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   Rethinking Aspects of Management and Empowerment
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Resident Participation Structures in English Social Housing:
Rethinking Aspects of Management and Empowerment

By
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Honors in Political Economy

WILLIAMS COLLEGE
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Abstract

Following the media investigation into the Grenfell Tower fire, it became evident that residents’ complaints about fire safety hazards were ignored. There has thus been significant public and media attention devoted to the idea that resident voices are marginalised in social housing provision across the United Kingdom. However, there are structures for resident participation, input, and even direct control at various levels of social housing governance; therefore, it is essential to investigate if these models serve only to legitimize the actions of government while failing to represent tenant and leaseholder interests. Using 23 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants in Arms-Length Management Organizations (ALMOs), Tenant Management Organizations (TMOs), housing cooperatives, and Tenants’ and Residents’ Associations (TRAs) in England, this thesis investigates and compares the extent to which social housing residents experience their involvement in residents’ governance organizations as empowering and effective, referring primarily to the different categories of empowerment conceptualized by Somerville (1998). Overall, residents do feel that they can more effectively assert their interests against those of their local authority or other policymakers when they act collectively. Nevertheless, tenant participation imposes time-intensive responsibilities onto residents whilst local authorities end up as the ultimate decision-makers for large-scale projects. As a result, tenant participation and input is reduced to a legitimizing role in TRAs and TMOs, and primarily marginalized in ALMOs. Existing participants may use resident participation platforms to assert their own interests over those of their neighbours; furthermore, the current political environment and economic constraints on some of these housing
organizations is experienced as demoralizing or disempowering. Resident governance organizations need more support, genuine consultation from local authorities and government oversight. In particular, they need support to expand involvement to a broader and more diverse range of residents, and they need to maintain meaningful control over changes on their estates in order to gain the benefits of empowerment through participation. The national government’s 2018 Housing Green Paper presents an opportunity for creative approaches to resident participation, and this paper highlights the overlap between interviewee perspectives and suggested solutions.

Introduction

Housing Policy and Resident Empowerment: The Past, Present, and Future

The Grenfell Tower fire of June 14th, 2017 in London, which killed 72 residents, aroused concerns about high-rise living, the state of social housing, and the marginalization of low-income communities in the United Kingdom. The fire spawned a widespread discourse in British and international media that renters, especially those in social housing, did not matter to policymakers. Headlines from The Guardian and the New York Times following the tragedy included: “The Grenfell Tower fire was the end result of a disdainful housing policy,” “Grenfell Tower is a terrible betrayal of human rights,” “Would a White British Community Have Burned in Grenfell Tower?,” “Grenfell cladding approved by residents was swapped for cheaper version” and even “Grenfell council may have committed corporate manslaughter”. Notably, the Business Insider published an article with the verbose title, “A damning anecdote shows how the
Grenfell Tower council responded to complaints about noisy Ferraris — but ignored fire safety.”

The shocking aspect of the Grenfell Tower fire was not only the sheer number of deaths in such a highly developed country and wealthy borough of London, but the ways in which safety regulations and recommendations were ignored despite numerous warnings from the Grenfell Action Group (GAG), a neighborhood group who had warned the council and public on numerous occasions since 2013 about the fire hazards in the building (Grenfell Action Group, 2017). The media was also clearly quick to note the demographics of Grenfell Tower residents: disproportionately poor, immigrant, and non-white. The discourse around the Grenfell Tower fire was couched in the emotive language of human rights, racism, classism, and social injustice.

While Grenfell spurred wider public interest in housing safety across the UK and the EU, it was not the only significant tower block fire in recent history. In 2010 a tower block fire in Shanghai killed 58 people, while in 2013 a skyscraper fire in Mexico City killed 37 people (“Shanghai high-rise fire” 2010, “Mexico blast kills at least 35” 2013). Although all of these fires were some function of bad luck, the extent of their carnage was certainly preventable at the structural level of building safety and maintenance (“Illegal work practices” 2010, “Mexico blast kills at least 35” 2013). Nevertheless, in the United Kingdom, renters in social housing are far less likely to live in what is categorized as “poor housing” conditions than private renters or even most owner-occupants, although they are dramatically more likely to live in deprived areas than owners (Ministry of Housing 2016, 24). In general, tenants rights are highly developed in the UK and tenant participation in the governance and management of housing is formalized in legislation such as the Right to Manage, which has allowed tenants and leaseholders in social housing to form elected organizations and take over management responsibilities of their
buildings since 1994 (“The Housing” 1994). The United Kingdom is thus a good case study of what legislated, legitimate, and sophisticated frameworks for tenant participation might look like in practice. As a result, it might be surprising — or disappointing — that some tenants in social housing feel ignored or unheard. Is Grenfell Tower really a “one-off” accident, or essentially a predictable result of systemic, ongoing marginalization of social housing tenants? Do formal frameworks for tenant participation — as established by the Right to Manage — empower tenants enough to make a difference in their living conditions?

Some of the most well-known proponents of social housing in the United Kingdom emerged in the Victorian era, at a time when overcrowding flourished alongside philanthropy and growing concern for the living conditions of the working poor (Porter 1995, 268-278). British historian Roy Porter highlights that although various pieces of legislation such as The Shaftesbury Act (1851) and The Torrens Act (1868) were passed to allow local authorities to demolish slums and erect dwellings for the working-class, no funds were centrally provided, leading to vacant sites and the funneling of government compensation to slum landlords (269). In the absence of government efficacy, charitable endeavors emerged to “moralize” the poor, and housing reform was a pillar of this project, as morality and an “appropriate” domestic life were perceived as interlinked. For example, Lord Shaftesbury founded The Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes in London, aiming to “uphold morality by keeping families together” (271). In 1844, the Society began building houses to accommodate families and single women (271). Later on in the 19th century, George Peabody, a wealthy American merchant residing in London, donated £150,000 for working-class housing on the condition that tenancies were given to “respectable people” or the deserving poor (272). Nearly 20,000 people resided in
Peabody-funded housing by 1897, following strict management rules for collective and individual cleanliness (272). Social housing thus began by private philanthropy, although it generally failed to serve the absolute poorest in Britain as a result of its focus on the “deserving” poor (273). Although local authorities later became the most significant providers of social housing, housing charities — some of which are now housing associations — continued to operate. Today, the Peabody Housing Association is one of the largest and oldest providers of social housing in the United Kingdom (Peabody 2018).

After World War II, the construction of social housing was part of what David Dutton among numerous other political historians refer to as the post-war settlement or consensus: a cross-party and public belief in the “state’s capacity to reduce social injustice” (14). Between the 1940s and 1970s, both Labour and Tory governments developed and maintained a commitment to a welfare state, a mixed economy, and full employment (Marquand 1988, 21-28). The post-war period thus saw a significant expansion of state-funded public housing (Marr 2009, 51-52). This emerged with the post-war Labour government’s platform for expanding social policy, best characterized by the introduction of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948 (Reid 2005, 85). Public housing was slow to get off the ground; Aneurin Bevan, the architect of the NHS and Minister of Health, encouraged local authority construction and limited private building, but could not achieve the government’s promise of 200,000 houses annually to meet post-war demand (85). Nevertheless, the commitment reflects the emergence of social housing as a key priority for the British government, and it would continue to expand in its importance into the 1960s and 1970s. In their 1966 election manifesto, the Labour Party promised to achieve a target of 500,000 new homes per annum by 1969-1970, compared to the average of the
Conservative Party of 310,000 homes per year during 1960-1963 (125). Labour leadership ultimately achieved an average figure of over 400,000 homes during the years 1966-1969, raising the proportion of council housing from 42 percent to 50 percent of the total housing stock (135).

At its peak in the late 1970s, about 30% of Britons lived in council housing (Ronald 2008, 124). Social housing was thus not a fringe or marginal tenure; it was one of the most mainstream housing arrangements for typical working-class families. However, the brink of an economic crisis and the resultant ideological shift in the late 1970s led to the election of the Conservative Party with Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, and the subsequent dissolution of the post-war settlement. The transformation of British politics between 1979 and 1990 was described as revolutionary by Conservative ministers and commentators, and the privatization of everything from railways to tap water did not leave housing untouched (Kavanagh 1990, 212). The Housing Act 1980 introduced the Right to Buy (RTB), which is widely cited as key to the marginalization of the social housing sector (Cole et al. 2015, 9; Murie 2016, 114; Jones and Murie 2006, 154).

RTB gave council housing tenants across the United Kingdom the right to purchase their dwellings at below-market rates. Since the Housing Act 1980, over 1.8 million properties were purchased under the RTB, amounting to around £45 billion in capital receipts (Cole et al. 2015, 1). Undoubtedly, without Right to Buy millions of households would be excluded from home ownership (Carr 2011, 519). It has helped change the distribution of housing wealth over numerous decades (521). Proponents argue that the RTB for council tenants is a good policy because it has increased access to a significant asset among a lower-income population, created a
“social mix” in some neighborhoods, increased neighborhood stability and a self-help attitude among former tenants, and reduced taxpayer expenditure on social housing in the long term (Jones and Murie 2006, 152; Disney and Luo 2017, 53).

However, the poorer sections of the social housing population are increasingly restricted to the worst of estates through processes of residualization, due in great part to the effects of the RTB (Jones and Murie 2006, 154). According to Kleinhans and van Ham (2013), residualization broadly refers to two processes, the first involving a growing concentration of the most disadvantaged households in the social housing sector, and the second a shrinking social housing stock increasingly composed of low-quality dwellings in the most deprived neighbourhoods (105). In general, homes purchased under the RTB policy have a tendency to be disproportionately more attractive and of better quality (Jones and Murie 2006, 64). For example, in the first five years of the RTB, only 3% of purchasers had bought flats, despite a third of all social tenants living in such dwellings (64). The young, the elderly, lone parents, the unemployed, and the disabled are underrepresented among RTB purchasers (Cole et al. 2015, 9). As Hills (2007) highlights, by 2005 less than 5 percent of the richest tenth in the United Kingdom lived in social housing, compared to 20 percent of the richest tenth in 1979 (87). In the first decade of RTB, the proportion of council tenants who were skilled workers fell from 27% to 15%, and during the same time period the proportion of households with an economically inactive head rose by 50% (Jones and Murie 2006, 88). Jones and Murie (2006) thus argue that the generation of households entering the social rent sector after the 1980s entered a “less varied and less attractive tenure” (51). The worst estates have not improved, at least not without displacing existing tenants (Murie 2016, 114). However, King (2010) points out that the RTB
must not be examined in isolation from other policies and economic changes, such as stock
transfer from councils to housing associations and an increasing use of private finance, which
have also transformed the landscape of social housing (72). The marginalization of social renting
also went hand-in-hand with new rights allocated to tenants and leaseholders besides the Right to
Buy, such as the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 which gave tenants and leaseholders the right to
be informed about service charges (Shelter Legal 2016).

As social housing became a marginal and undesirable tenure in the UK, it was no longer
associated with a “respectable” working-class. By contrast, Ronald (2008) argues that home
ownership was reinvented “as the most natural, normal and intrinsically superior way to live”
through the second half of the twentieth century (125). Homeownership was linked in political
and public discourse with values such as thrift and independence (120). Social housing was
increasingly linked with poverty, delinquency, laziness and decay; former Prime Minister
Thatcher described social housing estates as “breeding grounds of socialism, dependency,
vandalism and crime” (Gregory 2016, 346). As of 2014, rented social housing accounted for only
about 17 percent of the total housing stock (Stephens 2017, 1).

Today, the Grenfell Tower fire has helped provoke questions about resident scrutiny and
resident power over their living conditions. The fire was widely cited in news media as being so
catastrophic because tenant concerns about safety standard violations and the quality of recent
refurbishments were ignored by the Arms Length Management Organization (ALMO) in charge
(Power 2017). Furthermore, the ALMO in charge, the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant
Management Organization (KCTMO), encouraged project managers on a recent Grenfell Tower
refurbishment to cut construction costs by almost £300,000 via the use of flammable instead of
non-flammable cladding, noting the need to secure “good costs” for one of the local authority councillors (Architects for Social Housing 2017).

Although the claim that residents in social housing do not have a “voice” appears plausible when examining the events surrounding the Grenfell Tower fire, it is countered by the presence of models of resident governance organizations in housing management (i.e: TMOs, TRAs, and cooperatives) and by a resident presence on the boards of ALMOs and housing associations. In the case of Grenfell, KCTMO was originally a large TMO until 2002, and even as an incorporated ALMO, maintained a majority resident board (Housing Green Paper 2018, 38; KCTMO, “About Us”). Nevertheless, a quantitative presence of resident involvement does not necessarily correspond to legitimate power if it is tokenistic in nature or if resident concerns are unrepresented or dismissed. Furthermore, residents in ALMOs may have different expectations and capacities to effect change than those in other organizations, such as TMOs, TRAs, and cooperatives. It is thus important to examine both the processes and outcomes of resident involvement because tenant representatives may speak for a larger body of residents whose individual efforts may not be as effective as their collective ones. Since social housing residents are voters and rent payers, they carry clout in larger numbers when they seek improvements or repairs from their local councils or ALMOs. Examining clout, however, requires more than just a glance at the number of tenants involved or the formal legislation in place which secures their rights to management or advocacy; residents need to be asked specific questions about why they participate in housing management and advocacy and what they can and do accomplish via participation.
Therefore, structures for social housing governance which involve residents are increasingly important to analyse for three reasons. Firstly, urbanization will continue across the globe, and thus housing governance models will be of relevance for a growing number of people. Especially as cities across the globe become increasingly expensive, forcing many low-income households to move out of the inner city, urban residents have significant incentives to prevent their further economic marginalization and displacement at the hands of gentrification (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 1). Secondly, more meaningful tenant involvement could be a means to secure better, safer living conditions, and even potentially prevent deaths such as those which occurred in Grenfell Tower, as tenants can organize around their collective interests, such as installing sprinklers or non-flammable cladding. Thirdly, participation may be perceived as a good in itself; the direct democracy involved in being part of a housing governance organizations increases the sense of control experienced by participants and may make them feel like their voices matter. For these three reasons, this thesis aims to examine how residents narrate their participation in housing governance organizations, and whether they feel they have power or influence over their living conditions as a result of their involvement.

This project is important because as a socially and economically marginalised group, residents in social and cooperative housing do not have significant resources to exercise choice in housing, as conceptualised by Hirschman in *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1980). To put it simply, residents are often too poor and social housing resources are too scarce for them to move house in the face of challenging living conditions. Therefore, if “exit” cannot be exercised, “voice” must be the alternative. These limitations to social housing resident choice over management services and their quality compared to consumers in other markets is recognised by the recent
Housing Green Paper 2018, which notes that it can be “difficult to switch provider[s] to try a different service” (38). This UK-focused research is not only timely because of the Grenfell Tower fire, but because of the release of this Housing Green Paper. Green Papers are preliminary reports of UK government proposals that are published in order to provoke public discussion. A number of British organizations, such as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and the Local Government Association (LGA), have prepared reports and briefings in response to the Housing Green Paper, which was launched in August of 2018. In some respects, this thesis is also a response both to the Housing Green Paper 2018 and to these recent briefings and reports of TPAS and LGA, as it aims to supplement existing evidence on the importance of effective resident participation.

This research initially began with the intention of examining the extent to which resident participation translates to resident control, hypothesizing that resident participation in TMOs, ALMOs, and TRAs in particular was likely to be tokenistic or a means of legitimizing decisions taken by local authorities, and a means for local councils to absolve themselves of certain costs and management responsibilities by offloading them to volunteer residents. Based off of the media narratives of exclusion and disregard of resident concerns around the Grenfell Tower fire, the relationship between local authorities, ALMOs and residents may be unbalanced and residents may, regardless of formal participation structures, be unable to influence larger local authority projects, such as estate regeneration, via public consultations.

However, the interview data is far richer in insights than initially anticipated; stagnant demographics in resident governance organizations compared to evolving estate demographics, corruption, funding cuts or restrictions on spending, gentrification, and conflicting interests
between leaseholders and tenants, are some of the additional challenges to resident empowerment which emerged from interviewees’ experiences. Most importantly, the assumption that resident control is inherently good for all estates is challenged by the conflicting narratives of interviewees in TRAs and TMOs, who highlight the burdens of excessive responsibilities as a limitation to direct resident control. Not only can direct resident control be a means for offloading costs or responsibilities onto residents; it can be an inappropriate approach if residents are not equipped or supported to collectively manage their estate.

**Tenure Types and Forms of Participation**

In order to examine tenant participation across different housing governance structures, it is important to clarify the differences between social housing tenure types as well as formal participation structures or standard practices for tenant participation. Firstly, a clear definition of social housing is necessary. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government defines social renters as those renting from Local Authorities (including Arms’ Length Management Organizations (ALMOs) and Housing Action Trusts) and housing associations, Local Housing Companies, cooperatives and charitable trusts (Ministry of Housing 2016, 39). Besides social renters, there are also leaseholders in social housing estates who have exercised the Right to Buy for their flats. Traditionally, those wishing to purchase their flat in social housing will retain a leasehold for 125 years, as council flats are not usually sold freehold (Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government 2018). Housing associations were not examined for the purpose of this thesis due to limitations on time and the availability of participants, although they are an extremely crucial pillar of social housing provision in the
United Kingdom. According to the 2016 English Housing Survey: Stock condition, there are now more social homes owned by housing associations than by local authorities (4). In 2016, housing associations owned 10% of housing stock compared to 7% owned by local authorities; by contrast, in 1996, housing associations owned 5% while local authorities owned 17% of housing stock (4).

Different forms of social housing require or expect different levels of tenant participation, or have many different forms of participation available to residents. For example, the cooperative model of housing necessitates the highest level of tenant participation, with the lowest level of government interference. Cooperative interviewees remarked that initial loans from local councils often helped the foundation of the cooperative, but over time, once mortgages were paid off, the cooperative effectively became an independent non-profit entity with little or no interference from local councils or national policy. Mulqueen (2012) argues that contemporary efforts to support cooperatives through legislation or loan provision in the UK confront competing and conflicting aims to achieve commercial sustainability while also promoting social transformation through collective ownership and management (36). As cooperatives rely on little public finance to launch themselves, and rely almost completely on residents to manage the cooperative, there has historically been a cross-party consensus that cooperatives are an accountable and efficient means of providing affordable social housing (Clapman et al. 1987, 207). According to the Commission for Cooperative and Mutual Housing’s 2008 report, Bringing Democracy Home, resident satisfaction in cooperative housing models is higher because “the people who live there democratically own and/or manage their homes, taking responsibility and feeling a sense of belonging, identity and ownership” (Commission on
Cooperative and Mutual Housing 2009, 5). In cooperatives, residents may attend general meetings or join committees to manage their estate’s affairs; the scope of work is wider than in other tenant governance structures and involves significant long-term planning as cooperatives are financially independent.

By contrast, social housing estates managed in whole or part by Tenant Management Organizations (TMOs) and/or Arms Length Management Organizations (ALMOs) are ultimately owned by local councils or accountable to them. Among the data collected for this thesis, the vast majority of Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) also represent council-owned properties or are accountable to local councils. Within a given building, a TMO and an ALMO may share responsibilities, or a TRA and an ALMO may share responsibilities; it is also possible, albeit rare, to have both a TMO and a TRA representing tenants of the same building. An ALMO is effectively a management organization set up by the local council to manage the entirety of their housing stock; hence it is at “arms length” from local authorities. For example, one interviewee in an ALMO described the local council as the “sole shareholder” for the organization. Unlike TRAs, TMOs, or cooperatives, the boards of ALMOs are rarely resident-led or entirely composed of residents; there are independent housing or business professionals and council nominees which comprise up to 2/3rds of an ALMO board (NFTMO, n.d.).

Meanwhile, a TMO is a much smaller body, and is formed on a given estate by tenants and leaseholders who exercise the Right to Manage (RTM) by forming a management committee following a majority vote from residents. The TMO must follow a legal agreement with the local authority to take over the budget and management responsibilities such as repairs and rent collection for the estate (Department for Communities and Local Government 2013, 5).
Although a TMO is volunteer-run, it is described by the Department for Communities and Local Government as “akin to running a small business” (5). TMOs are independently assessed for competence and participants receive training from local authorities (4, 6).

