centred on adaptations. It is a specific requirement under the home standard that “registered providers shall co-operate with relevant organisations to provide an adaptations service that meets tenants’ needs”. Housing associations across Bristol and Bristol City Council collaborated on a trailblazer around meeting this TSA requirement. Since more than 40% of social housing tenants are disabled or have a limiting long-term illness, the lessons from this trailblazer could be widely applied. Key issues examined by this trailblazer are summarised in the table on page 25.

The draft standard deals with these issues and an extract is shown in the table on page 25.

A common priority for the Bristol partners is to improve value for money. Prices for typical jobs (level-access showers and straight stairlifts) are being compared by all the associations. Joint procurement may be considered to bring economies of scale. Sharing intelligence on contractors will help to pick those that are best able to work in the homes of older people. This has echoes of the Hanover trailblazer, where Hanover wanted suitable contractors for the elderly people that live on its estates.

Shared funding for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) is being introduced. Associations will be able to carry out works themselves as long as their costs are less than the council’s. The aim is for all work under £3,500 to be carried out by providers directly without the bureaucracy of the DFG process.

The Bristol trailblazer offers this advice:

- it is vital to engage tenants, but it takes time to find the right people and they need practical help with transport/electronic links in order to take part in discussions/meetings
- it is all too easy for adaptations to be seen as a technical or organisational issue. It needs to be viewed from the tenant’s perspective and made more tenant-focused
- senior staff needs to be ready to question current practices and be committed to making the changes required
it is important to make sure the standard lifts everyone's performance and does not reduce it to the lowest common denominator. It is also important to recognise that the standard is just the beginning. There needs to be an action plan, and an operations group needs to be established to develop better working practices and to monitor progress.

Home adaptations local offer – housing associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What tenants want</th>
<th>Offer</th>
<th>Performance measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To know what help is available and who to ask | Improving communication with tenants:  
• Single point of contact in HA for all adaptation enquiries – date of first point of contact recorded  
• Know who your disabled tenants are – include disability and the need for adaptations in STATUS and other surveys  
• All relevant staff to be trained to recognise the need for adaptations and know where to refer people in the HA  
• Better information – leaflet, website (adaptations signposted from home page), handbook  
• If the work is likely to take more than a month, tenant will have an HA ‘adaptations advocate’ to make sure they know what is happening at all stages – especially when other agencies involved  
• HA to act as an advocate for residents needing adaptations and use housing officers to make sure that work takes place in a timely fashion and that the resident knows what is happening at all stages – especially when other agencies involved | 95% tenants satisfied with quality of information provided |
| To know what will happen and when | 95% tenants satisfied with how they were kept informed |

Improving communication with partners

• HAs to have a named ‘adaptations officer’ for Bristol (who is a decision maker) so BCC/PCT knows who to contact – and keep BCC/PCT updated if staff change
• All HAs to put telephone number and email address of the key point of contact for their adaptations service on their website
What lessons can we learn from the neighbourhood management and anti-social behaviour trailblazers?

Overall these trailblazers worked well. They consulted widely with tenants, agreed standards and measures and are on the road to implementation. An example of the consultation process comes from Bolton where the ALMO, Bolton at Home, and six housing associations worked together. This partnership approach was not unique. Midland Heart succeeded in getting more than 700 residents involved in shaping its local offer in Staffordshire. There, the association found that “the priorities identified by tenants were common throughout. It made no difference in which local authority the neighbourhood was located”. Keeping neighbourhoods clean and tidy and ensuring tenants felt safe scored highly everywhere. Midland Heart felt that it established a 'real dialogue' with tenants, who could see that their priorities were directly shaping the local offer. Feedback from tenants was positive.

Tenant comments, Midland Heart

“I feel you have covered most issues and I fully agree with everything. I would like to add I don’t feel safe walking at night time.”

“It would be a great achievement if this was looked into further, especially the drug problems and getting rid of excess waste.”