Similarly, a TRA may represent a given estate or neighbourhood, but they do not have significant management responsibilities for the estate or neighbourhood; their purpose is to represent or advocate for tenant interests and concerns by communicating with the social landlord (i.e: the local council) or the ALMO; supervise and inspect management of housing services (i.e: review receipts related to service charges); and to plan community events. However, tenants and residents often follow procedures set by the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) in England to set up their TRAs, and most often follow democratic procedures to select committee members and are run with a constitution (The Association of Residential Managing Agents 2014, 3-4). Some TRAs form Community Interest Companies (CICs) and take over management of some communal social spaces, such as residence halls.

While TRAs, ALMOs, TMOs, and cooperatives vary widely in their size and scope of responsibilities, they all directly involve residents in housing governance and are organizations where the collective interests of residents are voiced or even acted upon, and where residents vote on decisions and take an active role in improving their estate.
### Table 1: Key Differences in Housing Governance Structures Analysed in this Thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Owner</th>
<th>Arms-Length Management Organization (ALMO) Board</th>
<th>Tenant Management Organization (TMO)</th>
<th>Tenants and Residents Association (TRA)</th>
<th>Housing cooperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Housing stock owned by local authority (and leaseholders)</td>
<td>- Housing stock owned by local authority (and leaseholders)</td>
<td>- Housing stock owned by local authority (and leaseholders)</td>
<td>- Housing stock owned by cooperative as a legal entity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance of Residents in Organization</td>
<td>- Board is most often composed of at least 1/3 tenants and/or residents</td>
<td>- Completely resident-run</td>
<td>- Completely resident-run</td>
<td>- Completely resident-run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of Management Responsibilities</td>
<td>- Complete oversight/management responsibilities for the entirety of a council’s housing stock</td>
<td>- Some or many management responsibilities for a given estate</td>
<td>- Some, few, or no management responsibilities for a given estate</td>
<td>- Complete management responsibilities for a given estate (however, responsibilities are sometimes outsourced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlap with Other Tenant Participation Organizations</td>
<td>- May exist alongside TRAs and/or TMOs with overlapping responsibilities</td>
<td>- May exist alongside TRAs and/or an ALMO with overlapping responsibilities</td>
<td>- May exist alongside an ALMO and/or TMOs with overlapping responsibilities</td>
<td>- Independently manages housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope in English Social Housing Sector</td>
<td>- There are 31 ALMOs registered with the National Federation of ALMOs, accounting for approximately 420,000 properties or ⅓ of local authority housing stock (National Federation of ALMOs, 2017).</td>
<td>- In 2012, there were approximately 189 TMOs across England (National Federation of TMOs 2012, 20)</td>
<td>- Data may be incomplete, but across the nine regions of England in 2009, there were approximately 1,171 tenants organisations registered with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service and with the North East Council of Tenants and Residents (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010, 25-31).</td>
<td>- In 2007, there were 243 housing cooperatives in England registered with the Housing Corporation, their statutory regulator; cooperatives held an average of 40 homes (Cooperative Housing International 2019) - The January 21st, 2019 List of Registered Providers names 203 housing cooperatives across the UK (Regulator of Social Housing 2019)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Methodology

Over the course of eight weeks between June 2018 and August 2018, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted in England with members of Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs), Tenant Management Organizations, Arms-Length Management Organizations (ALMOs) and housing cooperatives. For the rest of this paper, these organizations will be referred to as housing governance structures or management organizations. Participants were asked about why they got involved, some of the challenges they faced with their involvement in housing governance, limitations to tenant involvement, and the relationship between their housing organization and the local council (Appendix 1). Besides a convenience sample acquired through online lists of housing providers, participants were also found through an organising meeting in London for the advocacy group Homes4All, particularly tenants who turned to wider political activism out of disillusionment with existing frameworks for tenant participation.

Participants were interviewed in their preferred cafes and in public spaces on their estates, such as meeting rooms or resident halls. Interviews were also conducted over the phone for convenience purposes. Overall, about 37 people responded to emails and in-person requests for interviews via Homes4All, leading to 23 interviews in total. While there is no consensus on a suitable number of interviewees for qualitative research, Adler and Adler (2012) argue in a brief from the National Centre for Research Methods that between 12 and 20 are suitable for undergraduate research (10).

Interviews are not data sources that lend themselves to statistical analysis, but they are the best means of gaining insight into why tenants get involved in housing governance, and whether they assess their involvement as influential or meaningful. A widely-distributed survey
to tenant participants would serve a similar purpose, but it would not allow for the same depth of expression and nuance as interviews. For example, while almost all participants described the relationship between their housing management organization and the local authority as positive, most of them later elaborated on a myriad of experiences with conflicting interests, neglect, or outright apathy from local authorities. Cawthorne (2001) argues in “Identity, Values and Method: Taking Interview Research Seriously in Political Economy” that while the discipline of economics often marginalizes or ignores qualitative work, aiming to understand, interpret and report honestly on what individuals do and say allows for “deep and rich knowledge claims to be made” about the political and economic world (65). So long as researchers are conscious of statistical limitations, qualitative research “destroys all illusions…that the facts speak for themselves” (65). While it is a fact that some types of housing governance organizations (such as TMOs or cooperatives) are more dominated by tenants than others (such as ALMOs), it is only by speaking with participants that any inferences could be drawn about whether or not a quantitative presence of tenants translates to actual power, influence, or tenant satisfaction.

Although interviewees cannot speak for everyone, they can speak for themselves in ways which highlight implications for policy or the future of tenant participation. The people who reach out for interviews might be more willing to speak about their experiences because they feel the most invested in their involvement, or attach more intense meanings or importance to their participation, whether positive or negative. The sample is thus “biased” in useful ways, as it captures the experience of participation of those for whom the experience is worth sharing. This thesis ultimately uses the most appropriate methodology for the topic in question, as it asks
complex questions which can only be answered by those with firsthand experiences of housing governance structures.

**Interviewee Demographics**

The sample of 23 interviewees are divided into organization type and region of England in Table 2 below. The names of all interviewees have been changed for their privacy:

*Table 2: Division of Interviewees Based on Organization Type and Location*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALMO</th>
<th>TRA</th>
<th>TMO</th>
<th>COOP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greater London</strong></td>
<td>Noah (resident)</td>
<td>Logan Amelia</td>
<td>Wendy Joan</td>
<td>Nolan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liliana (resident)</td>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>Abigail</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Atticus (resident)</td>
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<td>Bailey</td>
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<td><strong>South West</strong></td>
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<td><strong>South East</strong></td>
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<td><strong>East Midlands</strong></td>
<td>Donovan (independent)</td>
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<td><strong>North West</strong></td>
<td>Hank (non-resident employee)</td>
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In the table above, names which are grouped together belong in the same organization. For example, three cooperative interviewees came from two different cooperatives in London (Nolan in one, with Abigail and Laurie in another), while the remaining two cooperative interviewees (Samuel and Gabriel) came from a single cooperative in the East of England. The data have a general “South” tilt, and an entirely “London” tilt for TMOs. All 31 existing ALMOs across the United Kingdom were contacted — most of which are London-based — while the sample of TMOs and TRAs came from local authority websites, google maps, and community resource lists available on google searches. This was a convenience sample, as a full list of TMOs in the UK was not publicly available or readily accessible. Some of the cooperatives were contacted randomly off of lists from the Government’s list of Registered Providers as of April 1st, 2018, while others were also part of a convenience sample, contacted due to the researcher’s proximity to London. Housing associations were not initially responsive and would significantly broaden the scope of this paper, thus they are excluded from this analysis. However, it is important to note that housing associations are the most significant providers of social housing in the United Kingdom; in March of 2017, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government estimated that 2.4 million dwellings in England are rented from housing associations, while only 1.6 million are rented from local authorities (MHCLG, “Dwelling Stock Estimates”, 3).

The map below shows the distribution of organizations in England (ALMOs, TMOs, cooperatives, and TRAs) from which interviewees were found. To protect the privacy of the interviewees and their organizations, the dots speak only to the general region; they do not specify exact locations.
Figure 1: Map of Housing Governance Organizations

Altered map is “English metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties 2010”, attributed to Nilfanion and Dr Greg, GNU Free Documentation Licence, Wikimedia Commons.
Each point on the map represents a distinct organization; larger dots reflect the fact that multiple interviewees came from the same organization. Each number corresponds to a particular region of the United Kingdom:

1. Greater London
2. South East
3. South West
4. West Midlands
5. North West
6. North East
7. Yorkshire and the Humber
8. East Midlands
9. East of England

The average age of participants was 53, with a median age of 55. The standard deviation for age is 10.7. Since the sample size is small, outliers have a large effect on the standard deviation; thus it is important to highlight that there were only three participants in their 30s, while there were 17 participants in their 40s-60s, and one participant in their 70s. Ten participants were female, while thirteen participants were male. One respondent identified as black British, one as black African, while the rest identified as white British. Although this may appear to reflect a lack of diversity among interviewees, the sample does not deviate dramatically from general population and social renter demographics. According to the 2012-2013 English Housing Survey, 10% of households in the UK are minority ethnic, compared to 16% in the social rent sector (48). However, within the social rent sector there is significant variation; 20% of local authority households are minority ethnic, compared to 12% in housing associations (48). Considering the small size of the sample and the lack of screening
prior to interviews, the gender and racial/ethnic balance appears to be reflective of the population.

According to the UK government’s survey of income poverty, *Households Below Average Income (HBAI)*, poverty is defined as 60 per cent of the median UK household income. As of 2016, the poverty line for a lone parent household of two children is £15,444 per year (Child Poverty Action Group, 2018). 18.2% of respondents cited income below £15,000 and thus below the poverty line (although, if married, their household income may bring them above this threshold), while at least 50% of respondents would be below the median household income.

*Figure 3: Interviewee Income Data*
Literature Review: Theoretical Approaches to Resident Empowerment

The importance of community and its empowerment has been increasingly emphasized in large-scale estate regeneration policies since the 1990s (Lawson & Kearns 2014, 65). According to Lawson and Kearns, this reflects the UK government’s “favoured mode of governance,” which is characterised by partnerships between the state and civil society where individuals and communities take on more responsibilities to help themselves (65-66). As a result, resident participation has become an “almost ubiquitous” feature of social housing provision across England (Simmons & Birchall 2007, 573). At the same time that community empowerment has increased in political relevance, successive UK governments have pursued policies which have deepened inequality since the 1980s, including austerity measures since 2010 (Shildrick, 2018 citing: Cooper & Whyte, 2017; Dorling, 2017; O’Connell & Hamilton, 2017; O’Hara, 2017; Pring, 2017). Caincross et al. add that the residualisation of the social housing sector and decentralization of housing management has made it more challenging for tenants in social housing to perceive a common interest (197). In this context, empowerment through resident participation, both collectively as a community and as individual residents, is squeezed between favourable political discourse and challenging economic and social policy.

In order to evaluate or examine resident empowerment in the context of participation in housing governance, both power and empowerment first need to be defined. Cairncross et al (1994) use an approach to power put forward by Clegg (1989) to examine tenant participation in
six local authorities in Britain (177). Rather than focusing on what power is, Clegg’s approach is preoccupied with what power does. Instead of any single originating and decisive centre of power, power is a phenomenon that is only grasped relationally and evaluated through structures, processes, and expressed objectives of resident participants (180). A simple definition of power put forward by Cairncross et al. is “the effectiveness of strategies for achieving for oneself a greater scope for action than for others implicated by one's strategies” (180). There are two ways in which residents can resist power or create their own; these are linked to the concept of “obligatory passage points,” or the rules of the game in which power relations are expressed and contested (180). In the case of this thesis, the “obligatory passage points” are likely to be the legislatively designed, formally structured, legal and non-legal entities which constitute housing governance organizations (ALMO boards, TMOs, TRAs, and cooperative committees). Therefore, the first form of resistance to power, and thus relative empowerment, is tenant participation within such mechanisms; the second is to create new power by disputing the “rules of the game” or creating entirely new “obligatory passage points,” such as new forms of resident-led organizations (180).

Community empowerment is modeled by Lawson and Kearns (2014) in Figure 3 below, where the outer circle represents the “wider community,” in this case residents on a specific housing estate or local authority, and the inner circle refers to those involved in a community organization, in this case a housing governance organization (68). Empowerment is thus characterised by three elements which contain multiple components. In order to be empowered as a community, an accountable and democratic housing governance organization constituted of community members must have the appropriate knowledge and critical skills to know how to set
and achieve their goals, as well as the capacity to influence or make decisions which ultimately lead to their goals, as they are able to institute actions directly or engender appropriate actions by others such as the local authority (69).

Figure 4: A model of community empowerment by Lawson and Kearns (2014), p. 68.

Arnstein (1969), on the other hand, uses a hierarchy of participation via the Ladder of Citizen Participation, whereby levels of participation ascend from “therapy” and “manipulation” by local authorities or government, up to full citizen control, which is defined by “partnership”, “delegation”, and “citizen control” (27). By comparison, Somerville (1998) describes empowerment as any process which increases the control people have over their lives (223).
Although defined in terms of increasing choice and freedom of action, the concept of empowerment retains “a necessary element of vagueness” emerging from the abstract general meaning of power (233). Nevertheless, Somerville identifies four forms of empowerment in relation to housing which are useful for the aims and hypotheses of this thesis. The first form is empowerment through knowledge, which means that resident participants must know about the policies and practices surrounding the management and ownership of their homes, and must also be informed about what is happening in their home area, through performance reports of their landlords for example. This can be achieved via legislation, such as the Housing Act 1980 which conferred on social housing residents the right to be informed about their landlord’s allocation policy and to be consulted about proposed changes in management practice (242). Empowerment via knowledge also comes through training and skill acquisition, which can enhance choice and freedom of action in both the housing sphere and other areas of the resident’s life, such as employment. The second form of empowerment identified by Somerville is through statute, where residents are empowered by rights through legislation (244). For example, such rights for local authority tenants include extensive rights of security of tenure, rights to sublet, and rights to carry out certain alterations to their homes (245). Thirdly, residents can be empowered through resourcing, where they are provided appropriate resources to achieve their aims; examples would include budgets for TMOs and TRAs (246). Resourcing, however, is only empowering insofar as residents can freely determine the use of their acquired resources (247). Resourcing is thus similar to empowerment via knowledge, as the more freedom over the use of human capital resources both within and outside of the housing organization, such as managerial or maintenance training, the more empowerment experienced by a resident. Finally, residents can
also be empowered through agreement and power transfer (248). This could entail the creation of tenant management organizations or other contracts between residents and local authorities, where residents take direct control over their housing affairs.

Participation in itself does not necessarily increase the control that residents have in their own lives, if their participation is merely used by the local authority, government, or another institutional body for its own political or economic ends (234). Empowerment in the context of tenant participation is thus not to be equated with direct control, but to the freedom to choose whether to manage or not to manage (254). The empowerment of tenants is not necessarily the aim of politicians: historically, increasing tenant participation has been part of a project to weaken the role of local authorities (254). Klausen and Sweeting (2004) highlight that in part, citizen participation plays a role in legitimating the role of government in society (221). This leads to McKee and Cooper’s (2008) critique of models of tenant participation using a Foucauldian notion of governmentality (132). They argue that a government attempt at empowerment through tenant participation is “itself a mode of subjection and means of regulating human conduct towards particular ends” (132). Therefore, less direct government does not necessarily entail less governing; on the contrary, it merely renders the role of government less visible (132). It is implied that tenant participation is part of both an economic project to place management, monitoring and scrutiny work in the hands of volunteers rather than government employees, and a political project to reconstruct and define the ideal citizen. As highlighted in McKee and Cooper (2008), empowerment is thus a mode of subjection and means of regulating conduct as described by Cruikshank (1999):
When we hear that subjects are apathetic or powerless and that citizenship is the cure, we are hearing the echo of the will to empower... I have argued that the will to empower is a strategy of government, one that seeks solutions to political problems in the governmentalization of the everyday lives of citizen-subjects (Cruikshank 1999, 122–123).

Research from Hickman’s (2006) case studies of tenant participation highlight the presence of consistent landlord control over when and where resident participation is appropriate, leading to the exclusion of residents from strategic decision-making in areas like housing finance, capital and revenue programmes, and regeneration initiatives in their communities (218). While this thesis will highlight the interests of local and national government and how these interests appear to influence existing forms of tenant participation, it is important to note that some residents do achieve their own individual and collective ends through participation, such as the acquisition of education or training which enhances their wages or better living conditions. Their own interests are not necessarily in conflict with the state’s regulation of formal resident participation mechanisms; acting within the “rules of the game” has positive material impacts for residents which may be absent without such mechanisms for participation. Although governmentality provides a useful lens for considering how the state ultimately benefits from resident participation, the approach in this thesis does not foreclose possibilities for residents to both effectively resist government actions or impositions and collaborate with the state to find common interests.
It is essential that resident participants find at least one of the four forms of empowerment outlined by Somerville (1998), or increased control and freedom for their own sake. It is also essential for all individuals to hold the right to participate in the affairs of a democratic state: it is a requisite of citizenship. As Klausen and Sweeting (2004) argue, citizenship is about the right to participate in the welfare of society, and contribute as an individual to the collective (218). Resident participation, when effective and empowering, can extend the participatory meaning of citizenship beyond the realm of local and national elections. Using the insights of Somerville (1998), Lawson and Kearns (2014), Cairncross et al. (1994), and others, this thesis will explore different limitations and strengths of TMOs, ALMOs, TRAs, and cooperative boards, as outlined in the following section.

**Argument and Chapter Synopsis**

As the Local Government Association briefing on the Housing Green Paper 2018 remarks, there is no one-size-fits-all model for resident participation (4). The willingness of residents on a given estate to commit to participation, the resources available to them, the size of their estate, and the severity of the problems they face are just few of many factors which may impact the level of direct responsibility which a group of residents is willing to take on; this will be further highlighted in Chapter 2. It is nevertheless possible to highlight the balance of power among tenants, other members of these organizations, and local councils; it is also possible to locate the political and economic use of such organizations today with respect to the aims of national and local governments, based in part on the perception of resident participants. Most crucially, by highlighting some of the strengths and limitations of each organization with respect
to tenant participation and control, multiple arguments can be made concerning the level and forms of empowerment or disempowerment experienced by resident participants across all models. This thesis postulates that if residents experience their participation as effective, influential, and empowering, they will express satisfaction with their relationship with local authorities and feel optimistic about their potential to effect change through collective action within the “rules of the game”. With greater insight into the motivations behind and the impacts of resident participation, it can be determined if changes to existing models of resident participation, or alternative models of participation altogether, are more likely to leave residents feeling like they can collectively transform or maintain their living conditions.

Using the available interview data, I will highlight four arguments emerging from the experiences of interviewees, one in each chapter:

Chapter 1. Time and Place: The Context of Resident Participation

The housing governance organizations analysed in this paper do not exist in a vacuum; they struggle with an evolving housing market, changing local and national policies which impact their budgets, evolving demographics on their estates, and a higher proportion of leaseholders as a result of Right to Buy. Chapter 1 highlights the extent to which resident participants perceive exogenous factors such as the broader socioeconomic and political context as a challenging operational space to achieve empowerment through participation. The experiences of residents generally match the challenges to social housing presented by scholars such as Cairncross et al. (1994) and Simmons and Birchall (2006).
Chapter 2. Why Some Residents Participate: Defining Self-Interest & Inequities of Power and Participation

There are both vertical inequities between residents who participate and those who do not, and horizontal inequities among resident and non-resident participants in the various housing governance structures. Although every member, resident or not, of housing governance structures is supposedly equal, “some are more equal than others.” While residents are motivated to participate out of an interest in their own home, acquiring management or leadership experiences, and out of altruistic motivations for their community, resident participation is not available or accessible for everyone due to a lack of skills, experience, or inclusive outreach. Furthermore, the influence of some participants in these governance organizations is more significant than others, due in part to their experience and skill.

Chapter 3. “Empowerment” or Free Labour? Conflicting Perspectives of TRAs and TMOs

In practice, there is a conflict between resident management and council responsibility. This is most visible by comparing TRAs and TMOs, and their respective views on the limitations of each model of resident participation. On the one hand, TMOs allow residents to take control of their estate, but on the other hand, councils may be offloading significant responsibilities onto residents who are not necessarily qualified for the role, or who are unable to manage the significant burden on their time and labor. Without adequate oversight and compensation, resident participation can impose an excessive legal responsibility on ordinary residents.
Chapter 4. Does a Residents’ Perspective Matter?: Comparing Consultation & Engagement with Local Authorities Across Models of Resident Participation

No matter the formal structures of resident participation, all participants besides cooperative members feel that the local council is the ultimate authority on decision-making for their estate, or in the case of ALMOs, the entire housing stock. This perspective is primarily a result of a lack of adequate consultation from local authorities and ALMOs. However, resident perspectives are not equally valued across all organizations; in ALMOs, residents must put aside their particular interests or those of other residents in order to achieve the organization’s mission, sometimes at the expense of resident well-being. Nevertheless, residents in TMOs, TRAs, and cooperatives do feel that they are more likely to be taken seriously when they act or complain collectively as an organization rather than as individuals.

Chapter 5. Long-Term Viability and Obstacles to Resident Participation

Residents are generally pessimistic for the future of resident participation due to both the characteristics of prospective participants and challenges imposed by policymakers. They recognize a multiplicity of obstacles to participation, although interviewees cite “laziness” as a key factor in limiting involvement by prospective members. While cooperatives are not worried about financial viability as a long-term issue, organizations like TMOs and TRAs are concerned about how government cuts to funding will allow them to operate in the future. The Housing Green Paper 2018 creates some room for optimism, but overall, existing levels of resident participation appear to be stagnant and at-risk.
Chapter 1. Time and Place: The Context of Resident Participation

Cairncross et al. highlight how exogenous factors, such as central government policy, can change the “rules of the game” at the local level (195). The 1980 Housing Act mandated some consultation with tenants, which has encouraged participation; later, the Estate Action programme pushed local authorities to consult tenants in order to receive central government loans for regeneration, while the introduction of a Tenants’ Charter encouraged local authorities to set targets for housing management services and increase tenant feedback as a result (195). Exogenous factors need not be direct or obvious policies shaping resident participation; they can include broader policies, as well as political, social and economic events and circumstances which impact participation in any way. Simmons and Birchall (2006) highlight the residualisation of council housing and the marginalisation of “problem” estates, and polarised demographics on many estates based on age, where newer entrants lack the same level of commitment to the area as two important contextual factors impacting resident participation (574). Less measurable or tangible factors such as wider processes of social change, inequality, “individualisation” or consumerism, and the changing meaning of community and place alike can also be prospective influences on the level and efficacy of participation (574).

Interviewees across all organizations expressed concern about the impact of the broader political and socio-economic context of housing policy and city development on their
organization’s efficacy and sustainability. The increasing risk of gentrification, rising rents, displacement of low-income residents, and defunding of social housing were noted by two cooperative tenants, one TMO participant, and three TRA participants as risks not only to resident participation, but to the existence of social housing and the livelihood of its residents altogether. In part, interviewees and their organizations were grappling with wider perceptions and treatment of social housing tenants. For example, TRA participant Amelia suggested that since “for years social policies aim to get rid of social homes,” the voice of social housing tenants is neglected due to their tenure status. Amelia believed that homeowners, by contrast, would be genuinely consulted by the local authority, rather than subject to a mere box-ticking exercise. Logan agreed, noting that “certain people will look at you [differently]” when you mention you live on a council estate:

There [is] a kind of feeling that, why should you get any[thing] better? It's social housing, go and buy a place if you want something better.

Although most residents did not solely blame market forces — in fact, at least five respondents emphasized the role of the local authority and the national government in creating such a hostile environment — one TRA participant, Ron, went so far as to call the inability of council housing residents to challenge larger issues on the estate a result of intentional “social cleansing”:

At the moment, I don’t know if it’s a conspiracy theory, but if you look and just watch what’s going on—social cleansing is happening within [the borough].

Ron stressed his frustration with the changing landscape of London as a result of gentrification, leading many council housing residents to be pushed to housing in different parts of England:
The bigger cities, where social cleansing is going on, we see a lot of people are getting referred up North, places like that, and I think it’s unfair to push these people away, where they got no option, away from their birth areas, their family areas, their friends areas to move miles and miles away to put them in deeper poverty.

The use of the term “social cleansing” indicates a perception of intentional harm and a concerted effort at erasure. The term “social cleansing” in the UK-based academic sphere refers to “state-led gentrification,” the origins of which Hodkinson (2018) pins on New Labour’s urban regeneration policies after 2000 and the short-lived “sink estates” demolition policy of David Cameron (17). With the net loss of socially-rented homes as a result of these policies aimed at increasing “social mix” in typically low-income communities, or removing the visual blight of brutalist block towers, “social cleansing” comes to describe the choices that local authorities and national government make in favor of speculative real estate and luxury flats over social housing (17). Hamnett (2017) points out that welfare policy has been described by local authority politicians and charity workers on the Left as “social cleansing” imposed by Westminster (141). For example, cuts and limitations to the Housing Benefit have limited the capacity of social housing tenants to remain in London due to high rents (140-141). Left-leaning mainstream news media, such as The Guardian, have had article titles in the past four years such as “Apartheid London: social cleansing ruined the minestrone streets I grew up in”, “Housing association merger will lead to social cleansing, warn tenants”, and “Vast social cleansing' pushes tens of thousands of families out of London” (Vulliamy 2017, Weaver 2018, Taylor 2015). With the obvious linguistic link to ethnic cleansing, the term “social cleansing” stresses intentionality and implies an experience of trauma.
ALMO respondents had a notably different outlook on the broader political and socio-economic context impacting their work, ignoring the role of private development and gentrification while highlighting instead the impact of social policies and events such as the Grenfell Tower fire. Marcus, a board member of an ALMO in the South West of England, pointed to increasing social awareness and pressure for additional social housing, while Noah, a resident board member in a London-based ALMO, highlighted the fallout of Grenfell, government cutbacks, and the introduction of Universal Credit as challenges for the organization. He tied broader policy changes and austerity measures with his role in the ALMO, pointing not only to his “ambassadorial” tenant role, but a more “practical” one involved in helping the ALMO thrive amidst the broader operational context:

…Of course you’ve got quite a lot of challenges coming up, a lot of pressure on our local housing provider, there’s been a lot of cutbacks in the government. People look around and go, okay, this organization is the last one standing, it is the best-resourced, it provides resources to significant number of people in the borough… I do a lot of research and have a network of my own that I have the organization in touch with, building partnerships here and relationships there… we need to do that more, especially with the introduction of Universal Credit, where the rent is no longer given to us… you know, we are proactively connected. So there is an ambassadorial role as well as a more practical role, suggesting to the executive the things they need to do, or may be useful…to achieve the objectives and the business plan, and putting them in contact with people.

Universal Credit (UC) is a streamlined welfare payment gradually rolled out across the United Kingdom since 2013 (Department for Work and Pensions 2015). UC will fully replace six different benefits across the country by 2023, including the housing benefit and income-based unemployment benefits (Citizens Advice 2018, Revenue Benefits 2018). A 2018 Citizens Advice Scotland study found that administrative delays, the length of time for a first payment, and an overall decline in the magnitude of benefits received by UC recipients has exacerbated rent
Despite becoming involved in the housing board from the perspective of a council tenant, Noah clearly emphasized the ways in which the long-term goals of the ALMO, in terms of the “business plan,” became the ultimate focus of his efforts. The contextual concerns of TMOs and TRAs was clearly highly localized compared to that of ALMOs, who were less concerned with neighborhood and estate-level changes. Nevertheless, tenants in TRAs and TMOs also pinned the cause of their challenging socioeconomic context on policymakers, but extended the culprit to private developers as well. As the following chapters will highlight, these broader issues overlap with the day-to-day challenges facing resident participants, as well as the limitations to distinct models of housing governance.

Chapter 2. Why Some Residents Participate: Defining Self-Interest & Inequities of Power and Participation

**Motivation and Role**

Motivations for participating can range from gaining relevant management or leadership experience, to altruistic motivations around a notion of community well-being. In Simmons and Birchall’s 2006 study of tenant participation, they found that the influence of individualistic incentives was secondary to collective ones, noting that the majority of participants “say they never calculate what they are getting out of it” (587). In their comparison of TMOs and TRAs, they found that TMOs were overall less mobilised by immediate and significant issues, perhaps due to a greater sense of control over their own affairs (583).
Comparably, among TMO and TRA participants in this dataset, motivation to join varied from an interest in getting to know other people in the community to frustration with conditions on the estate. For interviewee Wendy, the motivation to join her TMO was related to a sense of duty and interest in collective well-being, corroborating Simmons and Birchall’s study:

I knew straight away that I wanted to help the environment that I lived in and I wanted to make things better for people.

However, out of ten TRA and TMO participants, seven noted the presence of issues on the estate – such as flooding, a lack of repairs, deteriorating living conditions, and a non-responsive ALMO call center – as key factors leading them to become involved. The approach to these grievances naturally varied between TMOs and TRAs. For example, one TMO member, Joan, noted that she joined a group of residents forming a TMO to see if they could do “anything ourselves for our estate instead of waiting for the council to do it for us.” By contrast, TRA members such as Amelia and Logan aimed to influence their local ALMO for better repairs. It is clear that engagement with a TMO reflects a deeper self-help approach compared to engagement with a TRA, which emphasizes advocacy.

By comparison, the role of grievances as motivation for resident participation is absent from the interviews with cooperative members. In part, this could be attributed to the nature of cooperative housing itself, as it demands consistent resident participation regardless of the existing quality of living conditions. This would fit with the findings of Somerville (1998), who notes that a higher level of resident involvement and strong community institutions will tend to lead to both the formation of a cooperative and more effective management (249). Therefore, if better management performance is “only to be expected” of cooperatives, then it is also
unsurprising that grievances play no role in motivating cooperative members to get involved (249).

Of the five cooperative interviewees, Gabriel, Samuel, Nolan, Abigail and Laurie, three of them initially came across their cooperatives amidst attempts to alleviate a severe housing need, reflected in their search for affordable housing, or their squatting or homelessness prior to joining the cooperative. According to cooperator Samuel, the rent in cooperatives was exceptionally cheap due to the benefits of collective management; therefore, while cooperatives were clearly effective in providing social rents, this was primarily a product of residents’ labor contributions. Although the basic need for housing, and a referral from a friend, a housing association or the local council was the initial stimulus for the interviewees to join their respective cooperatives, many of them noted feeling “a need to help out,” or appreciating the concept of collective management, being their own landlord, and protecting the viability of the cooperative housing model as later motivations to join committees and contribute their labor to the management of the cooperative.

Motivating factors for involvement in ALMOs was more varied than for cooperatives, TMOs, and TRAs; this is due in part to the variety of roles on ALMO boards, like independent and council representatives, which bring required skills and expertise to the organizations. For example, Hank, a non-resident employee of an ALMO in northwestern England, applied for his position competitively as a career choice, but cited the desire to work for an organization that was not “purely profit driven.” Meanwhile, Donovan, an independent member of an ALMO in the East Midlands, applied for and secured a vacant position on the board after extensive experience in a local council and on the board of a housing association.
Unlike the independent members or employees, who had relevant skills or a general interest and experience in housing policy, Noah, a resident board member of a London-based ALMO, sought to “influence decisions” in the interests of residents, including himself, and acquire transferable skills — reflecting the role of resident participation in enhancing employability. Ultimately, Noah emphasized his identity as a council tenant:

So there was a mixture of altruism and self-interest, not only from a career and skills perspective, but I’m also a resident, a council tenant, so I need to understand how these things work — decisions are taken about me, and about my home, so I need to get involved to see how I can influence those decisions.

This notably contrasts with the ways in which most ALMO board members argued that tenant representation is not the primary purpose of resident board members; this is further explored in the subsection on Influence. Noah’s emphasis on understanding how decisions are made reflects a desire for empowerment through knowledge, while the desire to influence those decisions reflects an aim to interact with power through the ‘obligatory passage points’ of the formal ALMO board (Somerville 1998, 241; Cairncross et al. 1994, 180). In Lawson and Kearns (2014) model of community empowerment, influencing decisions is the second component of the Deciding element (69).

**Training & Skills: Both a Benefit and a Barrier**

At the same time that most resident participants in TMOs, TRAs, cooperatives and ALMOs commit time and labor to training for their roles, they gain other personal benefits from the skills and training they acquire. For example, cooperator Samuel was trained to become the maintenance coordinator on his estate, and later gained a job at his local council due to his
volunteering and training at the cooperative. Meanwhile, ALMO board member Atticus valued the opportunity to learn about housing legislation and funding through his training and volunteering. This reflects the multiple ways in which empowerment through knowledge as conceptualised by Somerville (1998) can take place: acquired skills and knowledge can provide both empowerment external to the provision of housing, such as via employment, and internal benefits by increasing participant’s critical awareness of local and national housing issues (Sommerville 1998, 241; Lawson and Kearns 2014, 69). Simply because residents acquire the training to perform the tasks required of participation or even direct control does not mean that they are aware of their complete interests or resources for engendering change, limiting the capacity of participation to serve as a form of empowerment (67). Therefore, acquired knowledge related to housing policy, in addition to skills training, is undoubtedly valuable.

However, the training required to contribute meaningfully to a committee or board and to be empowered by such participation might be extensive. In Simmons and Birchall’s 2006 study, they found that resident participants were more likely to have educational qualifications, training, or previous experience compared to non-participants (581). As Cairncross et al. (1994) highlight, skills and knowledge are necessary to manage both their own activities and to communicate with other “players in the game,” such as other resident participants, housing officers, and the local authority (190). Resident participants must be able to articulate their needs by producing “a logical and well-researched argument” and maintain a constructive dialogue with funders and legislative bodies (188). As a result, to be effective in their roles residents must either join equipped with relevant skills, or gain them early on; this can be an obstacle for increasing broader participation. ALMO resident participant Noah identified the need to “stay focused in
terms of the questions,” and highlighted this skill as something which, as a resident without a direct set of skills in the housing sector, was more challenging:

I’m trying to still acquire [that skill], trying to stay focused in terms of the questions…if you are an independent, you may come with a set of skills that are directly related to the housing sector, whereas as a resident, you are bringing a resident’s perspective, but it is a disadvantage occasionally because you are not working in the housing sector…

Non-resident ALMO employee Hank felt that the amount of time “to feel on the same page, to become familiar” with the operation of the board as a resident (or, in his words, a customer) was about a year, “by which time they will have seen a full cycle of meetings and the process of the big issues such as approving the budget, approving the accounts and so on.” In terms of training for resident members, the ALMO offered a comprehensive induction program, including one-to-one meetings with independent professionals. His organization, unlike many other ALMOs, was able to pay its board members “token amounts, quite small amounts,” and has seen improvements in the quality of board member applicants “measurably” as a result.

Similar to the findings of Simmons and Birchall (2006), most resident participants bring their own particular skills and experience to their committee or board work, beyond those of simply being a resident or skills acquired through training. This was often true among interviewees in cooperatives, TRAs, and TMOs. For example, Abigail’s partner was a bricklayer at the time they joined the cooperative, so he became involved in the maintenance subcommittee; meanwhile, she was a teacher, and would take minutes during cooperative meetings. For TMOs, Jane and Joan both stated that they had no relevant experience before becoming involved with the TMO, but that was not the case for the other participants. Wendy was involved with a charity for almost thirty years, while Bailey was retired from work as a manager in a nearby hospital.
Felix, the Chair of a London-based TMO, is a managing director for an architectural firm. Similarly, TRA members such as Blake, Logan, and Amelia noted a management background. Amongst ALMO interviewees, trends were even more acutely towards professional backgrounds amongst resident participants. Non-resident ALMO employee Hank highlighted that the recruitment of “customers” on the board was competitive, noting that a number of resident participants brought “sophisticated” business management and IT skills to the board. Meanwhile, resident ALMO member interviewees had backgrounds in health advocacy, running a consultancy, a legal background, a business management background, and experience on city council. Although all board members may be “treated the same”, ALMO chair Marcus highlighted that they “do sort of bring their skills” to the table:

[The] first week I was appointed to the board, many board members were required to bring their non-housing sector, inside knowledge, and I had a pretty strong commercial background….and an involvement with people background…[...].... basically each member has [a] strong but different skill set from their experience, and I think we have an attitude where even the tenant board member can [...] arrive at or [become] fully qualified to provide insight.

The prevalence of these highly skilled backgrounds does not necessarily indicate that a specific set of skills or experience is required for tenant participation; instead, it may indicate that while some specific skills (such as bricklaying, management or notetaking prowess) are beneficial for specific roles, overall it is such skilled residents who are more willing or likely to join a housing organization in the first place. This may be due to a lack of confidence as a significant barrier to participation, as indicated in the section “Limits to Participation.” For example, Blake noted that his work experience as a manager instilled a higher level of confidence to handle or manage meetings, while Liliana noted that she was initially intimidated when she joined the board, until she received extensive training and mentorship. The evidence
suggests that these high-skill characteristics of resident participants are actively sought out in part because they are perceived as necessary. According to TMO Chair Felix, although some skills are transferable from his management work to running the TMO, he found that even his management experience did not fully prepare him:

Being a director of the business, I have to deal with different opinions but actually... as a director of a business, all my colleagues are graduates and they’re all professional, they’re on the same page and they don’t take it so personally, whereas this is actually more challenging. It’s a real skill to be able to have had to develop sort of and not with any training. And for anyone setting up a TMO or doing a TRA, it’s probably one of the hardest things to learn and I’ve kind of learnt it as I went along then.

ALMO employee Hank also emphasized the importance of board members possessing a baseline level of skills and broader policy awareness in order to ensure the organization’s viability:

Another specific challenge...is ensuring that whoever is on the board, at a particular time, does have the necessary skills to hold the organization to account and ensure that its finances are run with utmost probity, and largely we do have very skilled members but there's always a need to keep re-scaling, assessing...there may be some change in government funding, change in national policy, some local circumstance that we didn't anticipate.

Hank went on to mention the Grenfell Tower fire as an example where this insight and skill was essential:

...No one could have foreseen [the fire] so we need board members who are able to understand what's going on, what the implications are from a business point of view, what the risks [are], and to be able to translate that into a meaningful debate at board meetings and influence the decision-making.

While not detracting from the social purpose of the ALMO to provide affordable housing, such a comment on implications from a business point of view reveals a financialised orientation of ALMOs towards their “sole shareholder,” the council, and to their “clients,” the tenants and leaseholders. It also highlights the extent to which resident participation is primarily accessible to
residents with particular skills and disproportionately professional backgrounds. This fits more with the aims of local and national government than with any identified interest of residents. As Somerville (1998) highlights, national and local policy often favours the cultivation of an “elite of well-informed skilled residents, who will act on behalf of all the other inhabitants of an area” (255). These resident participants are not representative of social housing residents in general with respect to educational or professional background. According to 2006-2008 data, 4 percent of social housing tenants had degrees compared to 20 per cent or more amongst those in other tenures (Hills et al. 2010, 106). It would be beneficial for the broader community of residents to acquire more knowledge or training, to minimize the gap between the tiers of participants and non-participants (255). At the estate level, this could be achieved via open workshops or more widespread dissemination of information such as the budgets of tenant’s groups and landlord responsibilities, imposing less of a commitment on non-participants while still providing them with the opportunity to be well-informed.