“My husband and I have lived in this house since 1977 and I have seen quite a few changes, some good, some bad. Most people know how to live among others, but a few spoil it for the rest.”

“Any improvements will be good improvements.”

Tenant involvement in setting the standards in Bolton

The table on page 29 illustrates how the Bolton trailblazer has involved tenants in setting the standards throughout the trailblazer.

What is striking about the neighbourhood management and ASB trailblazers is the extent of liaison required with other agencies to develop local offers for this TSA standard. Providers must bring so many organisations on board to make an impact: the police, fire service, council (as landlord, refuse collector and strategic housing authority), other social landlords in the area and contractors (for cleaning, fencing and grounds maintenance).

Social landlords are not the only ones working on ASB standards. A citywide ASB standard might well cut across the efforts of a housing association trailblazer on its estates. Perhaps the approaches at Bolton and Hounslow, where groups of landlords are working together with their councils, is the way forward. This type of approach pools resources and reduces the scope for misunderstandings. Of course, care must be taken to ensure that problems on particular estates are not ignored.

Trailblazers developed local offers that covered similar ground using similar terminology. Several are working on common measurement tools with HouseMark. Offers were agreed with tenants that set the frequency and standards for communal cleaning, grounds maintenance and removing graffiti and fly tipping. Walkabouts and reality
### Tenant involvement in setting the standards in Bolton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Role and involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenants attending Local and National Conversation events</td>
<td>This group of around 50 tenants was able to provide feedback on key priorities for tenants and comments on the draft standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant representative on the project board</td>
<td>As a project board member they were able to ensure the project was delivered on time and to help to ensure tenant outcomes are delivered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant on the project team</td>
<td>By being part of the project team, the tenant representative ensured the tenants’ perspective was heard. They also played a key role in shaping the details of the standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core tenant steering group</td>
<td>The group consisted of two representatives from Bolton at Home and each housing association. Their main focus was to develop the first set of draft standards. Members of the group are being consulted on how they would like to be involved and kept up to date on the performance of the standards now the trailblazer is coming to an end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton Affiliation of Tenants and Residents Associations (BATRA)</td>
<td>Surveys were sent to this group of tenants asking for comments on the draft standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing services tenant BATRA meetings</td>
<td>The tenants attending these meetings have been updated on the project and able to feedback their comments or concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 residents in the Halliwell area</td>
<td>This area was identified as being a hot spot area of ASB within the borough. It is a mixed tenure area and was chosen as an area for consultation. A local event was organised where tenants could call in and comment about the service and the standards. In addition, surveys were issued to all the residents with a high number of surveys returned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants using the ASB service in the last 12 months</td>
<td>More than 100 surveys were posted to the tenants who had returned satisfaction surveys and who were either satisfied or dissatisfied with the service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants attending other events, ie Christmas parties, tenant conference, etc</td>
<td>Surveys were taken to events already planned by housing associations using the opportunity to consult with tenants on the standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
checks are used to test standards with provisions for rectifying failures.

An example of standards for neighbourhood management comes from the Boundary Way estate, managed jointly by Thrive and Watford Community Trust:

Draft service standards for neighbourhood services

**Neighbourhood officer**

- We will publish the name of your neighbourhood officer, with photo and contact details. This information will always be available on our website and on flat noticeboards
- We will write to you whenever there is a change to your neighbourhood officer
- Your neighbourhood officer will be identifiable on the estate as they will wear landlord-branded clothing

**Environmental nuisance on our property**

- We will remove offensive graffiti within 24 hours
- We will remove all other graffiti within two working days
- We will remove bulk fly tipping within seven days

**Estate inspections**

- We will publish details of when estate inspections will take place and write to inform residents, as well as putting details on noticeboards
- Thrive Homes and WCHT will carry out joint estate inspections at least once a quarter
- We will provide feedback on the findings of the estate inspections

**Cleaning in flat blocks**

- Communal cleaning will take place:
  - Fortnightly for Thrive Homes residents
  - Weekly for WCHT residents
- We will publish the cleaning schedule on the noticeboard
- You can expect your block to have this standard of cleanliness once it has been cleaned