Influence: Some “More Equal” than Others

The cultivation of an “elite” of residents is also evident in how participants perceive the presence of disproportionate influence in their respective housing governance organizations. Although the boards and committees of housing organizations (ALMOs, TMOs, TRAs, and cooperatives) purport to make decisions based on consensus and majority vote, an individual’s influence over collective decision-making is often a product of their skill, experience, social status, or connections. Due in part to the lack of member turnover, term limits, and independent oversight of many housing organizations, individual members in TMOs, TRAs, and cooperative
committees can and do wield disproportionate influence on decision-making. For example, Jane, a former TMO member who was particularly unsatisfied with the TMO on her estate, felt that tenant participation was ultimately a mask for the authoritative control of the manager:

Whenever they say that [a] TMO works, that the tenants are the one that’s running the TMO, that is lying. Who runs it? It’s the manager. You can see in every TMO, the manager that makes the decision, the manager that decides what’s going to go on in them, the manager decides who’s going to get repairs or not. It has nothing to do with the tenants.

Jane argued that although decision making was supposed to be a majority vote, the manager would have her “people” vote as she told them to:

…it was never anyone voting how they believed, no. She [the manager] told them what to do and what to say.

She also noted witnessing potential experiences of corruption in her role of treasurer, such as an unusual expenditure by the manager for a decorator who collected £11,000 for 8 weeks of work. Jane claimed that after questioning the certification of the locksmith hired by the TMO manager, who she described as “kind of like a nephew to the [housing] manager,” she was pushed off of the board. Although Jane’s noted experience of her housing manager’s corruption and nepotism is exceptional among interviewees, other respondents noted disproportionate influence among specific resident members. TRA Chair Ron noted that he has “more energy and more force,” or more leverage to move forward with issues or complaints as well as a close link to the local council due to his particular role in the TRA as the Chair. In Nolan’s cooperative, elections for committee positions are generally uncontested, and the cooperative has maintained the same treasurer for at least 15 years. Nevertheless, unusual influence in the hands of specific individuals seemed not to be a primary concern for most resident participants in TRAs, TMOs,
and cooperatives. Overall, disproportionate influence is difficult to assess as the interviewees themselves may be influential individuals; regardless, there is room for resident participation organizations to better assess their internal dynamics to ensure that influence is exercised broadly across residents rather than concentrated in a select few.

Meanwhile, in ALMOs, it is often professional skill and experience that creates additional influence; therefore, while there may not be any majority of a specific group on the board, independent members tend to dominate in essential committees like investment and risk, and hold the final word over new policies or practices, subject to approval by the council. While resident board members in ALMOs may be an “elite” relative to other residents, they are often subordinate in terms of influence within the ALMO board due to a relative lack of skill. In total, three ALMO interviewees noted that independents were particularly influential, due to their expertise. This sentiment is best highlighted by ALMO member Noah:

I think there is probably a hierarchy — an unofficial one, of course we are equal, but some are more equal than others — residents are somewhat disadvantaged by that, but I think resident board members are not just there to reflect the resident voices, although that is part of their role. I think some people, just by nature of their knowledge, their experience, their network, etcetera, are better connected or more influential. Perhaps [that’s] just the way it goes, but I think that’s the same with any board — so I don’t think that’s particularly unique. Boards do tend to choose people who are actually of use, and therefore some are more useful than others.

In part, this hierarchy is due to the purpose and role of the ALMO, which participants emphasize is to maintain the confidence of the council, their sole shareholder. The capacity of resident board members to represent the distinct concerns of tenants and leaseholders is limited; in the words of ALMO board member Donovan, tenant representatives were not there to “represent their next-door neighbour or their own interest,” but are instead responsible to the ALMO and
ensuring its financial success. Therefore, independent housing professionals are highly valued for their management and financial expertise, which resident members may lack. Regardless, some resident board members emphasized that the influence of independent members does not negate the role of residents; for example, Liliana argued that all members of the board are held to the same expectations, which was why board members received extensive training. Meanwhile, Noah also concluded his remark about an unofficial hierarchy with a clear caveat:

That doesn’t mean that tenants are not included, it just means that... they must satisfy the confidence of the shareholder...that’s how it is.

As ALMOs manage the entirety or large swathes of a council’s housing stock in the long-term, it is perhaps unsurprising that expertise must translate to influence. This nevertheless comes at some expense to tenant power if tenants do not hold the same skills as independents, even if it is perceived by resident participants as irrelevant. Furthermore, due to the size of the management unit, the gap between ALMO board members and the majority of residents in the borough is such that any individual resident participants on the board cannot exert control in any meaningful sense over the needs of a small group of properties (Somerville 1998, 249). That is, in effect, the role of the executive, while the board oversees strategy; however, as highlighted with evidence from interviewees in this section and from previous studies such as Hickman (2006), residents tend to be absent from strategic decision-making processes in areas like finance and investment (218).
Leaseholders vs. Tenants: Conflicting Interests and Unequal Influence

Residents in social housing estates, and therefore resident participants of ALMOs, TRAs and TMOs, may be either leaseholders or tenants. Demographics on estates have changed drastically in terms of tenure type since the introduction of the Right to Buy in 1980. Across TRAs and TMOs, the relationship between leaseholders and tenants varies widely, leading to disparate impacts on resident involvement. TMO member Felix and former TRA member/current ALMO member Atticus both noted that leaseholders are typically interested in keeping their service charge low, leading to a conflict of interest between council tenants and leaseholders, since the former relies on the council or an ALMO to cover the costs of estate-wide renovations. Felix argued that leaseholders could, in some TMOs, assert their own interests to secure lower service charges, leading ultimately to less maintenance or fewer services. He remarked that the issue of conflicting interests may not have been so prominent in his TMO because there were no major works undertaken on his estate since he moved there. However, he expected this to change in the near future:

I think we probably will have some major works in the next five years and that will be a good test...obviously, leaseholders will be concerned about it much more so than tenants...It comes down to the money really. It’s the main thing.

If we are concerned with tenant participation as opposed to the broader, leaseholder-inclusive category of resident participation, these conflicts of interest are a risk to tenant empowerment because leaseholders can (and in the case of some of the case studies in this paper, do) dominate resident participation organizations like TMOs and TRAs, and resident positions on ALMO boards. In Felix’s TMO and Liliana’s ALMO, leaseholders were overrepresented compared to
tenants. Felix alluded to both the economic and educational inequalities between leaseholders and tenants as prospective factors leading to their disproportionate levels of participation:

I think education is the big background difference, to be honest, with some of the leaseholders…because of where we are, you know, [...] in London, it’s a lot of [...] graduates and leaseholders typically.

Resident involvement thus seems to partially mirror that of larger citizen participation structures, such as the arena of local and national government, where financial and human capital tend to be overrepresented amongst political representatives.

Wendy and Joan corroborated the notion of tensions between leaseholders and tenants by highlighting their estate as an example, while Logan and Amelia noted that such tensions were present in other TRAs, although not the one on their estate. Joan pointed out that since the TMO is responsible for much of the repairs and maintenance on the estate, the relationship between leaseholders and the TMO could be strained, since leaseholders paid their service charge in a lump sum. Atticus highlighted potential dangers from such a structure of leaseholder payments, noting his frustration with a local resident engagement panel where leaseholders would bring their individual grievances about their service charge, detracting from the aim of the panel to address general problems such as flammable cladding. This experience fits with incidents widely noted in online news sources such as The Guardian, Talk Radio, and Inside Housing, where leaseholders across England have fought against significant service charge hikes imposed on them in order to remove flammable cladding (Booth 2018; King 2018; Hollander 2018).

In addition to this conflict of interest around service charges, Wendy noted that she felt her TMO and her community was at risk from an increasingly large proportion of leaseholders
moving onto the estate. Although Wendy herself is a leaseholder, she argued that many new leaseholders have weak investments in the community:

> Most of the leaseholders, now they are people that never lived on the estate, but they've moved on the estate, either from a foreign land or they have money, because there’s no way they can buy this flat…

Crucially, she argued that they are less neighbourly, implying that their participation was more self-interested than that of other residents:

> They’re all here, [the leaseholders,] and they’re like okay, you’re spending my money, I’m going to come and see what you’re doing…but then they’re not neighbourly like me…and they’ve got other agendas.

These divisions between tenants and leaseholders are visible in single-family, homeowner-dominated neighborhoods as well. For example, Lisa and Mason’s TRA in the South East of England is entirely composed of homeowners, despite the presence of social housing on the street. In the past, their TRA did have local social housing residents in it, but that was no longer the case. With respect to obstacles to resident participation, Lisa remarked, “I think renters are surprised that we exist at all.” She noted that the TRA did make attempts to include the nearby social housing residents, but they were not receptive:

> When the newsletter comes through their letter box, they automatically assume that it’s somehow not for them…we’ve tried very hard to make sure they know it's for them, we actually have at the top of the newsletter, we have the logo of the [housing] association there.

In the case of Lisa and Mason’s TRA, there is no apparent tension between homeowners (or leaseholders) and social housing tenants in the nearby housing association, but divisions based on tenure type are present regardless. While there may be reasons unrelated to tenure differences for the absence of social renters in their TRA, the fact that Lisa suspects these residents
“automatically assume that it’s somehow not for them” indicates a perception of tenure-based divides or tensions in the community. This could hint at class-based divisions, as the mean gross weekly income in 2013-14 for owner-occupiers was £798 compared to only £315 for households in social rented accommodation across England (Department for Communities and Local Government 2014, 33). As a result of economic and social inequality, social renters may not perceive of a common interest with homeowners in the neighborhood, and therefore have no incentive to join a homeowner-dominated TRA.

**Internal Dynamics & Decision-Making**

Resident participants in estate or residence-level organizations must balance both the professional expectations or responsibilities of their involvement while living in close proximity to neighbours they may be attempting to serve, represent, or work with as part of their involvement. The internal dynamics of these organizations thus impact the relationships that participants have with their neighbors, for better or for worse; as a result, tensions can become more personal in cooperatives, TMOs, and TRAs than in other non-housing or estate-based organizations. According to cooperative respondents, decision-making in cooperatives is often done by consensus and on rare occasions by majority vote, with all residents permitted to approach the committee to add items to monthly meeting agendas. Two interviewees noted that the personal nature of living with other members of the cooperative could make participation challenging or undesirable. For example, Nolan highlighted that the constant close proximity to people in his cooperative is a deterrent for participation:

> I'm always a little bit apprehensive about doing anything where I would come into conflict with them because they’re my neighbours. That’s part of the co-op and some people have learnt how to rubble on with it, and they talk with their neighbours, and then they sit on a committee and act like nothing's happened.
Whereas other people would say, I don't want to be on that committee because so and so is next door.

Meanwhile, Samuel noted that in his cooperative, there is a mediation team of residents who intervene with conflict resolution strategies when there are disagreements among members. It is not a popular role among residents because of the personal nature of the work; Samuel noted that the perfect time to join would be when you “just move there,” because “you don’t know anyone.” Similarly, some residents may hesitate to join the committee because they “don't want to have to deal with upsetting people” when an individual’s interests clashed with that of the entire cooperative.

In at least four TRAs and TMOs, attempts from residents to dominate meetings for their own particular issues were also an occasional challenge, but at the same time, the personal, neighbourly nature of TRA and TMO work could be an asset to both committee members and tenants. For example, Ron stressed that the purpose of the TRA to engage only with estate-wide issues rather than individual issues was actually, at times, a limitation or a hindrance. He highlighted an example where he ignored this expectation by assisting an elderly woman whose apartment was not properly heated in the wintertime. Individual issues were the responsibility of the local authority, to be contacted by the tenant; however, for some tenants like this elderly woman, connecting to the local authority about such problems is an insurmountable challenge:

When you’ve got a tenant that can’t get out, or can’t get anywhere, or [has] no support network, and this particular lady is on the disabled-side as well... it’s an issue you have to take out with the local authority, call them here...[and ask,] Why hasn’t this been done yet, why have you not been around?
Meanwhile, TRA member Logan noted that as many of the housing offices in the area had closed, residents with mobility challenges could struggle to contact the ALMO, especially those who were digitally excluded. Therefore, in both Logan’s and Ron’s case, their TRAs served as a lifeline for residents who required assistance to assert their needs for repairs or maintenance. TRA members like Ron and Logan, known on their respective estates as simultaneously helpful neighbors and TRA members, are both a formal and informal source of this assistance. Similarly, Blake noted that his involvement in a TRA has allowed him to meet his neighbors, something which had proved to be a challenge on the estate despite living there for seven years. At the same time that organizations like TMOs and TRAs could be conceptualized as a collective “self-help” approach to housing issues, they can also be conceived of as support networks which foster a sense of mutual aid and community. Relationships and encounters with other residents blurred the formal lines of TMO and TRA work and at times crossed into social, informal engagements or activities. This implies that some of the benefits of estate-based organizations are immeasurable, as some assistance or support occurs through informal or casual channels; at the same time, there is additional pressure on participants, as setting boundaries on time or labor may be more challenging among neighbors or personal connections.

The internal dynamics of ALMO boards are necessarily different from that of other housing governance organizations due to their composition of members. Typically, ALMO boards consist of resident members, council nominees, and independent members. Independent members tend to bring specific financial, housing or management expertise to the board. Nevertheless, there is some variation; for example, Hank’s ALMO had no council nominees, with accountability to the council set up through meetings and discussion forums rather than
direct council representation on the board. Out of eleven members, only three were residents, or “customers”, while the rest were either professional independent members or “stakeholders”. A stakeholder, in his words, was someone who could demonstrate a local connection to the area; the stakeholders at the time of the interview were a chief executive of a national housing body, an employee of another housing provider, and someone with a local authority affiliation. The constitution of the ALMO was designed in such a way as to ensure that no particular group — stakeholders, professional independents, or residents — could have a majority of the board. While in theory no single group could dominate, it should be noted that based on Hank’s description, the stakeholder members appear to be quite professional in their background. The choice of the term “stakeholder” over “independent” appears to legitimize their presence on the board, as it suggests the existence of some type of current or former work or residential connection to the area. Semantically, this appears to place “stakeholders” on an equal level with residents, who are obviously significant stakeholders themselves; however, “stakeholder” does not indicate the professional background of these board members.

Marcus’ ALMO, with a slightly more traditional board composition, had more independent board members (5) than residents (3), but only two council nominees. Donovan’s ALMO consisted of three independent members, three council nominees, and three tenants. At the time of the interview, Noah’s, Liliana’s, and Atticus’ board was composed of 15 members, including six independents, six residents, and three councillors.

The regulations of all ALMO boards tend to undermine the possibility of a majority of any group, although they share a common aim, described by interviewees as overseeing “the strategy and the mission” of the ALMO, or “to influence or determine strategy, to monitor
performance and to monitor and ensure compliance with legislation.” Board members may be expected to bring their particular expertise or experience to the board, but with an ultimate common goal of keeping the executive members of the ALMO accountable and meeting performance targets. Decisions are most often made by consensus on ALMO boards. While these practices and norms appear to suggest that ALMO boards are an environment of tenant empowerment, most are, out of the same regulations aimed at equalizing all members, inherently set up to ensure that residents cannot have a majority; they are also thus driven to set aside individual concerns to meet the mission in the interests of the “sole shareholder.” The primacy of serving the council’s interests reflects the ultimate control of the landlord, in this case, the local authority, over tenant participation and empowerment. Clearly, the interests of the shareholder trumps that of the stakeholder.

The limits to resident control illustrated here and in the section on Influence speak to McKee and Cooper’s (2008) critique of models of tenant participation using a Foucauldian notion of governmentality, where participation is a means of subjection, serving the particular ends of government (132). That being said, a resident majority board is not necessarily the solution by any means; KCTMO was, after all, a rare ALMO with a resident majority. In general, the “arms-length” aspect of ALMOs limits their capacity to act on the real interests of residents when they conflict with those of the local authority; this opens the question of whether or not the role of ALMOs should be broadened, or if residents need a larger representative body at a level beyond their estate in parallel to the existing ALMO structure.
Chapter 3. “Empowerment” or Free Labour? Conflicting Perspectives of TRAs & TMOs and the Evidence of Time

TRA vs. TMO: Too much power or not enough?

The 2018 Housing Green Paper expresses an interest in gaining more information about the effectiveness of TMOs for local authority tenants (38). Through different models of tenant participation, there are different “obligatory passage points” through which the power relationships between the local authority and resident participants are expressed (Cairncross et al., 180). Simmons and Birchall (2006) compare TRAs and TMOs in terms of their effectiveness in achieving various success factors identified by Kelly and Clarke (1997), including equality with providers in terms of influence over housing services, provision of information to residents, and resource access, and conclude that TMOs tend to enjoy more successes, although sometimes only marginally (591). The legally binding contract between TMOs and their local authority prospectively places them on a more “equal footing of mutual dependency,” while TRAs are limited to the catharsis-value of contributing input without action (591). However, the findings of this thesis are more mixed: while TMOs may come out ahead on key measures by virtue of
their additional control, interviewees expressed clear reasons why a TMO was not ideal for their particular estate, or even as a general model of tenant participation.

Interviewees revealed a conflict between TMOs and TRAs as ideal models of tenant participation, as each model stresses a different balance of resident control and council responsibility. On the one hand, the TMO model is not only a means for tenants to take control of their estate, but a means for local councils to absolve themselves of the responsibility of management work, as some labor is offloaded to resident volunteers who sit on a TMO committee. As numerous academics highlight, extensive participation or resident management can merely be a tool for the government’s own ends (Lawson and Kearns 2014, 67 citing: Banks and Shenton, 2001; White, 1996, as well as McKee 2008, McKee and Cooper 2008, Somerville 1998). By devolving autonomy and control to volunteer residents, local government also devolves the responsibilities of citizenship, and in the case of housing, welfare provision (McKee 2008, 25-26). Interviewee and former TMO member Jane was conscious of the potential gains to local councils by outsourcing management to volunteer-run TMOs:

It’s easier for them. It gets rid of the problem. One problem less for them to deal with it.

As a result, she felt that the local council was dismissive of tenant concerns, and redirected residents to the TMO for repairs:

...If anything, if you complain about a repair [to the council], [they say,] oh, you’re on the TMO, you gotta go there.

Overall, Jane did not feel that non-TMO residents had any voice about conditions in their house, because “the TMO is not their friend.” With respect to the local authority, Jane described their
relationship with the TMO as “a joke.” She went on to elaborate on the lack of oversight and accountability:

> Because they give the TMO too much power....the TMO is not following their rules, [but] they have a management agreement...the council doesn’t have any power over her to say, ‘Oh, you’re doing this, you’re doing that wrong,’ because they gave them the full power to do whatever they want. So, I believe the only way that TMOs can work if they change the rules and...be more strict with TMOs.

She felt that TMOs needed a stronger threat of cuts to their allowance in order to curb corruption, but ultimately concluded by arguing that TMOs should be banned. Jane tipped the balance of the debate towards more council responsibility:

> It’s extraordinary that you should spend your time running the estates whereas in fact, the local authorities should be running your estate. There is a rule for a TRA, a tenants and residents association, to supervise the council but I think that with the TMO, invariably, in the long run, is a bad idea.

By contrast, TMO member Felix, who characterised his experience as Chair of a TMO in highly positive terms, also emphasized the need for increased oversight of TMOs. He noted the importance of “checks and balances” and council scrutiny in TMOs to ensure that the Chair or the manager was not “embezzling the money.”

> In addition to the lack of oversight from the council, TRA members like Amelia also argued that TMOs place significant management responsibilities on residents who were not necessarily qualified to deal with them; as a result, she argued, some TMOs have made serious financial mistakes. Amelia also remarked that TMOs can pit tenants against each other, as well as leaseholders against tenants. Logan added that most TRA members are working full-time jobs; as TMO work is a more significant voluntary commitment, it can be inferred that the TMO
commitments are unrealistic for working-age tenants. This fits with one of the limitations to tenant participation structures raised by Hickman (2006), who highlights a case study where the complexity and intensity of tenant participation structures left “enormous” demands on tenants and their time (220).

Interestingly, some interviewees confused Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organization (KCTMO) with a TMO rather than an ALMO, and therefore cited the Grenfell Tower fire as another example of why TMOs were a poor model of housing management. For example, Amelia remarked:

We don't want to manage the property, and after Grenfell, I don't think anyone wants to be a TMO.