**Gardening for flat blocks**

- Communal gardening will be carried out 20 times a year. During the summer season this will take place once a fortnight
- You can expect the communal gardens to be in the following condition:
  - Litter removed from communal garden prior to cut
  - Grass cut and not longer than 5cm in height
  - Paths left clear of any grass

**Repairs**

- We will confirm receipt of a communal repair by placing a label/sign on the repair or on the noticeboard. This will identify a ‘to be completed by’ date
• We will publicise our freephone repairs numbers on the noticeboard
• We will carry out repairs in accordance with our published repairs priority times

In another of the neighbourhood and estate management trailblazers, Town and Country has produced detailed service standards with its tenants and contractors for the Sherwood area. An extract is reproduced below.

Town and Country Neighbourhood Service Standard

A) Managing the green environment
Ensuring the grassed areas, trees and shrubs are well maintained throughout the year. The standards with an asterix are additional to the current contract and will provide an enhanced service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will be done and when</th>
<th>Who</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grass cutting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grass cutting and edge trimming up to 20 times a year</td>
<td>Grounds contractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear up grass cuttings*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contractors to note weather conditions prior to cutting so number of cuts will be subject to review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collect litter before cutting*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remove dog dirt before cutting grass*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tree maintenance: cut back overhanging branches once a year</td>
<td>Grounds contractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear leaves as appropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plants &amp; shrubs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintenance and pruning of plants and shrubs and borders</td>
<td>Grounds contractor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B) Maintaining and improving the hard landscape
Ensuring the paths and signeage are maintained and developed to allow residents to move easily and safely around Sherwood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will be done and when</th>
<th>Who</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weed killing to paths</td>
<td>Grounds contractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintain paths to safe standard</td>
<td>Town &amp; Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide signage as appropriate</td>
<td>Town &amp; Country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An example of a local offer on ASB comes from Bolton and was developed across all the major landlords and their tenants.

Bolton at Home ASB Local Offer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed service standard</th>
<th>Local offer area</th>
<th>How it could be monitored</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Registering your anti-social behaviour complaint</td>
<td>This information is collected via systems were available or manually via appropriate means.</td>
<td>Systems spreadsheets</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We will ask all victims and witnesses for their preferred method of contact and send an acknowledgement within four working days. This will include the:

- case reference number
- name of officer who will deal with the case
- date by which you can expect to receive further contact
- category given to the case

Number of new cases receiving an acknowledgement within four days divided by number of new cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Our response to your report</th>
<th>All new complaints for A cases offered an interview within one working day divided by all A new complaints</th>
<th>Systems spreadsheets</th>
<th>Quarterly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Once you have told us about the problem we will offer you an interview as follows:

- Within one working day if the incident is classed as very serious (example – threat of physical violence or actual violence, serious damage to property, hate crimes/ incidents and domestic abuse)
- Within two to five working days for all other incidents (example – persistent noise nuisance, youth nuisance, harassment/ intimidation and verbal abuse)

Very serious is defined as:

- Threat of physical violence or actual violence
- Criminal behaviour
- Serious damage to a property (any damage which makes property unsafe)
- Hate crime/incident
- Domestic abuse

All new complaints for B & C cases offered an interview within five working days divided by all B & C complaints.
Other incidents defined as:
- Clear breach of the tenancy agreement
- Evidence of drug dealing
- Intimidation/bullying
- Verbal abuse
- Minor breach of the Tenancy Agreement, such as minor damage to the property, garden nuisance or pets causing nuisance
- Noise nuisance
- Youth nuisance

3. Out of hours

If the incident occurs over a weekend or a bank holiday, we will provide a dedicated phone line to give you access to practical advice and we will report the incident to a housing officer for action on the next working day.

4. Removing graffiti

We will remove offensive graffiti within 24 hours of reporting this (example – racist or abusive graffiti).