A different TRA member, Atticus, made a similar remark on why residents opted for a TRA rather than a TMO:

Personally, there’s no way I’d want to be involved in having that pressure of that legal entity or responsibility. Especially because I’m pretty certain that the organization that was responsible for Grenfell was a TMO. No thanks!

Although interviewees incorrectly believed that KCTMO was a TMO, they were correct in identifying TMOs as significantly more formal, executive housing management bodies. As a legal entity with a management contract with their local council, the role of TMOs goes beyond a mere communication bridge between residents and an ALMO. One TMO interviewee, Joan, felt that as a result of the TMO’s independent management responsibilities, they had less of an active relationship with their local council. As TRAs rely on the council completely for services on their estate, they appeared to be more integrated with the council’s work; therefore, Joan suspected that TRAs “would also get a lot more information” about services or maintenance on the estate. In summary, the lack of council oversight and communication, the burden of
management on unqualified tenants, and perhaps even the (misguided) reputational issues of TMOs since the Grenfell Tower fire, are all perceived as weakness of the TMO model, especially by TRA members. In general, the model reflects an offloading of council responsibility onto voluntary workers, arguably a mechanism of budget cuts under the guise of resident empowerment. Furthermore, Somerville (1998) would add that such radical transfers of power tend to “lock” tenants into their particular arrangement, with difficulties arising in changing to a different type of agreement (Somerville 1998).

These perceived weaknesses of the TMO model and respective strengths of the TRA model are not necessarily indicative that TMOs should be replaced; TRAs are comparatively weak in what they can accomplish, and many TMO interviewees stressed the same benefits of self-management as cooperative interviewees. For example, TMO member Wendy emphasized the idea of community self-sufficiency as a valuable aspect of tenant management:

I like being in a community, I like the idea of us running our own estate...I think we can do it cheaper and I think we can do it better [than the council].

When the council or ALMO is overstretched, tenants with a budget can potentially resolve issues more rapidly than they could when complaining as individuals or as a TRA. When Felix got involved on his estate, there was only a TRA at the time. However, residents were increasingly concerned about the “poor quality of repairs” and the call center which managed resident complaints. As Felix and other members of the TRA approached the council, they were directed towards the possibility of managing the estate:

I think we were talking to the council around that time and they said, ‘Have you thought about how you could change that?’ And we said, ‘No, what are the options?’ And we talked about service level agreements and we talked about TMOs and after probably about a year or two, we eventually, in 2012, started [the] TMO.
The supportiveness of the council in encouraging the tenants to start a TMO can be read as a means by which the council could improve resident satisfaction while reducing their own commitments to residents. Regardless, moving towards a TMO structure enhanced the legitimacy of the TRA in the eyes of the council; it reflected an active commitment to the estate among residents, and a willingness to commit additional effort to its well-being. Felix expressed that the legitimacy of the TMO itself was a factor in pushing the council to withdraw a planning application in the community which was proposed without resident consultation:

*Interviewer:* Do you think if you [the residents]...weren’t sort of a strong TRA moving towards a TMO, just sort of a group of tenants on the estate without any sort of formal structure, [you] would have been able to resist that planning application?

*Felix:* Unlikely, to be honest. I think it was a combination of the TMO itself and some very active residents...we, the TMO, had to remain officially neutral, but we were very supportive of the residents who were fighting them on social media.

Although TMOs may not be able to resist larger projects, they certainly have more freedom and flexibility than TRAs to resolve issues on their estates. TMO member Joan, for example, believed that TMOs were more effective for the estate because of their larger budgets, as TRAs merely held “bit of pocket money.” There are evident problems with the TMO model as it exists in practice, including a lack of oversight, training for residents, and compensation for the significant labor commitments that TMO work can entail. However, these issues are rectifiable; they do not necessitate the elimination of TMOs. Keeping both the TRA model and TMO model is valuable because different estates, depending on the level of tenant organization and
community cohesiveness, the efficacy of their local council, and the severity of their specific problems, may benefit more from one model over the other.

As the Housing Green Paper points out, housing management comes with significant responsibilities and liabilities that are not ideal for every resident’s circumstances; residents’ groups need support to build skills and a commitment to sustain their involvement over time (38). Residents can take on partial responsibilities on a voluntary basis through Local Management Agreements, and this could be better promoted as an alternative to TMOs for TRAs seeking more, but not extensive, responsibilities (38). Overall, residents in both TRAs and TMOs need choice over contractors for their estate; the Housing Green Paper suggests the routine provision of a list of approved contractors for tenants to choose from for repairs and improvements as a prospective policy implementation (38). As the Local Government Association Briefing on the Green Paper argues, there is no “one size fits all” model of housing governance that is suitable for every or any estate (4). In general, enhanced oversight of the resident organization must be coupled with better resourcing.

**Time Commitment: Resident Participation is No Casual Hobby**

The efficacy of resident participation is undoubtedly some function of the time residents commit to it. However, an intense time commitment may be a deterrent for residents who would otherwise be interested in exercising more control over their housing. Time commitment is also an indicator of the labor costs saved by government by devolving responsibilities to resident volunteers, particularly in TMOs and ALMOs. The voluntary time commitment of resident participants in ALMOs, TMOs, TRAs, and cooperatives is highly variable, ranging from as low as a couple of hours per month to almost 30 hours per week. Noted time commitment was most
consistent amongst cooperative interviewees, averaging just under two hours a week for committee or maintenance work plus monthly subcommittee meetings, with one exceptional resident noting 5 to 10 hours a week of volunteer work. General meetings for TMOs and TRAs ranged from every four weeks to every eight weeks, while noted time commitment outside of meetings included extremely variable answers, such as only one hour per week, 0.5 to 1.5 work days per week, and the far extreme of half of the entire work week. There is certainly no way of confirming the veracity of these claims, but they indicate that participants at least perceive of their commitments as highly time-intensive and they are all certainly making, to varying degrees, significant personal trade-offs in other uses of their free time in order to participate. TRA Chair and resident Ron, for example, who was spending between 0.5 and 1.5 work days per week for the TRA, acknowledged that as a father and grandfather, he had to be careful not to overdo his involvement at the expense of his family. By contrast, cooperative member Nolan described the amount of time he committed to the cooperative as “very little” because much of it “never actually felt like work.” For example, when he was on the selection committee, they would review applications over coffee, which felt like a social gathering.

Time commitment was also highly variable in ALMOs, ranging from two hours per month to an extreme high of 25 to 30 hours per week. Some respondents noted that time commitment was inconsistent on a week-to-week or month-to-month basis, and others added that there was significant preparation required for board meetings, with one respondent noting up to 300 pages of required reading in order to participate in a productive board meeting. Since resident participants may not have the same relevant expertise as independent or council members to easily navigate technical readings on housing policy, they may be disproportionately
burdened. Full board meetings were, however, less frequent than committee meetings in TRAs and TMOs, occurring for multiple respondents only every two months.

These findings on time commitment indicate that participation is not accessible for every resident, perhaps even for most, on the grounds that the level of required commitment is unpredictable and often extensive. This may at least partially explain the reluctance of tenants in previous studies to take on management responsibilities, and corroborates the findings of other studies where tenants have expressed exhaustion with the extensive time commitment of their voluntary participation (Somerville 1998, 250; Hickman 2006, 220).

Chapter 4. Does a Resident’s Perspective Matter?: Comparing Consultation & Engagement with Local Authorities Across Models of Resident Participation

From Bottom Up: The Relationship Between Residents (in Cooperatives, TRAs, TMOs) and their Local Authority or ALMO

According to the Housing Green Paper 2018, the social housing sector has been increasingly taking steps to improve engagement between landlords and residents (36). As highlighted by Cairncross et al. (1994), tenants’ representatives will often meet resistance from their landlords when their perspectives diverge, resulting in what Clegg would refer to as an exercise of “agency” power by residents (193). This occurs when one agent attempts to cause another agent, such as an ALMO or the local council, to do something they otherwise would not do (193). Power is exercised by individual agents who act intentionally based on their own interests (Clegg, 41-44) Local councillors can resist such attempts by drawing on their
democratic legitimacy, their own party or other councillors, and the resources of the council itself, while housing officers or board members in ALMOs can draw on their professional experience and connections (Cairncross et al., 193). To some extent, councillors and ALMO members rely on support from residents for their own legitimacy, whether they are elected or appointed, and this interdependence in terms of support can help residents achieve their own objectives (193). Since the local authority or an ALMO are most often favoured by the “rules of the game” for resident participation due to their considerable advantage in resources and capacity, the state of the relationship between resident participants and the council is crucial for resident empowerment.

Cooperatives, however, are not nearly as reliant on their local council as TMOs or TRAs. All cooperative interviewees described the relationship with their local council in positive terms, with most noting that beyond an initial capital grant from the central government in the 1970s-1980s and the occasional consultation about new projects in the community, the relationship is minimal in scope. Nevertheless, many cooperatives need to take nominations from a local council housing waiting list as part of their agreement for an initial capital grant, and at times this requirement could be a minor source of tension. Conflict or tension does arise from the basis that cooperatives and local councils use different criteria for allocating housing. For example, Nolan’s London-based cooperative allocates one bedroom per resident, whereas council housing tends to allocate a bedroom per couple. Other issues arise with the co-operability of people who are nominated from the council housing waiting list; for example, Nolan highlighted one man from the local council housing waiting list who expressed a heterosexist attitude during an interview with the cooperative and as a result was rejected:
We said, okay, so we’re going to stop the interview here, because you may be living in a house where someone is gay, someone [is] Christian, someone who has one arm.

In general, the cooperative has the final say over allocations in their building, as they conduct interviews with all prospective members. Nolan felt that because the local councillors and the cooperative were both “quite left-wing,” they could see eye-to-eye and accept the cooperative’s final say. Nevertheless, a relatively hands-off, positive relationship with the council does not necessarily mean that all cooperators felt that the council valued their housing model in the community; Gabriel, for example, felt that half of the council “kind of regret allowing [the cooperative] to be set up,” as developers and the council seemed increasingly interested in gentrifying the area. Taking up prime real estate with the right to own more land, the cooperative limited the opportunity for local developers to build high-cost accommodation for a wealthier class of residents. He noted that on a previous occasion, the cooperative’s bid for council land was rejected in favour of luxury condos.

Amongst TRAs and TMOs, the verdict on the general relationship between their respective housing organization and the council was mixed, with more tension and conflicts than in cooperatives. Like TMO members, TRA members generally described their relationship with the council or ALMO in positive terms, but they nevertheless highlighted a consistent pattern of challenges in communication. Among TRAs, these communications challenges arose from both failures to inform residents of relevant developments or events on the estate or borough, and from soliciting information or feedback from residents. It is notable that these concerns are slightly different and more limited than those of TMOs, indicating how salient problems vary
among residents from one model to another. A comparison of issues noted by TMOs and TRAs is presented in the table below:

Table 3: Issues Noted by TMOs and TRAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAs</th>
<th>TMOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty receiving a response or solution from the local authority/ALMO about concerns on the estate</td>
<td>Difficulty receiving a response or solution from the local authority/ALMO about concerns on the estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ On Blake’s estate, the ALMO allegedly neglected complaints of scaffolding on the estate for 12 months.</td>
<td>→ Unless, according to Jane, “you get a councillor involved” or a solicitor in which case “you might get a little bit lucky” with a response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Logan and Amelia’s TRA consistently complained about fire safety violations of the ALMO-hired construction team, only to be ignored: “We have to report again and again, as we were promised that every night they would do checks before they leave the building, but again and again, stuff is left that blocks the doorway, blocks the fire escape, blocks the stairways.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failures in informing residents about relevant construction/maintenance</td>
<td>Lack of oversight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Without supervision, Jane stressed that councils enable corruption within TMOs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Logan and Amelia noted that the council failed to inform residents of construction work and would be unresponsive to questions.

→ Unequal relationship with local councils, leading to unfair expectations

→ Joan highlighted that when the local council was responsible for allocating an empty flat, their policies allowed them to spend up to 6 weeks doing so, but when the council designated the filling of a void as the TMO’s responsibility, the TMO was permitted only 2-3 weeks to allocate the flat.

→ Open stigma towards council housing residents

→ Felix, as an architect in his day job, highlighted his experiences with stigma, where housing professionals would note that he was “remarkably well informed” for a council housing tenant:

“As an architect, I design affordable housing so, most of my clients are the same people who I meet [as Chair of the TMO]...there is an attitude that, you know, residents on the council estate and tenants particularly, don’t know what they’re talking about and housing professionals, of course, they will disagree with that in public. I think there is an attitude that, you know, residents on council estates, you can often pull [wool] over their eyes.”

One TRA stood out for its two interviewees failing to note any concerns about their relationship with the local authority; this was the homeowner TRA in the South of England. The two interviewees, Lisa and Mason, described the relationship between the TRA and the local authority as “very good,” with Lisa noting they will “actually consult on anything.” These discrepancies are in part due to the nature or extent of interaction with the local authority; like
cooperatives, this particular TRA was financially independent from the council. By contrast, social housing residents who engage with TRAs and TMOs face limited choice in the housing market with less room to maneuver in terms of service providers than homeowners or private renters (Housing Green Paper 2018, 38). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the two interviewees in a homeowner TRA, although certainly a small sample, did not express the same types of grievances with their local authority as did social housing residents.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of ALMO board members, their relationship with residents, including those in resident participation organizations, was generally positive and backed by consistent and supposedly effective feedback mechanisms. Feedback mechanisms noted by ALMO members included tenants’ panels, annual door-knocking exercises, customer experience reports, and monitoring of complaints from feedback teams and performance committees in ALMO boards. There is a clear divergence between the ALMO and resident perspective on their efficacy in informing, responding, and consulting residents. However, some resident participants in ALMO boards were aware of this divergence; resident ALMO board member Noah, for example, attributed this divergence to a lack of understanding among ordinary residents about the constraints faced by ALMOS:

I think if you are an ordinary resident and you are not aware of [the financial constraints]; it means that you are asking for things that can’t be done. But on the other hand, [when you join the ALMO board] you become aware of what can be done and what is being done, which is a really exciting and interesting opportunity.

This reflects the importance of empowerment through knowledge; with the awareness of how ALMOS operate in practice, residents can make more reasonable, logical demands for services, information about housing policy, or transfers of control. Noah’s comment indicates that while
such information is accessible to ALMO participants, this is not necessarily the case with other resident participants in different organizations. The Housing Green Paper 2018 argues that the UK Government’s preferred approach to increasing tenant empowerment involves increasing transparency for residents over the performance of their landlords, such as local councils, through measures like key performance indicators and league tables (38). The availability of comparative information is valuable, but resident organizations must also have a clear sense of how their ALMO spends the budget for their borough. While these organizations have some access to public information about ALMO budgets, there is room for ALMOs to work closely with TRAs and TMOs in their borough to better highlight the availability and meaning of this information. As a result, the relationship between TRAs/TMOs, and ALMOs would benefit from the increased understanding of the financial context in which ALMOs operate.

ALMOs and Local Councils: At Arms-Length or at Fingertips?

ALMO respondents described their relationship with their local council as positive, often indicated by the length of their management agreement, but ALMO interviewees nevertheless did highlight significant tensions. As ALMOs are expected to provide consistently high value for council funding, there are inevitably issues if ALMOs fall short of expectations. At times, however, ALMOs are not kept truly at “arms length,” resulting in questionable interference from the council. Resident board member Marcus highlighted an instance where a vacant position on the board was contested between an insurance executive with ideal skills for the position and a former council member, who would have merely duplicated existing skills on the board. After hiring the insurance executive, the recruitment panel faced backlash from the council, leading
eventually to the chief executive of the ALMO offering a position to the former councillor. He perceived the event as a breach of the integrity of the board.

Other ALMO interviewees, like Noah, felt that tensions arose around what the local authority understood to be the capacity and role of the ALMO, but that this varied drastically between officers with a developed understanding of the ALMO and what new politicians want or expect. Adjusting to a new political reality, the ALMO needed to strike a balance to satisfy new councillors while continuing their role:

If you are going to be a developer you need to build new homes…but you also need to be addressing the issues: the fallout of Grenfell, universal credit, and a variety of other things, so it’s about being able to do what you need to do, as well as building the new homes the administration committed to.

He felt that the extent to which the council consulted the ALMO about relevant decisions “could probably be better.” He drew a distinction between consultation and informing, notably corresponding to different rungs on Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969):

I think [the ALMO] is viewed quite rightly by the council as a provider, so I think we are consulted, but sometimes, you know, we are informed…

He remarked that the council might consult the ALMO about changes to planning policy and services, but not necessarily about social work or issues with impacted residents in ways that the ALMO was dealing with indirectly. For example, indirect issues could include cuts in broader community services which limit the ability for some residents to pay rent. East Midlands board member Donovan also noted that regardless of the level of consultation provided by the council or the views of the ALMO, it is “clear that [any policy change] is [the council’s] decision.” As a result, the ALMO had to adapt to decisions that seemed “not very sensible” to the board.
London-based Liliana also reiterated the ultimate decision-making power of the local authority, stating that “they are the people with the finances; we are their managing agents.”

From Noah’s perspective, it was partly the responsibility of the ALMO to ensure its profile was sufficiently high to ensure that the council would contact them proactively and consult them about policy or development changes. This indicates that some ALMO members have internalised the hierarchical relationship between the ALMO as a provider for an ultimately decisive shareholder; the ALMO board’s authority or perspective is marginal by comparison. It is therefore no surprise that KCTMO preferred low-cost, flammable cladding on Grenfell Tower; it needed to bring “good costs” to the local authority (Architects for Social Housing 2017).

Since ALMOs are not organizational bodies in which residents can effectively assert their interest over that of the local council, their empowerment within ALMOs appears to be primarily limited to the domain of knowledge, although resident input may have some value for ALMO boards as well.

**Consultation and Authority: Who Makes the Ultimate Decision?**

In Hickman’s study of tenant participation in the 1990s, it was clear that local authorities aimed to retain power and control over the approaches to tenant participation used in their borough (222). Lawson and Kearns (2014) and Fuller et al. (2008) similarly highlight inequalities in the bargaining position of residents and local authorities, noting that communities are subject to consultation and community development as a “tick box control mechanism” or “tick box exercise” where the views of residents are collected but ignored (Lawson and Kearns 67; Fuller et al. 273). As a result, it can be expected that residents feel that their capacity to
influence the council via consultation processes is limited. Amongst interviewees in this thesis, participants in ALMOs, TRAs, TMOs, and cooperatives attributed the ultimate authority for housing policy and development to the council. This was clear from interviewee perspectives on consultation undertaken by the local authority. Cooperator Laurie described local authority consultation as a mere “box ticking” event, while TRA member Ron also stressed that it “doesn’t matter how big the opposition is or how big the matter is, if the local authority wants it to happen, it will happen.” TMO members Joan, Wendy, and Jane described consultation by their local authority as effectively non-existent for smaller projects. In two cases, one highlighted by Joan and another by Felix, consultation occurred after project plans were finalized. For example, Joan’s TMO was invited to a meeting to discuss plans for new build on the estate:

> So, they invited us to a meeting to come and have a discussion about it, but they’ve got all these drawings. So they’ve involved architects, they’ve spent a lot of money on it and then they go, ‘This is what we’re going to do,’ and we go, ‘Actually, we don’t want you to do that.’ And then, it’s, ‘you’ve got to understand that we’re all doing it,’ and then, you know, you know that it’s going to go ahead because they’ve spent X amount of money on this but then they try and keep it quiet so that we don’t know about it...everything happens at the last minute, if you know what I mean.

This consultation process appears, at best, to be equivalent to Informing on Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation, and at worst, to reflect categories of non-participation, like Manipulation and Therapy. Joan noted that at times, the TMO was not even informed by the council about new tenants coming on to the estate or other projects. Similarly, when asked about TMO consultation, Felix highlighted the legal requirement of the local authority to consult on major works, however, he pointed out that the council once begun a planning application before consulting residents:
There’s a process for leaseholders called Section 20, you might know about already, for statutory notification of lease holders of the financial cost [of major build], etc... but we are a statutory consultee for any major works, and they’ve not always been very good at that, to be fair. We had an issue years ago where they put a planning application in, and then... then they started a consultation process. So, we got them to withdraw the planning application and then do the consultation process.