5. Keeping you updated

We will keep you up to date with progress in relation to your complaint and agree with you how we will do this and how often.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed service standard</th>
<th>Local offer area</th>
<th>How it could be monitored</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Providing support</strong></td>
<td>10% of new cases each quarter</td>
<td>Evaluation forms, Spot checks</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will offer a range of solutions to help resolve your complaint (example – advice and support, mediation or legal action).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Staff training</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Annual spot checks</td>
<td>Annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will ensure our staff have appropriate compulsory training relating to ASB and support including annual ‘refresher training’.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Confidentiality</strong></td>
<td>10% of new cases</td>
<td>Spot checks, Annual survey</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will keep the identity of victims/witnesses confidential when requested.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What lessons are there from the allocations trailblazers?

Three trailblazer projects examined how local offers could be developed for allocations. Although it is not mandatory to consult on local offers for allocations, providers can agree local offers on allocations if they wish and there is much to learn from these trailblazers.

The allocations trailblazers spoke to applicants about their views of the process and the blockages. Next the providers and councils worked out how to streamline applications and make their system easier and fairer for tenants. Key features of these trailblazers included:

• **effective joint working across multiple partners** – the project plans that set targets for each partner were similar to those that we saw on the multi-landlord trailblazers for neighbourhood and community, and tenant involvement and empowerment. No provider is an island

• **involvement beyond traditional routes** – applicants do not belong to any equivalent of a tenants’ association to champion their interests and some may be vulnerable, young, disabled or from BME groups. The trailblazers used a breadth of techniques to make sure all voices were heard. For example, in the trailblazer at Oldham led by Great Places, a local charity called Peacemaker consulted with BME groups. Halton met with applicants at the council’s homeless families unit and the YMCA

The standards agreed in these offers fell into three areas:

• **information** – explaining how a choice-based lettings system works to applicants, guidance on areas properties are located in to help with choices, and reporting on lettings to dispel myths about favouritism

• **accessibility** – using the same application form and ‘no wrong door’, meaning all providers will accept the form

• **support** – realistic advice on when and where applicants will get accommodation with additional support for those that need it

Points of interest from these trailblazers include:

Detailed but practical SMART project plans – these will feature in the TSA local offers toolkit. Targets needed to be achievable by all partners, and this brought a degree of frustration amongst those that could act more quickly.

Working across providers and the council is necessary to achieve better and more consistent services for applicants. As Great Places puts it:

“Allocations is a difficult area to develop standards and partnership working is key; however, this slows down considerably the speed at which you can work. You need to make sure you identify the right people to get involved in the project, allow time to build relationships and factor in any related projects that the outcome of your project is dependent on.”
As with the other trailblazer areas, the task of setting standards became a lot easier when the providers spoke to applicants.

This is shown in the experience of Bromford Group and HomeZone Living’s trailblazer, which centred around the joint initiative for applicants in southern Staffordshire and Northern Warwickshire, UchooseHomes. They said, “At the outset we expected to produce a range of different service standards by type of vulnerability (for example, a learning disability standard, a young people standard and so on). This has not panned out because the feedback that we received from all those that we consulted was consistent across the groups.”

Like trailblazers in other service areas, Halton received a low response to its initial survey. They overcame this obstacle: “Personal contact with tenants such as through focus groups and telephone surveys proved to be more effective than postal and online surveys in obtaining tenant feedback.”

A section of the Halton allocations offer and performance measures is shown to illustrate the approach to target-setting and monitoring from these trailblazers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What tenants said</th>
<th>What tenants want... our commitment to you</th>
<th>What we are aiming for: specific targets to achieve the commitments</th>
<th>The performance indicators/mesures we will use to measure how we are performing</th>
<th>How we will monitor performance – the activities involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Older, disabled and vulnerable tenants may need support when applying for housing and when moving into accommodation</td>
<td>• Allocations staff will be trained to identify support needs. They will be able to either provide support required or signpost tenants to agencies and advocates that can help</td>
<td>• Training completed by January 2011</td>
<td>• Percentage take-up of support offered</td>
<td>• Survey of applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Number signposted for support</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Mystery shopping scenario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Information pack and web-based information to contain details</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Editorial panel role in development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What tenants said</td>
<td>What tenants want... our commitment to you</td>
<td>What we are aiming for: specific targets to achieve the commitments</td>
<td>The performance indicators/ measures we will use to measure how we are performing</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff do not always provide a tenant-focused response to enquiries; sometimes there is a lack of empathy</td>
<td>• Tenant information will be available about the full range of support available and how to access it</td>
<td>• 100% satisfaction?</td>
<td>• Percentage satisfied with how they are dealt with</td>
<td>• Mystery shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff will be polite, helpful and provide a consistently high standard of service to all tenants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Percentage satisfied with how the enquiry is resolved</td>
<td>• Feedback from surveys and complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• On-the-spot exit surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use Voxpod for tenants to report their feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Performance reporting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the allocations trailblazers are involving a wide range of partners and working across a broad front to make their processes more transparent and accessible. An important feature is offering the opportunity for tenants to make informed choices, for example about whether to join a waiting list or through the use of choice-based lettings systems. Also significant is the potential for improving tenant service yet cutting waste and improving value for money, particularly in streamlining applications systems.
Overall lessons from the trailblazers: summary

The trailblazer programme has produced a number of valuable lessons as all social housing providers gear up to produce their own local offers. The programme was greeted enthusiastically by the sector. That is encouraging, given that there were a number of risks in the trailblazer exercise, including:

- a potential sheer lack of interest from the social housing sector as it dealt with other challenges like the credit crunch
- the need for landlords to get to grips with the new, outcome-based standards after years of performing to the KLoEs
- the risk of local offers being over-complex and hard to deliver against
- the potential for consultation fatigue from tenants following on from extensive previous exercises by the TSA and the National Tenant Voice

Our analysis looked at how the trailblazers dealt with these potential pitfalls.

What worked well across the trailblazers?

- The trailblazer exercise was popular with landlords. Many more applied than could be accepted by the TSA. The trailblazers that were selected produced detailed practical reports showing how they consulted with tenants and set local offers. The learning points will be available in a TSA local offers toolkit
- Trailblazers dealt with the big issues that emerged from the National Conversation such as repairs and ASB. Progress was made on developing measures for the TSA standard on right first time repairs. Tough problems like dealing with children at risk and vulnerable adults were also covered
- Residents were engaged in all the trailblazers by participating in surveys, formal and informal meetings, mystery shopping exercises and scrutiny panels. Tenants played a major role in setting and checking offers. Several trailblazers reported that there was a poor response to their initial consultation. Perhaps tenants are showing a degree of weariness over surveys. But in all cases, tactics were then altered and involvement was achieved. In particular, face-to-face conversations and informal meetings helped
- The trailblazers consulted beyond the usual suspects. Local offers were set with housing applicants, tenants requiring aids and adaptations and residents with various support needs
- The trailblazer experience suggests that setting local offers should not be onerous. Tenants requested sensible improvements with predictable variations to reflect demographics. Overall there was a remarkable level of consistency about what tenants wanted, although the precise language used in offers did vary across providers. One large landlord expected to set numerous local offers – in the end tenants everywhere wanted exactly the same priorities addressed
- Landlords worked together effectively to help each other set local offers. Skills and capacity were shared with tenants and officers challenging each other’s costs and standards.
Local authority strategic officers facilitated several of the trailblazers

- Some of the largest housing associations participated in local offers in combinations with councils, ALMOs and other associations. The big players in social housing collaborated well at the local level.
- All of the trailblazers developed targets and measures – so it will be possible to test their impact effectively.
- Self-regulation has started. The trailblazers showed how association and ALMO boards and councillors were able to monitor the delivery of local offers.
- There were no ‘Eureka’ moments. Better execution and integration were the hallmarks rather than innovation. Trailblazer offers were not radically different from accepted good practice. What we saw was better execution at the local level with real tenant engagement. Formal and informal resident involvement was integrated with the governance structures. There was a clear route from the grassroots to the top.
- The trailblazers worked because the staff members running them were incredibly resilient. Technical issues, initial disinterest from tenants, finding new measures of success, and negotiations across numerous landlords were just some of the problems overcome. The can-do attitude was widespread amongst the staff members running the trailblazers.