ALMOs were also most often perceived by TRAs and TMOs as weak in their measures of consultation. For example, TRA member Amelia felt that the choice given to residents was often “minimal” or “cosmetic,” such as the color schemes of refurbishments. Meanwhile, tenants had no say on more crucial matters such as the choice of companies for the delivery of services. Logan remarked, “consultation [is] a dirty word as far as [the ALMO] are concerned.” Logan and Amelia highlighted a cancelled consultation and a neglected one on issues such as cleaning services and parking provision as examples where the ALMO had failed to provide a meaningful commitment to tenant consultation.

ALMO board members, including residents, generally felt that tenants were adequately consulted by them, noting engagement with tenants’ panels and constructive relationships with TRAs and TMOs. This conflicting perspective between TMOs, TRAs, cooperatives and ALMOs highlights gaps in communication and feedback. However, one resident ALMO board member, Noah, did stress that ALMOs needed to more effectively relay the impacts or outcomes of consultations to residents:

 Sometimes a resident will just need, you know, to see results — as a result of what you said, we did — to be able to track back their input. […] Many organizations engage in consultation and they may well make changes as a result of that, but they don’t actually communicate that back out.
Noah also stressed that tenant participation and consultation needed to be standardized through formal tenants organizations like TMOs and TRAs. He argued that “there needs to be a statutory obligation for landlords to engage” through legislation, and such participation needed to be regulated or standardized “so that people could be benchmarked against one another.” He noted the limitations to informal or non-institutionalized tenant participation in the context of the Grenfell Tower fire:

If you look at Grenfell and you look at what happened there, that was supposed to be a TMO or an ALMO, what you have there is people who were outside of the formal tenant structures raising a lot of issues — which were there for anyone to see — only to be ignored.

As ALMO members overall had few or no critiques of their own consultation strategies or practices, Noah’s policy prescriptions are notable. Social housing residents can benefit from the presence of effective TRAs or TMOs through which they can formally and collectively voice their grievances; a resident presence on ALMO boards is not enough, as ALMOs are not designed as vehicles for resident empowerment beyond the arena of knowledge.

**Individual vs. Collective Power: Better Together**

To conclude whether the residents’ organizations examined in this paper leave residents better off, we can return to Somerville’s definition of empowerment as any process which increases people’s control over their own lives (233). Nearly every interviewee in a TMO, TRA, or cooperative felt that acting collectively in their respective tenant organization was more effective than acting individually; former TMO participant Jane was a notable exception, as her experience in a TMO was one of disempowerment. Among cooperators, Samuel and Nolan
noted that if a resident had an issue with the council, they were better off bringing their concerns to a committee meeting, as they perceived a collective complaint as more effective than a series of similar individual ones. Abigail and Laurie also emphasized the empowering aspect of self-management, with Laurie remarking that “we don't have to go and ask anybody” about how to run the cooperative, while Abigail noted that she felt privileged to be in a cooperative because “we are our own landlords.”

Although TRA members do have to “go and ask” their local council or ALMO about repairs as they are often not their own landlords, all TRA respondents felt that their collective effect was stronger than the sum of their individual effort. Logan, Atticus, Amelia, and Blake all expressed a positive perspective of their organization’s collective voice, indicating that they expected a response to a TRA complaint to the ALMO about an estate issue to be more thorough, quick, and useful for residents than an equivalent complaint from an individual. Blake found it “quite shocking” how responsive the ALMO was to the newly-formed TRA in comparison to when he was contacting them independently; he felt that residents could have influenced many recent decisions of the ALMO if it had formed only slightly earlier, such as the construction company it chose for recent estate work. As Atticus highlighted, the TRA gave legitimacy to tenant voice in its engagement with the ALMO or the local authority:

> It was almost like, ‘oh, you’re only social housing residents...oh, now, you’ve got TRA. Now, we need to listen to you and do something to get things done.’ And I don’t mean that in a negative way, but there was definitely an opinion change.

And of course, it meant from a TRA point of view, we got to know or get to know the Senior management team of [the ALMO] more closely and build up a better working relationship.

The collective impact of TRAs could expand by building relationships with other TRAs in the area. Amelia noted that as more TRAs are set up, she expects her TRA to connect with them
around common issues, such as new build in the borough. TRAs which link together around shared concerns multiply the numbers of people they represent on the issue, and reflect a larger proportion of the local electorate. As a result, they could act as a potent political force if they use their links with each other to collectively organize. Tenants, as individuals, already organize in cities like London through grassroots community groups like Defend Council Housing and Axe the Housing Act ("Defend Council Housing", "Axe the Housing Act").

Residents in ALMOs, on the other hand, are not necessarily representing a collective tenant voice nor their own individual perspective on estate-wide or borough-wide issues. ALMO resident board member Noah stressed that communicating or receiving feedback from residents was not part of his particular role as a tenant:

There isn’t really a requirement to do that — but on my own estate I talk to people about what I do, so I am a point of contact — but you’re not mandated or accountable to other residents because you’re a resident board member, that isn’t part of the deal...[...]...you’re not mandated, you’re not elected by the residents so you are not directly responsible to them in that way.

This reveals a notion of tenant participation in ALMOs that removes the “tenant” identity from the participatory process; while tenant representation on the board may be a perfunctory measure to reflect a commitment to a tenant voice, there is no expectation that this voice is representative. As another ALMO board member, Marcus, stressed, resident participation is “not the same thing as the tenants making the decision.” At the same time, some individual resident board members may choose to bring a tenant-focused voice to their committees, even if they are not expected to do so. For example, Liliana joined remuneration, staff engagement and performance committees in order to get a sense of how resident perceptions align with the ALMO’s practices:

Residents see things in one way, like the services that are provided by [the ALMO], and the board may be seeing the paperwork a different way because the
executive may be feeding them with what they want. So, I came in as a like more of a grassroots person to see what the comparison is. What they’re telling us they do, have I experienced it as a resident? That’s how I look at it. I’m like, these reports, they look good but I don’t… I or other residents don’t feel that this is improving. So, how come the figures say that they are? There’s something wrong.

Liliana’s resident-focused approach is valuable from the perspective of the ALMO and the council, as it does not make sense to pay for ineffective services or poor maintenance; if a board member can connect executive reports to conflicting testimonials from tenants, then the ALMO can make more informed decisions about its service provision, or realize the limitations of their own reporting and feedback mechanisms. If one assumes that tenants, the ALMO, and the council alike share a common interest in the safety and well-being of residents, there is value in taking advantage of the distinctly “tenant” perspective brought to the board. Since resident board members are directly immersed in the effects of an ALMO’s policies and surrounded by other residents with similar lived experiences, there is potential for them to serve as more effective touchpoints for ALMO and resident communication.

Chapter 5. Long-Term Viability and Obstacles to Resident Participation

Barriers to Participation

When asked, “Do you think there may be any factors that might limit residents [non-participants] from being heard?” , respondents noted a broad array of barriers to resident participation, as seen below.
Family commitments (such as children) and laziness or apathy were the two most mentioned limits to tenant participation, followed by work, language barriers, feeling that participation was not worthwhile or a waste of time (due to perceptions of being unheard), and other commitments.
(such as community volunteering). The prevalence of “laziness” and “apathy” is notable for how it plays into a moral discourse of “responsible” participants and an “inactive” majority (McKee 2008, 33). Critical or unsympathetic perspectives towards non-participants were widespread across the various organizations. Laurie, one cooperative member, remarked that she did not care if residents who were not involved in cooperative meetings felt they had a voice about their homes, because they were always able to access the cooperative committee and attend meetings. Two separate interviewees, Atticus from an ALMO and Blake from a TRA, compared tenant participation to voting, noting that a lack of a vote translates to a lack of a justification to complain. Similarly, a lack of a voice as a tenant, in their perspective, was often the simple result of a lack of effort.

Meanwhile, many respondents noted an array of efforts aimed at increasing levels of participation, ranging from hosting community events to garner interest, leafleting, and surveying. According to Noah, a resident ALMO board member, better understanding barriers to participation could have broader implications for resident safety and well-being. He stressed the importance of “knowing who your customers are,” as otherwise individual barriers to resident participation — such as language or educational barriers — would not be overcome. He highlighted the Grenfell Tower fire as an example where the absence of this knowledge was devastating:

So there’s quite a lot of barriers — what Grenfell showed was that the Local Authority and their team did not know who was actually living in its properties. And everyone was saying if you don’t know who is living there, then you don’t know who your customers are, there’s a lot of ‘don’t knows’ there, you don’t
know their particular needs — what barriers there might be to engaging them, what value added you might gain from engaging with them.

Rather than problematising non-participation, Noah is right to stress the need to gather more data not only on why people get involved, but why they do not get involved. While academics have taken on this task to some extent, in the policy arena there is room to gather broader, UK-wide information on barriers to participation, and explore more strategies to include residents with language and health barriers in some forms of resident participation.

**Staying Afloat: Financial Ambiguity**

Although most TMO members did not reference any long-term financial obstacles, Felix expressed concern about his TMO’s long-term sustainability due to the financial challenges of the local council. His TMO was coping with a 5% cut in their allowance for the year, although they raised £50,000 of external funding in the previous year through their own fundraising efforts. Turning to methods of self-financing seemed to be increasingly necessary due to cuts. By contrast, TRA members drew from borough-wide tenants’ funds or received small budgets from their local councils for social events or projects on their estates. While the financial burden on TRAs is certainly stress-free compared to TMOs, Felix’s testimonial is notable because it highlights the potential for residents to independently secure significant revenues from local, non-profit community sources and individuals. This is likely unachievable by widely-stretched ALMOs and local councils, who do not have the same types of individual, neighborhood-level connections as residents. Since TMOs manage a significant budget for their estate, they also experience the budget’s constraints in their own collective decision-making, unlike TRAs who only experience the impact of the local council or ALMO expenditures or lack thereof through
repairs and maintenance they can observe or criticize. There is no reason why resident participants in a TRA model cannot fundraise and many certainly do, but TMOs may be more intensely incentivized to do so due to their management responsibilities. To the extent that financial independence or self-sustainability is a source of empowerment for residents, TMOs have a greater incentive to achieve it, and in some cases, partially do so out of necessity. At the same time, fundraising may also be experienced as disempowering, since external funders may expect particular behaviors or uses of their funding in return for their assistance.

ALMOs, much like TRAs and TMOs, do not have a budget that is entirely, or even mostly, within their control. Their financial conditions are dependent not only on market conditions, but on regulations and policies imposed on them from the central government. Two ALMO interviewees, Hank and Donovan, noted particular financial challenges faced by their respective organizations. Wider welfare reform including the introduction of Universal Credit, coupled with a debt cap on borrowing for new build and declining revenues, have created a more challenging environment for ALMOs. These issues are not grounded in local authority regulations or practice; on the contrary, they are the result of national-level policies.

In contrast with the TRAs, TMOs, and ALMOs, every cooperative interviewee described the financial condition of their cooperative positively, highlighting the build-up of reserves, investments in local banks, and even revenue generation from solar panels as sources of financial viability. The sample of cooperative interviewees is confined to far too few cooperatives to draw broader conclusions, but it is logical that cooperatives which have paid off, or nearly paid off, their initial mortgages would be in a reasonably strong financial place due to asset ownership.
Unlike organizations which are subject to budgets allocated by local authorities, cooperatives need only to cover for maintenance of their existing properties with their current rents.

**Where Will Tenant Participation Go?**

Four cooperative interviewees stressed the long-term challenge of maintaining high levels of resident participation in order to maintain low levels of rent. One resident, Samuel, noted that young residents who came for cheap rent are not committed to helping run the cooperative, leading “10% of people doing the work for the other 90%.” Housing cooperatives are not meant for residents who have no interest in collective management; unfortunately, cooperatives are not always successful at screening for genuine participatory and voluntary interest in prospective residents.

Among TMOs and TRAs, noted long-term risks to resident participation also included a lack of youth participation and an aging cohort of resident participants, but other risks also including changing neighborhoods and the shifting balance between tenants and leaseholders, higher turnover among residents, declining government funding for TMO training and support, and the general long-term decline of the role of council housing. These factors negatively impact resident participation in different ways; shifting neighborhood demographics may reduce community cohesion and therefore organizing for collective interests, while a lack of funding translates to obvious limitations to building and maintaining TRAs and TMOs. Overall, TRA and TMO interviewees were pessimistic for the future of resident participation. London TRA member Ron noted that only those with knowledge of how to acquire funding — via community grants or fundraising for example — would be able to operate TRAs, as government funding is in decline. This fits with the financial situation of some TMOs as indicated by Felix, who
highlighted the need of his TMO to externally fundraise due to a decline in council funding. In addition to the intensified need for fundraising knowledge, Ron stressed the impact of privatisation or private development on TRAs, perhaps due to the lack of influence that residents could have on private developments in the neighborhood compared to public ones.

One ALMO interviewee also recognized the long-term challenge of getting younger tenants on their boards, while Hank, a non-resident employee of an ALMO, expects the Housing Green Paper 2018 to encourage the ALMO to enhance resident engagement. He brought up the Grenfell Tower fire as a critical point in the relationship between social landlords and tenants, an impetus for change at the national policy and local level:

I think one of the long-term changes that will flow from the terrible disaster of Grenfell is that they'll be a need for landlords to be more visible and more directly accountable to customers.

Noah similarly identified the need to enhance the democratic accountability of local councils and ALMOs with respect to the provision of housing. However, he stressed that “boardroom battles” were not ideal; politicizing members of the ALMO via elections could lead to divisions between independent members, council nominees, and residents. He also identified the “current political situation,” namely the new housing Green Paper, as a key “moment” for policy transformation:

There is an opportunity, at least in theory, to influence through local councils. I think it needs democratizing to some extent, and I wouldn’t necessarily suggest you need a separate set of elections for board members — […] you don’t want boardroom battles, pitting one constituency against another. Certainly, there needs to be some more involvement, and there will be, but I’m not sure how that will manifest itself in the current political situation and the fact that this will only be indicative in the Green Paper as well. I think ballots are a good idea for regeneration, as that has been problematic. There has been a lot of positive efforts made, but they aren’t registered [at all], not embedded across the board, and I think if we are not careful the moment will pass.
Therefore, while many members of TRAs and TMOs were pessimistic for the future of resident participation, it may simply be their natural, albeit misguided response to a previous absence of policy. With the Housing Green Paper 2018 generating discussion and policy, residents may become more optimistic in the face of these challenges; nevertheless, there are clearly obstacles to empowerment via tenant participation, due to the construction of the “rules of the game” and factors which extend beyond housing legislation, such as the residualisation of social housing and aging demographics among resident participants.

Conclusion

While resident members of ALMOs, TMOs, and TRAs assert the benefits of acting collectively rather than individually, they are, in general, frustrated with the existing balance of power between residents and their local authority landlords. The framework for assessing empowerment developed by Sommerville (1998) highlights a number of areas where resident empowerment through participation can be evaluated, including empowerment through knowledge acquisition, statute and legislated rights, resourcing, and agreement and power transfer (244-248). Through resident participation structures, residents in social housing can gain important skills and knowledge about their rights and living conditions, exercise their Right to Manage, and run services on their estates through a transfer of budgetary responsibilities from their local councils. Although the 2018 Housing Green Paper has opened up new possibilities for resident participation in the United Kingdom, this research has identified a number of areas where effective and empowering participation is limited; there are multiple long-term challenges facing residents in social housing who wish to participate in the management of their homes.
Participants in existing housing governance structures (TMOs, TRAs, cooperatives, and ALMOs) are often burdened with significant demands on their time without any compensation, their organizations are frequently stagnant in membership (and aging in demographic composition), and resident influence in ALMOs, for example, is often secondary to that of professional independent members. There is inadequate oversight of and financial support for TRAs and TMOs in particular, leading to cases of alleged corruption, as highlighted by Jane’s interview, as well as the need to fundraise independently to meet service needs. Meanwhile, ALMOs, bound by their loyalty to their “sole shareholder,” are not spaces in which resident voices can emerge to assert their own interests when said interests conflict with that of the local authority.

Unsurprisingly, cooperatives come out on top in areas such as finances and their relationship with their local authority, as they are generally self-sustaining organizations. The national government recently invested a record amount, £300m according to the National Community Land Trust Network, into community-led housing across the country (National Community Land Trust Network 2018). With new prospective funding for housing cooperatives, there is an opportunity to provide not only long-term social housing, but to create opportunities for communities to empower themselves through collective management. This is a step in the right direction to enhance resident participation. However, as highlighted by interviewees in this thesis, a high time commitment is a key tradeoff for the low rents and direct control offered by cooperative housing; it is not an appropriate model for residents in social housing who are unable or unwilling to contribute their time or skills to management. Therefore, it is equally important to consider resident participation in other forms of social housing.
With respect to council housing, this thesis has found that along with varying levels of direct influence and control over day-to-day management, there is also no one-size-fits-all model of tenant participation which is appropriate for every estate. Although previous studies, such as the one undertaken by Simmons and Birchall (2006), emphasize the increased power of tenants in TMOs, a TRA is more appropriate for residents in certain circumstances. While “empowerment” may include more control, the acquisition of control must be voluntary; residents on some estates do not have the time, willingness or need to transform their TRA into a TMO. Broadening forms of resident participation appears to be the best approach to expanding the scope of resident influence and empowerment while accommodating the variation in willingness and ability to participate. The 2018 Housing Green Paper points to the existing use of service-level Local Management Agreements (LMAs) between residents and their local authorities which allow residents to choose to provide a service themselves, or employ a contractor, supplier, or individual to undertake specific types of service work (38). Promoting the expanded use of LMAs on estates with little to no existing resident participation organizations (i.e: no TRAs or TMOs) could be a means for residents to resolve small-scale estate-level issues in ways they collectively agree is best, and may promote the gradual expansion of resident participation if more LMAs prove to be effective.

At the time of completion of this thesis, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, independently set up to investigate the causes and circumstances leading up to the fire, was partway through Phase 2 of its hearings and investigations (Moore-Bick 2018). The Grenfell Tower fire, the impetus for undertaking this research on tenant participation and the stimulus of public discussion on the issue of resident empowerment, may have been a one-off catastrophe; however, evidence from
some ALMO interviewees does corroborate the narrative that ALMO board members must heed all orders under pressure from their local authority, even if it involves choosing cheap, flammable cladding. Compromising on safety in order to please councillors does not seem unfathomable based on the anecdotes of interviewees. With this in mind, the oversight and scrutiny powers amongst other forms of resident participation must be strengthened to balance the lack of direct influence which residents can exercise in ALMOs. Furthermore, this points to the value of instituting an independent, national voice for tenants, as highlighted by the 2018 Housing Green Paper, in order to engage residents with policy-level issues (36). If taken seriously by the national government, enhancing tenant voice and feedback at the national level could spur positive changes in the capacity of ALMOs to act on behalf of resident interests (such as safety regulations around specific building materials or operational budgets for social housing, for example).

This thesis also highlighted the ways in which participants perceived their own involvement as serving the interests of local authorities, as opposed to their own interests. This was evident from the dialogue between TRAs and TMOs on each other’s forms of resident participation, the intensity of volunteer time commitment from residents who manage their own housing estates, and the perceived lack of commitment on the part of local authorities to decision-making based on the outcomes of public consultations. This further elucidates the perceptions of governmentality present in other studies of resident participation, such as that of McKee and Cooper (2008). Since these forms of resident participation are essentially designed by legislation, they naturally fit the will or intent of government by their very design. However, this does not necessarily mean that residents are ineffective in securing their own interests.
through these institutionalized mechanisms for participation. On the contrary, this thesis has highlighted the extent to which all residents feel they are more effective when they act collectively, by both working within and challenging the “rules of the game” as conceptualized by Cairncross et al. (1994). Residents also make independent, individual gains as a result of participation, by acquiring more knowledge about their housing rights and developing skills which in some cases can enhance their wages.