What challenges do the trailblazers face?

- The main challenge is that the trailblazers must deliver against the targets they have set.
- One of the weaker areas across the trailblazers was the arrangements put in place for rectification. Many need to develop clearer processes for putting things right when delivery falls short against local offers.
- Although the joint trailblazers did work well, it took time to reach agreement across numerous groups of tenants and governance structures.
- The language used in discussing the standards and local offers needs to be carefully monitored. Jargon is not helpful in engaging tenants.
- There were few targets for improving VfM. Arguably, landlords are working on VfM across the whole organisation – but have not broken that down to the level of the local offer yet. Tenants were interested in comparing costs across providers in their area.
- One trailblazer worked on an anti-social behaviour offer for its tenants, which may be superseded by a city-wide standard driven by the local authority. Half of the trailblazers are setting local offers just for their own tenants. This may
well be what tenants want. But do these stand-alone local offers fit with Total Place and the all-party push on localism?

• How will local offers be dealt with in the providers’ annual report to tenants and the TSA? The annual report is one of the main sources of information the TSA will use to inform how it regulates, and the deadline is 1 October 2010. The report must explain how the provider will go about setting local offers and subsequent reports will cover delivery. Larger providers could have numerous local offers, so they need to start thinking about how they can produce reports to tenants that are not too long.

• The sector is used to delivering against the KLoEs. There is an accepted way of doing things, as there is in many industries. Whilst the KLoEs raised standards across the board they can become a straitjacket unless continually updated. Under co-regulation official guidance like the KLoEs may not exist. There are few signs of new players entering social housing bringing new methods. Without central direction or competition, social landlords will need to drive innovation themselves.
Advice on setting local offers to the TSA and providers

HQN advice to the TSA from the trailblazer research – co-regulation so far, so good, but challenges ahead

- Continue to tap into the sector’s enthusiasm for improvement and closer working with tenants. The fact that the trailblazer exercise was over-subscribed shows the appetite for the new approach. The trailblazers produced the goods on tenant involvement and developing measurable local offers
- Continue to work closely with the trailblazers to help roll out the lessons on tenant involvement in service design and scrutiny and on measurement. The local offers toolkit will help with this process
- Work with government to ensure that TSA regulation is properly integrated with the wider policy agenda. Some trailblazers changed tack to respond to government-wide initiatives on ASB. What happens to local offers in the Total Place efficiency drive?
- Continue to remain open-minded on definitions of local. The trailblazers found that tenant characteristics can be more important than place in setting offers. Tenants are more likely to respond well when landlords talk to them about things that they relate to
- Keep flexible on annual reports. Could these span providers for a local area? Should they be tailored to a particular group of tenants? How do we strike the balance between a regulatory document for the TSA and a lively read to stimulate tenant challenge? Breaking down performance to a location or demographic group that tenants relate to is the big opportunity. The trailblazers could be asked for their ideas on how to incorporate local offers into the annual reports
- Encourage and reward innovation. Continue to look for bright ideas on local offers. Make sure these are publicised to providers and tenants
- Regulation must change to reflect local offers – just as a one-size-fits-all approach is wrong for service delivery, it is wrong for regulation. As providers tailor services by area and demographic it will be more complex for the TSA and Audit Commission to form a view on performance. This needs to be thought about in the joint review of inspection. Helpfully, many of the trailblazers are working on common measures for local services

HQN advice to boards and councillors that govern providers from the trailblazer research – it’s your job to regulate

- There is much to learn from the trailblazers and it will be written up in the TSA toolkit – use it. The trailblazers demonstrated that boards can play a key role in encouraging, challenging and scrutinising local offers. Extensive good practice emerged on engaging tenants in the design and delivery of services
- Understand the commitments and targets in your local offers. Track progress and ask tough questions
- Put mechanisms in place for taking decisions and tracking progress where the local offer spans more than one provider. Don’t be the weak link in the chain
• Ensure that the observations from your tenants reach scrutiny panels and get considered and acted on
• Undertake your role transparently and accountably
• Understand that the test of self-regulation is whether you can answer all the questions an outside regulator or a tenant might ask about local offers:
  − How were the local offers set?
  − Are they challenging?
  − Will they deliver what tenants want?
  − Are they delivering?
  − Have tenants noticed the improvements?
  − Are they cost-effective?
  − How do they compare with the offers of other providers?
  − What do you do when things go wrong?
• The CCH accreditation framework suggests a range of questions to assess the effectiveness of governance at co-operatives that could also be used more widely by boards and councillors

HQN advice to managers of providers from the trailblazer research – just do it

• Plenty of good advice on developing local offers and measuring impact came from the trailblazers and is captured in the TSA toolkit – use it
• Tenants are asking for sensible service improvements with predictable variations. The trailblazers showed that setting local offers need not be onerous
• Many trailblazers shared the burden by working together – but strong project management, clear leadership and a commitment to everyone pulling their weight is essential
• Don’t re-invent the wheel. The trailblazers made good use of existing data like tenant profiles
• Don’t make a rod for your own back. Pay attention to the costs and benefits of local offers. A few properly executed improvements to crucial services are preferable to endless half-baked initiatives
• Start writing the annual report – this is the key TSA regulatory test. Of course there are many decisions to be taken on style and content, but you can begin to assemble the raw material now. The TSA regulatory framework suggests the broad areas to cover and the TSA local offers toolkit supplements this. The LGA, trade bodies and consultants are being encouraged by the TSA to produce guidance on the annual report
### Appendix one – full list of the participating landlords

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local standard trailblazer</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Standard area</th>
<th>No. of providers involved in trailblazer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bristol Housing Partnership</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>1: Quality of accommodation (Decent Homes)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spire Homes</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>1: Quality of accommodation (Decent Homes)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Homes Ltd</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>1: Quality of accommodation (Decent Homes)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwards Housing</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>1: Quality of accommodation (Decent Homes)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 (t/a Christian Alliance HA)</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>2: Tenant choice and tenant service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derwent and Solway HA</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>2: Tenant choice and tenant service</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endeavour HA</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>2: Tenant choice and tenant service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Borough of Lewisham</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>2: Tenant choice and tenant service</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Housing Partnership</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>2: Tenant choice and tenant service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wolverhampton Homes</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>2: Tenant choice and tenant service</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Homes Newcastle</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>2: Tenant choice and tenant service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bemerton Villages</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>3: Repairs and maintenance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calico Housing Ltd</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>3: Repairs and maintenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local standard trailblazer</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Standard area</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derwent and Solway HA</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>3: Repairs and maintenance</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover</td>
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<td>West Kent HA</td>
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<td>3: Repairs and maintenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midland Heart</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>4: Neighbourhood and estate management</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Norfolk RSLs Alliance, lead: Wherry HA</td>
<td>1: Service offer to tenants</td>
<td>4: Neighbourhood and estate management</td>
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<td>Local standard trailblazer</td>
<td>Theme</td>
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<td>Bromford Group and Homezone Living</td>
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<td>Halton Housing Trust</td>
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<td>1: Allocations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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We can provide copies in large print, Braille and audio cassette, on request. Other language versions may also be available.
Local standards trailblazers
What has been learned?

This report sets out the progress of 39 local standards trailblazers.

Our new regulatory framework sets national standards that all social landlords need to meet. The national standards are supplemented by local offers, agreed between landlords and their tenants, on the issues that matter most locally.

This report covers the first six months of the trailblazers – the period up until most of them went live with their offers. It covers the main learning points for landlords, tenants and the TSA.