The following table summarizes the factors identified in this thesis which impact the empowerment by existing participants and experienced by resident participants:

Table 4: Factors Impacting Resident Empowerment

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Housing Governance Structure</th>
<th>Factors Impacting Resident Empowerment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tenant Management Organisation (TMO)</td>
<td>• Severity of problems on the estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants’ and Residents’ Association (TRA)</td>
<td>• Neighborhood context (gentrification, displacement on the estate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Cooperatives</td>
<td>• Stigma against social housing residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Training, oversight and financial support from local authority (TRAs and TMOs only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Authenticity of local authority consultations on estate or in community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Barriers to participation from prospective participants (apathy, language barriers, time constraints)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intensity of time commitment required of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arms-Length Management Organisation</td>
<td>• Disparities in influence between residents and professional board members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of independence from local authority interests on ALMO boards</td>
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</table>

Although residents generally benefit from participation, a significant number of prospective policy proposals and respective evaluation measures emerge from the findings of this
thesis. These policy proposals may enhance various aspects of resident empowerment as theorized by Somerville (1998). Firstly, as some residents noted that consultation from the local authority about significant regeneration projects would only occur after detailed plans were already developed, mandating or enhancing consultation earlier on in the project development phase could increase satisfaction with consultation processes. Currently, there are a number of statutory obligations on local authorities to consult social housing residents, such as Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, which mandates a “prescribed consultation process” with estate residents when entering contracts for major works (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2011). The 2018 Housing Green Paper highlights the desire of government to “understand better whether satisfaction with contractor services could be increased by encouraging landlords to provide greater choice to residents around services” (38). Routinely providing a list of approved contractors for residents to choose from is provided as a prospective strategy (38). For small and urgent repairs, or individual issues, the provision of a list of contractors would be appropriate; for larger works, consultation must begin earlier in some instances to ensure that resident input is not sidelined or serves as a mere box-ticking exercise. To democratise major works, local authorities and ALMOs should consider implementing majority resident veto powers over large-scale projects, just as they currently exist for stock transfers. The results of such a strategy may not be in the interests of the local authority, but significant community and estate-level build or regeneration projects would carry more democratic legitimacy if they were executed with clear and documented majority support from residents.
Secondly, TRAs, TMOs, cooperatives, and ALMOs alike should encourage resident participants to formally document the hours they commit to resident participation, both independently and through committee meetings. Since the time commitment noted by participants was often highly variable and intense, it would be valuable for these organizations to collect better data on how time-intensive resident participations can be. This would allow such organizations to determine whether or not they need to shift burdens away from volunteers, spread work differently across participants, encourage more participation from different or new residents, or pressure their local council or other funding sources for more resources. With documented evidence of the amount of time and labor residents commit to participation and collective management, a well-evidenced case for better funding or forms of compensation for participants, such as childcare, reimbursed transportation or a stipend, could be made to prospective funders. Enhancing the financial capacity of organizations like TMOs and TRAs for example would allow them to hire more operational staff to reduce volunteer workload.

Thirdly, housing governance organizations and local authorities can expand the breadth of resident participation to counter the stagnation and aging demographics within such organizations. Different approaches can address the cultivation of an “elite” of resident participants, minimize language barriers, and provide opportunities for residents with high existing time commitment to become involved despite their schedules. To encourage, revitalize or expand participation, residents on estates must first be well-informed of their options to participate, know what their rights and statutory obligations are with respect to their homes, and be informed of their service providers, existing contracts, and any proposed projects on their estate. The provision of written leaflets and workshops may spark interest; furthermore, as
residents highlighted language barriers to increasing participation, more effort and council support with translating materials, providing interpreters, or workshops in alternative languages is necessary. There are new opportunities to take advantage of technology and social media, and some, although not all, housing governance organizations maintain small webpages, blogs, Facebook pages, and even Twitter accounts, which can be useful for disseminating information in multiple languages. In Shelter’s 2007 Advice Gap Report, their findings highlighted the general failure of housing providers to provide information on housing issues and options in necessary community languages, limiting the capacity of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities to access housing services (36). The report pointed to the success of targeted, BME-led approaches within communities to expand housing advice and information provision to communities which are otherwise excluded from mainstream assistance due to language barriers (40). Although focusing on expanding empowerment by knowledge amongst non-English-speaking BME communities might be more challenging for small TRAs and TMOs who are already facing significant burdens on their time, it may provide long-term returns by increasing volunteer involvement. TRAs and TMOs which struggle with low turnout to their community events might benefit from better links to BME communities, and they may benefit from new perspectives on housing issues which would otherwise be unheard. Language barriers inevitably limit some forms of participation, but the extent to which BME communities can be better included in decision-making and day-to-day volunteering appears to be underexplored.

In addition to expanding the provision of information through workshops, social media and leafleting, following the preferred approach of the 2018 Housing Green Paper by instituting league tables of landlord performance would also provide residents with accessible and
comparative information about their housing circumstances (34). Tenants and leaseholders could benefit from leveraging league tables to advocate for better services or resident involvement. As highlighted earlier on in the conclusion, Local Management Agreements (LMAs) can also be a more accessible means for residents to become involved, allowing them to collectively resolve small-scale estate-level issues without forming a time-intensive and broader organization such as a TMO. However, if residents are not properly informed of their options and resources available to them, neither league tables nor LMAs can be useful. Therefore, an essential focus on information provision is the first and most crucial step to enhancing resident empowerment as conceptualized by Somerville (1998). This would also benefit non-participants and those with a limited capacity to participate more formally in committees.

Finally, the institution of an independent platform for tenants, as suggested by a number of national housing organizations and proposed in the 2018 Housing Green Paper, would help engage residents in larger policy issues (36). Since tenant influence is limited in ALMOs, regions which lack borough-wide resident engagement panels may not have adequate tenant input on broader issues and policies. In cases where formal structures for resident participation are lacking at a regional level, tenants may feel the need to organize independently, perhaps forming groups like Grenfell Action Group, Homes4All, and Defend Council Housing, the larger tenants’ groups mentioned in this paper. A national, independent platform would fill the gap in tenant input at higher levels of housing provision and policy. Since ALMOs ultimately do need to capitalise on financial and managerial acumen that most residents may lack, and will continue to receive the entirety of their funding from their local council, the option of a parallel structure to create new “rules of the game” appears to be a reasonable solution to their limited use of resident voice. This
would address the absence of a resident voice in strategic policy-making, enhancing resident empowerment as a result.

The outcomes of these policy proposals could be measured by a similar qualitative study as the one undertaken by this thesis, but can also be observed by how resident participation and resident satisfaction with housing management changes over time as a result of these interventions. There are potential trade-offs to broadening involvement, such as the dilution of expertise and experience as the long-time “elites” of resident participation are displaced by new members. Nevertheless, resident participation as it exists in its current state in England does not satisfy participants; it appears to be stagnating and the long-term sustainability of some TRAs and TMOs is in question. Ultimately, however, interviewees did feel that more could be achieved in their interests when they acted collectively in their respective organizations. Therefore, resident participation is valuable to those who participate; it is experienced as empowering regardless of its limitations. Returning back to the notion of citizenship illustrated by Klausen and Sweeting (2004), who argue that citizenship is about the right to participate in the welfare of society, we can begin to see why the capacity for residents to organize around their common interests is crucial for their sense of empowerment and control (218).
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Appendix

See attached document.
# Appendix

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Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Establishing Participation Motivation

1A. Why did you decide to join the [organisation]? How did you join?
   
   1B. [If tenant refers to a problem or grievance as a primary motivating factor]: Would you have joined if [the problem] was not an issue?

2. Are you involved in other types of organising, management or politics, or thinking of becoming involved with other types of organising, management or politics?

3. Do you enjoy your involvement in [organisation]?

Understanding Organisation Function with Respect to Participant Involvement

4. Please tell me a bit about your [organisation]. How do meetings function, and how often do they occur?

   4A. Is decision-making during the meeting consensus-based, majority rule, or other?

5. How much time do you dedicate to this position in a week or month?

6. How are responsibilities distributed among participants within the [organisation]?

7. Are there any particular aspects of management or tenant well-being that you have been responsible for since you started being involved in [organisation]? If yes, could you talk about these specific responsibilities?

   7A. Did you volunteer for this role or was it assigned to you?

Perceptions of Participant Involvement
8. How would you describe the problem-solving approach in [organisation]?
   8B. Would you describe the approach as collaborative? Or do specific members come up with solutions, and others help exercise the solution?

9. In your opinion, who are the most influential people in the [organisation]?
   - [If they name a specific group rather than saying something along the lines of, “everyone is equal”, ask the tenant why they hold that opinion.]

10. [If relevant] Why do you think tenants represent [x percent] of [organisation]?

Questions Focused on Control, Influence and Power

11. How much influence do [tenants/independents/participants] hold with respect to determining the discussion agenda for [organisation] meetings?

12. Within the [organisation], how is control divided between[tenants/independents/participants] and other members with respect to decision-making?

12A. What happens when there are disagreements among members?

13. As part of your role, have you ever had an experience where you felt nobody listened to, or cared about your opinion?
   - 13B. Please tell me about these experiences. Does this happen rarely or often?

Tenants, Residents and the Social Landlords

14. To what extent do you feel tenants or residents in [organisation] are consulted before decisions are made by [social landlord]? Are you consulted on all decisions, or none at all?

15. Can you think of any specific type of [social landlord] decisions on which tenants or residents are always or usually consulted? (i.e: estate maintenance, community or neighbourhood redevelopment, etc.)

16. Can you thing of any specific types of [social landlord] decisions on which tenants are rarely or never consulted? (i.e: estate maintenance, community or neighbourhood redevelopment, etc.)
17. If you or another tenant expresses an issue to the [social landlord], what type of response do you expect?

18. How would you describe the relationship between [organisation] and the [social landlord]?

19. Are you satisfied with the management and maintenance allowance provided by the [social landlord]?

Participants as Representatives

20. [optional] How do tenant representatives in [organisation] act as community representatives?

21. How do you communicate with or receive feedback from [residents/community members]?

22. There are other residents in the [building(s)/estate/borough] who are not in [organisation]. Do you think they feel that they have a voice when it comes to their homes?

22B. Do you think there may be any factors that might limit residents from being heard?

23. Do you think more [tenant/resident] participation is always good?

24. Do you have any comments on the future of [tenant/resident] participation?

General Demographic Questions

Age:
Ethnic Background or Race:
Gender:

In order to understand the economic background of people in housing management, could you please specify where your annual 2017 before-tax wage income would fall on this interval?

A) £0 to £5,000  
B) £5,000 to £10,000  
C) £10,000 to £15,000  
D) £15,000 to £20,000  
E) £20,000 - £25,000  
F) greater than £25,000

Paid participant in [organisation]: Yes/No

Alternative Occupation:
Appendix 2: Consent Form (In-Person Interviews)

Housing Management Interview Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of how different participants in the management of housing (leaseholders, tenants, and other participants) perceive their own participation. You are asked to take part because you are involved in a Co-op, Housing Association, Tenant Management Organisation, Leaseholders Association, or Arms-Length Management Organisation. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this study is to learn how different participants in various housing management schemes conceptualise their participation. This is an undergraduate project for the BA honours thesis in Political Economy for [L] Worden at Williams College, Massachusetts, USA. The primary thesis supervisors for this project are Dr. James Mahon and Dr. Stephen Sheppard.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to be in this study, the interviewer, [L] Worden, will conduct an interview with you. Between June 2018 and mid-August of 2018, the interviewer can meet you in-person at a mutually convenient public place, such as a library, café or a park. The interview will last approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, but can be cut short or completed in parts if you have time constraints. You can drop out at any time. The interview will include questions about your involvement in housing management, why you got involved, and what it means for you to be involved. With your permission, the researcher would like to tape-record the interview.

**Risks and benefits:**
There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your work to be sensitive. There are some risks to your anonymity, but the steps to mitigate this are explained in the section on Protecting your data.

There are no benefits or compensation for you, although you may find reflecting on your work during this interview to be personally rewarding or useful.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You may withdraw from this study at any time. There will be no consequence to you if you choose to quit partway through the study, withdraw your answers or skip questions.

**Steps taken for protecting your data.** The records of this study will be kept private. No information will be included which will make it possible to identify you in any sort of public report or publication. You will be given a pseudonym. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher ([L] Worden) and the thesis supervisors will have access to the records. If you agree to be tape-recorded during the interview, the tape will be destroyed after it has been transcribed and the thesis completed, which will likely be in February of 2018. Voice recordings, transcripts and other data will be stored securely on an encrypted USB stick as well as an
encrypted back-up storage space, where they can only be accessed by the researcher with a password.
Please initial in the box to confirm you have read this page: ☐

Proceed to the next page for further details.

European Data Regulations and Data Exportation.
Your personal data will be transferred to, and stored at, a destination outside the European Economic Area. Any identifiable data will be removed whenever possible and that any data transfer is done securely and with a similar level of data protection as required under UK law. As mentioned above, your data will be securely encrypted. However, as the data will cross the U.S border, it is subject to possible inspection by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). As the interviewer ([L] Worden) is Canadian, it may also be subject to inspection by Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). This will not pose any risk to you, although border security may read your interview transcripts at their discretion.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is [L] Worden. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact [L] Worden at ldw1@williams.edu or at (+44) 07734 235864. The contact information for the thesis supervisors is below:
Dr. James Mahon, jmahon@williams.edu
Dr. Stephen Sheppard, ssheppar@williams.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 607-255-5138 or access their website at http://www.irb.cornell.edu.
You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statements of Consent:
I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.
Your Signature __________________________
Date __________________________

If you agree to be tape recorded:
In addition to agreeing to participate, I consent to having the interview tape-recorded. I also consent to the use of direct anonymous quotations from my interview.
Your Signature __________________________
Date __________________________

If you do not agree to be tape recorded:
In addition to agreeing to participate, I do not consent to having the interview tape-recorded, and would prefer the researcher take notes. I consent to the use of direct anonymous quotations from my interview.
Appendix 3: Transcript Disclaimer

These transcripts are not professionally transcribed, and thus may contain inaccuracies or errors. They are intended to be used for reference only. Identifying information (such as location and names) have either been changed or redacted.

Appendix 4: ALMO Interviewee “Donovan” Transcript

Interviewer: I might also ask-
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Okay, great, so we can get started, so why did you decide to join [borough] homes and how did you get involved?
Interviewer: Right, it’s quite a long story, I’m not a housing professional by background, my background is education, in fact I’m a retired secondary head teacher, but going back to about 1990, I was a [borough] city councillor and was on the housing committee and got interested in social housing and then because of that I became a board member of a housing association, [Housing Association X], for a long time, for more than 15 years, I then retired from that board and decided I wanted to come to […], with my interest in social housing. There was a vacancy on [borough] homes board, which I applied for and got appointed and then I became Chair about 3 years ago.
Interviewer: Okay, great and you mentioned that you were involved in city council, are you currently involved in other types of management or looking to go into other types of management or politics or that sort of thing?
Interviewer: Sorry, I missed that, can you say again?
Interviewer: So you mentioned you were on the city council—
Interviewer: Can you just pause a bit, if I put you on speakerphone maybe I’ll hear you clearer.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewer: Hello?
Interviewee: Hi—
Interviewee: I can hear you much clearer now.
Interviewer: Great, you mentioned you were involved with city council beforehand, are you currently involved in any other type of management or politics, besides being the chair at [borough] homes?

Interviewee: I’m not actively involved in politics, I’m still a member of the Labour Party but I’m not actively involved in any other way, I am involved in, through education, I am the chair and governor of a local secondary school and I’m a member of the [X School Trust] board.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Overall do you enjoy your involvement with [borough] homes or do you face any challenges?

Interviewee: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, definitely. If I keep something, I get a lot of enjoyment and a lot of fulfilment from it.

Interviewer: Great. Could you tell me a little bit about the board, how meetings function? How often do meetings occur?

Interviewee: Well, the governance structure at [borough] homes is the main board, which I chair, has got 9 members on. [Borough] homes is a, what’s called an arm’s length management organization, it is an independent company, but it is wholly owned by [borough] city council.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But the board structure is, there are three independents, there are nine, nine board members, three of which are independent, of which I’m on, and that is, that position is advertised and appointed, interviewed and appointed. three of them are tenants, which again isn’t an advertised post, where any tenant can apply and interview to the project and three of them are city councillors, so they are appointed by the council to the board.

Interviewer: Okay, great.

Interviewee: We meet as a board, every two months, as a full board meeting, there are other meetings in between but, and that board has responsibility for the strategic issues around [borough] homes, whereas another board, which we call the operational board, and that is predominantly tenants, the tenants have a majority on that board and again it’s an appointed position and they deal with finances, all operational issues, i.e, all issues that are of most interest to tenants.

Interviewer: Right, okay, that makes sense. Now how does decision making happen during board meetings? Is it sort of, you vote on different issues or you sort of discuss them and come to a logical conclusion, sort of, how does the decision-making work?

Interviewee: Generally, papers are produced by the officers of the board for decision. It is possible for board members to raise things on how it’s being done and to suggest things, there is generally a discussion and most of the time, the vast majority of the time, we reach decision by consensus, it is possible to hold a vote on some occasions, but they are rare, we have a majority vote but usually we try to get agreeing to a consensus.

Interviewer: Great and how much time do you dedicate to this position in a week or in a month?
**Interviewee:** That’s a very difficult question to answer, because it varies so much. The time spent that I have is the board meeting which we had last night and that went on for about two and a half hours, and then the operational board meets every other month and I, although I’m not a member of that but as chair I attend just to observe but I also have fortnightly meetings with the managing director, but those are the actual minimum, there are also lots of other meetings which occur, and I can’t say I do so many hours a week because some weeks I will do a lot, other weeks, I will do very little other than the statutory meetings.

**Interviewer:** Right and what are sort of the two extremes of time?

**Interviewee:** Well the extremes might be, I might just have an hour, hour and a half meeting with the managing director and then very little else, other extremes is I can be, I’ve been known to be in the office four days out of five doing different things.

**Interviewer:** Wow, okay.

**Interviewee:** I wouldn’t say necessarily full days but perhaps for 2 or 3 hours a day, so the extreme could be from say one hour a week to twelve, fifteen hours a week.

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes that makes sense. Great, so within the board—

**Interviewee:** And also, to on top of that, I also represent, well represent [borough] homes and in fact, the [x] region of ALMOs, in a body called the [Organization M].

**Interviewer:** Alright.

**Interviewee:** Hello?

**Interviewer:** And how—Are responsibilities distributed in any particular way among participants? Are there certain people who maybe have more expertise in one area and so they focus on that? Is there any distribution of responsibility on the board?

**Interviewee:** Yes there is, as long as the board, there are two main subcommittees of the board, there is an audit committee, which as chair, I’m not allowed to sit on because part this job is to scrutinize my actions and so one of the board members, who has a very strong financial background, he is also an independent board member, he chairs the audit committee and then he takes a lead in that, he also, again because of his background he takes responsibility for, on the board, for health and safety issues. We also got a government and regeneration committee and again there’s some other board members, again an independent board member who looks and oversees that and report back to there and there is one of the vice chairs who of the board, is a tenant and he takes responsibility for any tenant issues.

**Interviewer:** Right, okay. So, what are your specific responsibilities as part of the board and as part of [borough] homes?

**Interviewee:** At first, not much specific responsibilities, it’s overall responsibilities, I mean apart from the practical things such as chairing the board meetings and hopefully arriving at consensus, it is to meet regularly with the managing director to agree on the strategy of where the organization is going, to oversee any issues that might be arising, to be aware and to generally be a lead person in the direction of this strategy of the board itself. One of the regular meetings we have is every month, myself and the two vice chairs, a tenant and a councillor meet with the
three senior offices of the board, which is the managing director, the finance director and the investment director.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And so, before things come before the full board we will talk around issues and see how, once we start something, what to do, we will get the advanced information if you like, of things that are occurring and decide whether we want to take this to the board or talk about it a bit more and we sign it.

Interviewer: Great, okay and – alright, where are we, okay here we go. So overall would you describe the problem-solving approach as collaborative among people on the board?

Interviewee: Yes. It’s a very collaborative field, we don’t always agree about everything obviously, because you’ll never get nine people to do that but it is collaborative when I say we generally talk things around and reach a consensus, it may not be exactly as we put forward in the original paper from the officers but it will be modified to try to get the best answer and it’s definitely collab, it’s not, it’s very rare, very very rare that we have [unclear audio 11:52-11:54] where people violently disagree, there are differences in opinion but we collaborate in getting what we think is the right results for the organization.

Interviewer: Right and what do you do or what happens when basically, sorry one moment, I’m having some technical problems, oh yeah, where did my question go. So, what happens when there are disagreements among the members?

Interviewee: It is discussed, most of the time we reach a decision, occasionally it goes to a vote and it is a majority decision, at least it is expected, at board meetings people say what they like, it is a, we encourage open discussion and open disagreement if it is there but there is a certain expectation which I’ve never known to fall down, where having made a decision, it is a collective decision and the board members support it, they may not agree with it but it is the decision of the board and therefore it will be supported.

Interviewer: Right, okay that makes sense. In your opinion are there people on the board who are more influential –

Interviewee: Yes, yes there are certainly. I’ll say, the board member who chairs the audit committee, he is very well respected, the audit committee, he’s well respected, if he, if and when he chooses to retire from the board, because he’s a long serving board member, it would difficult to replace him with exactly those skills.

Interviewer: Right, so it’s sort of, expertise is a big factor in, yeah.

Interviewee: Absolutely, yeah.

Interviewer: So, I know that the board is a third tenants, a third independent members and a third councillors, why that specific makeup or why that specific –

Interviewee: That was, when [borough] homes was established, 12 years ago, no it was longer than that, it was formed, the original idea, it was, because it was originally council housing in [borough] was controlled by the council housing department.

Interviewer: Right.
**Interviewee:** Yeah, but then the government at the time, going back all those years, council housing all across the country was in a fairly bad, a very bad state and the government put a lot of money into what they called their decent homes initiative, the condition for that was that there was a lot of places you had to set up these arm’s lengths companies and that was the original decision, originally there were fifteen on the board, which was five, five and five and as I said, it is a wholly owned company by the council, so the council insist on having a third of the board members to make sure that their interests are represented, but it was also a philosophical use in taking the issues of housing in all tenants and we wanted proper tenant, not just representation, but actual tenant influence on the board.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And then the independents are brought in to bring in some outside expertise, if you like.

**Interviewer:** Right, that makes sense. So, sort of the role of independent people is to bring an outside expertise.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And, so then could you speak also then to why the role of councillors and also of tenants is important on the board?

**Interviewee:** Well, that’s the thing, the role of councillors is important because this is a council owned company.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** They have an interest in doing that, though, at currently we have three councillors on, there is one labour councillor, one conservative councillor and one liberal democrat councillor so there’s political balance on there, it’s not controlled by any one political party.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** It is fairly, it is made fair to them that although housing is political with a small “p”, [borough] homes is not a party-political body.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Our councillors who serve on [borough] homes board are expected and, in my experience, always have done, put [borough] homes before any political, of course they’ve got political views, I have political views, I say I’m a member of the Labour Party, but we operate in the interest of [borough] homes and in the interest of the tenant, rather than we put any political viewpoint, tenants are there and again, it is made clear to tenants that they are members of the board and their responsibility is to the organization, they are not there to represent their next-door neighbour or their own interest, if you like.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** By all means they put forward views, the tenants, but they are not, they are full board members and their responsibility is exactly the same as mine as an independent board member.
Interviewer: Right, okay great. So, when it comes to determining the discussion agenda for board meetings, sort of what people are going to talk about or work on, what influences that? I guess.

Interviewee: The predominant influence is actually the major offices of the organization, so there is always a managing director’s report, there is always a finance report, there is always an investment and regeneration report, so the three major offices will always put a report in on there and we’ll also, but other items on the agenda may come from a variety of different areas, I mean, I’ve got, just to give you a view, I’ve got last night’s agenda in front of me now as well as those three reports, we discussed three major new initiatives in [borough] homes just got responsibility and a sizeable amount of government funding to for homelessness and rough sleeping within [borough], there was also something about a new initiative that we’re talking about, again working with the council on what’s called the [borough] cause, which is working with women who have had a number of births, where children are removed from them and it is to work with a small number of some of the most vulnerable women, within the city and so, whenever there are initiatives like that they will come through. Now all of these, as I mentioned, there is this monthly meeting with myself, the two vice chairs and the three officers, we will all, well the major items on our agenda is to set the agenda for the next board meeting.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And so, various things come forward from, they may be forced on us by outside, by government decisions, then they may come from initiatives that people want to put forward and they are obviously the major, well the major responsibility of the board is to make sure that [borough] homes remains a [unclear audio 20:37] financially.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So, there is always a financial report, there’s always report on the, again this comes from the council, the council just oversee, we have a specific number of targets, which is set annually and so there is a quarterly report on our performance against those targets.

Interviewer: Right. Right, okay, that makes sense. So, as an independent member, yeah you spoke on, actually yeah, you spoke a bit to your role on determining the discussion agenda, so I won’t go too much more into that, right, so as part of your role, have you ever had an experience where somebody wasn’t listening to you or you sort of struggled to get your voice heard? Not necessarily on the board but sort of in your role out in the community or in other ways in [borough] homes?

Interviewee: No, I don’t think so, I mean, I’m not just saying this because I’m Chair of the board but I think this is a good organization, where although board members may have differences in opinion in different things, we are united in wanting it to be a successful organization, and there is no major philosophical difference between board members and the chief officers of the organization, we want the same end so we want to push the same way, we may, we find things differently and put some difference in, but I think of any time there’s been a really major difference in opinion, the only real, well not, difficult is putting it the wrong way,
but a few years ago, the council decided that, they wanted to, their intention was to basically abolish [borough] homes and take the housing function back in house at the council and so there was an ongoing decision which it took a long time, it wasn’t really a, it wasn’t really a difference between the board or myself and the organization, it was a matter of the board and the organization talking to council offices and election members to decide a way forward, obviously [borough] homes is a 100% percent owned property of the council so if they want to, they can do whatever they like.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because they own it, but we reached a compromise, which I think works better for everybody concerned, when [borough] homes was first set up, it was an arm’s length company, there was a significant distance between the council and [borough] homes, it’s that distance is now much less, we don’t see ourselves so much as an arm’s length company, we see ourselves as a full partner of the council, helping council to fulfil its objectives in terms of housing and housing-related facilities.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because as an independent company, there are certain freedoms that we are allowed which a local government body is not allowed.

Interviewer: Right, that makes sense and overall how would you describe the relationship between [borough] homes and the local council? You described it as close but is it positive or-

Interviewee: It’s positive, but there are frictions on occasion, I won’t minimize that but it is positive, there are particularly, the offices that we deal with, the senior offices of the council that we deal with a lot of times, that is a very positive relationship. All the people in the council, to be honest are quite [in]different and I don’t mean that in a derogatory term, I mean literally, they do not know exactly what [borough] homes does and that goes for a lot of election members as well, and so part of the job sometimes is educating people, they have the wrong idea.

Interviewer: Right, right that makes sense. Alright, so the next couple questions are going to be more about the local council and [borough] homes and sort of, so I know that as an arm’s length management organization, a lot of decisions around the different housing estates are not necessarily that influenced by the local council, they work with [borough] homes but when there is some sort of decision taken by the local council, whether that’s about funding or something in the neighbourhood, do you feel like the board is consulted on any of these decisions?

Interviewee: Yes, yes, actually that is something, that’s something which has improved significantly over the last two years, since we moved from being an arm’s length company to more working as an official partner of the council, that consultation is now expected and happens on a very regular basis. Again, I have meetings regularly with the cabinet member, the election member who has responsibility for housing and so we will, we plan to meet once or twice a month and we will, he will bring issues to me and I will raise issues to him which will go up to there but alongside that, the particularly, well in fact, all the three major officers of [borough]
homes have very, very regular meetings, more than once a week with their counterparts on the council, so the consultation is very real and it works both ways.

**Interviewer:** Great, and are there specific types of decisions that the [borough] council will consult about and certain types of decisions that they won’t? If that makes sense, that are relevant to [borough] homes.

**Interviewee:** I think they will consult on everything, but it is clear that it is their decision, they will listen to what we have to say, doesn’t mean to say they actually have to agree with it.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, with the consultation, Again, I can’t really, there are times when—I’m trying to think of concrete examples, without going into too much detail, where the housing decisions which we made we think actually that’s not very sensible, to put that delicately, and we researched them and generally they’ve not always changed their mind on what they want to do but we try to modify it to make it a bit more sensible. If you understand what I’m saying.

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And so if you or um, okay, wait, before I go into that, so for example, things like community or sort of other developments that are happening near homes that are managed by [borough] homes that sort of affect the quality of life in [borough] homes or something like that, that’s something that the council might consult you on but not necessarily, because at the end of the day, it’s their decision, sort of.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yes. Okay.

**Interviewee:** Exactly, yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay, that makes sense and if you or another participant on the board expresses an issue to [borough] council, what kind of response would you expect from them or how quickly would they respond and how would they respond?

**Interviewee:** If we raise an issue it’s very dependent on what the issue is. Generally, if we are raising an issue with the council, it will be at a fairly serious level, more operational matters tend to go the other way, you get board councillors who will contact [borough] homes because of an issue in their ward with other tenants or other residents in their ward and that can be anything from a problem with a repair or it could be antisocial behaviour or something which is a direct interest of an individual and that is passed on through the councillor to [borough] homes and they would expect a very rapid response. Again, not always because they want to, there must be good reasons why somebody can’t get the repair they wanted, or they can’t get the new kitchen or whatever it was that they need, so it may not always be exactly as they want but it will be rapid. If we’re taking issues the other way it tends to be more serious issues and we’re not looking for an immediate response to something, what we’re asking for is the council to consider this at a senior level, and to respond, and it may take a long time. I can recall one example for this, and it’s taken a while to get resolved, but it is now resolved and that was what we call in [the
Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Run by the council, that was a council thing. It is now totally managed by [borough] homes because we said, we can do this in a more flexible way, in a different way. It took about 18 months, but now, the management now, there is entirely with [borough] homes, this is what I was talking about a while ago, as an example of where the partnership worked, when we said, actually we can do this better, we can put more money into this, we can give a better service by using the independence and the flexibility that we’ve got as an independent company, which is not always available to the council. A lot of discussion, it wasn’t that the council were against it, it was making sure it worked, and making sure the staff involved were consulted and that they were happy with moving their management responsibilities and the reorganization of the team. So, it took some, it took a long time for it to happen, so it is happening as far as we know at the moment, it’s working well.

Interviewer: Great and you mentioned, right, as an arm’s length management organization, it’s funded by the council and you’re very close to the council, I’m wondering if you are satisfied with the current budget that [borough] homes has, if sort of financially things look positive moving forward?

Interviewee: We’re never satisfied with the budget we have. [laughter]

Interviewer: Yeah, you’re not the first person to say that, don’t worry.

Interviewee: Yeah, the budget we get for the management team, we get from the council, yes, that is an agreed formula that is working reasonably well. It’s not so much the money from the council, which is the problem, it’s the money and the financial regulations from central government which is the frustrating matter, particularly the two big frustrations is one, is what we call particularly, the debt cap, the amount of money we’re allowed to borrow to build new houses.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: We would really like that raised, so that we get more flexibility, because [borough] is no different to anywhere else in the UK. There is a real shortage of social rented housing and what we, we would like that debt cap raised so that we can borrow more money and build more houses, that’s the thing, the other one is a real frustration about the Right to Buy.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: From the council. Our finance director was quoted recently in the periodic lease on housing, where he’s saying that a council house that we sell would be valued at say, round a hundred thousand pounds in [borough], of which when we paid our fees we got less than 30,000 pounds to replace. It is impossible, specifically with the dept cap as it is, to, the government talks about 1 to 1 replacement when it is totally impractical, it just does not work.
Interviewer: Right, right, so that makes sense. So, I want to talk a little bit now that we're sort of reaching the end of my questions about sort of tenants specifically, and do you communicate with or receive feedback from tenants about, besides the tenants on the board?

Interviewee: The tenants are there for a three year, all board members are elected for a three-year term of office, they can be reappointed but it’s a three year term of office, the tenant members regularly meet with tenants and particularly through the operational board, until, we don't get direct feedback from the tenant body about tenant matters, the board itself does an evaluation about the performance of things and we will talk to people at tenants panel and there is another organization, which we call the [Organization G], which is the [Organization G] and in their meetings they have representatives from all tenant groups throughout the city and so, issues from there are passed up through them and if there is dissatisfaction with the way the tenant board members are represented then that will be made clear through that feedback group.

Interviewer: Right. Are there any active tenant resident associations or tenant management organization?

Interviewee: No, not, there are—tenants organizations tend to thrive when there are problems.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: There are groups of tenants and particularly, there are active tenants who will work and who will scrutinize the actions of [borough] homes and we’ve moved away from what used to have, where you used our neighbourhood forums, where they’d meet on a regular basis with groups in the area. We found that wasn’t very effective because to be honest the tenants that attended those neighbourhood forums, weren’t always representative of the tenants, if you even understand that. What we do now is an annual door knocking exercise, where all sorts of people, staff from [borough] homes and some board members will go around and we would try and knock on about 2,000 doors.

Interviewer: Okay, wow.


Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And try to get direct feedback from them, we found that is a lot more effective, you can talk to a lot more people and you can get views of more ordinary tenants, rather than the same group of about three or four who attended the tenant forums and always have the same access to grant.

Interviewer: Right, great. So, right, so it's more about how to get tenants to participate rather than increasing participation?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay.

Interviewee: That’s it, yes.

Interviewer: Great.

Interviewee: I will say our tenant satisfaction at the moment, is running at very, very high levels.

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: We are, we’re very proud of the tenant satisfaction we get because obviously whenever there is an interaction with [borough] homes, from the tenant, to fix a repair or whatever like that, we ask for feedback.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And that goes into tenant satisfaction and that is running a very, very high level of the moment. It is more than 90% satisfaction.

Interviewer: Great, so, let’s see what my last thought? Yes, so residents can get involved by applying to be on the board of directors or on the operational board.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think there are factors that might limit tenants from trying to get involved in that way?

Interviewee: We try to accommodate them. We have all the meetings on evenings so that people that work can attend We do, if it’s an issue, we will pay for childcare to allow people to attend those meetings and if there are other issues such as transport, we will provide taxis to allow people to attend, so we try to make it as easy as possible to--

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yeah, so for people to attend, as with all these things, people, our tenants are no different from anybody else, there are lots of pressures on my time and that is the one thing that stops a lot of people getting very actively involved.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Interviewee: How do we overcome that? I don’t know, if you have any bright ideas, I’ll be happy to—

Interviewer: [laughter] At the moment not much, but I was, yes. So those are my general questions, I have a couple of just demographic questions, which nobody likes to talk about their age or anything, so you don’t have to answer anything but I’m wondering, how old you are?

[Demographic Questions redacted from Appendix for Privacy]

Appendix 5: ALMO Interviewee “Hank” Transcript

Interviewer: Hi there, good afternoon, here, I can turn on my camera as well, okay.

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: Great, excellent, let me just make sure I have everything ready. So, how are you doing today?

Interviewee: Yeah, okay thanks, excuse me, I’m just going to dog in here, is that a problem?

Interviewer: That’s not a problem at all. Did you have a—

Interviewee: [Could you take the dog out?] Sorry about that.

Interviewer: No problem, did you have a chance to look at the briefing form that I sent you?
Interviewee: I did, sure, yes, that all seems fine. I have one question about the anonymity.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: Say that any references to me will be made using a pseudonym and if there’s any references to my organization, will there be anonymity in some way as well?
Interviewer: Yes—
Interviewee: Because if there’s any direct attribution I’ll need to clear it with the comms. team.
Interviewer: Yes, there wouldn’t be any—you would be an anonymous housing organization, for my research I’m going to specify the general regions that I’ve looked at, so like, the Midlands and the South but that’s as far as it will go in terms of being recognizable.
Interviewee: Sure.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Okay. This piece of work, will it be published in some way? Will participants be able to get a copy?
Interviewer: Yeah, participants will be able to get a copy once I’m finished with my research project, at the end of January, and I will try to get published in an academic journal, if it’s of a suitable quality.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: But that’s to be determined, I guess.
Interviewee: Okay yes is there anything else you need to know from me before I go ahead and answer your questions?
Interviewer: At the moment no, if you’ve read – One moment, I’m just going to, are you comfortable being recorded?
Interviewee: Yes, that’s no problem at all.
Interviewer: Okay I’ll begin doing that, okay so, let me adjust my recorder, great. So, could you tell me about how you got involved in [borough] homes and sort of tell me about your role?
Interviewee: Sure, yes so I’m an employee rather than a board member and that's as I explained in our emails, I've worked for them for nearly a decade, and I've applied for the job competitively, I'd previously done a similar role in a nearby town called [Town X], where I'd been instrumental in setting up the arm's length management organization and so this particular job was closer to home, I live in [borough], and so my role, to put a little flesh on that, is recruiting and supporting the three boards we have, we have the parent company and two subsidiaries, and so it's recruiting, training, supporting those board members decision-making processes and I'm making sure that we’re fully compliant with the law and regulatory requirements and in that, I support two colleagues, who I manage so that some of the day to day stuff around minuting, scheduling meetings or so, more on the administrative side of things and it’s delegated down to that.
Interviewer: Understandable, and what got you to get involved with housing in general, as the years go?
Interviewee: Good question, so for me it was a kind of career choice I suppose so following undergraduate studies and I did political science, and really out of that became interested in social and affordable housing, here in England and the UK and at the time which was mid 1990’s there was some government funding, bursary funding available to encourage more people to come into the sector, so I started in operational roles and housing management, estate management and, gradually through the course of my career I’ve worked short term on a development team, a new build development team and then became interested in housing policy and the kind of legislative framework within which affordable housing bodies operate and that eventually led me to [Town X] and the creation of the ALMO.

Interviewer: Understandable, great. Could you tell me if you overall enjoy your involvement with the ALMO and some of the challenges that you face in your day to day work?

Interviewee: Yes, I do enjoy it and I find the, I suppose the social nature of our business to be very interesting and rewarding, that is the nature of an ALMO’s customer base is that a significant majority of those people will be on lower incomes and some of that, due perhaps to health related circumstances in a fairly often complex, social needs and then, I wouldn't want to overgeneralize that doesn't describe everybody, but it's certainly true for a significant proportion, so there is that motivation, I've never really wanted to work for an organization that's purely profit driven, and so yes I do enjoy it, but as I suppose with any sector of the economy, I enjoy working with my colleagues, it’s a very good team and it’s very—I’ll say it’s a very team-centred organization, so we kind of got, like what everybody has, a kind of strap-line of what our vision is but I think the staff we work with, and the board members are all committed to improving lives in [borough] and, which is a quite an affluent part of [region X], but with significant pockets of deprivation as well, and the challenge is I suppose and you know generally it's not a massive amount of public sector funding for what we do, so our organization has met those challenges, I think quite creatively and that's, I would attribute that principally to the vision and the energy of our chief executive and we get quite a lot of revenue through housing benefit, which, you’re not based in the UK are you? But that’s [how the government] subsidizes people’s housing costs, you’re perhaps familiar with that and but we've been very successful in generating other revenue streams as well, which allow us to support our core business of managing the tenancies and so the challenges particular to my role and I would say finding high quality board members that are capable of giving a standard of governance and assurance that commensurate with the amount of money we’re turning over, which is roughly [xx] million pounds a year and so fairly, significant sums and that’s been easier over the last three years, since we started paying our board members and only really token amounts, quite small amounts, but the number of applicants and the quality of those applicants have gone up measurably. Another specific challenge I would say related to that one about the quality of the people, is ensuring that whoever is on the board, at a particular time, does have the necessary skills to hold the organization to account and ensure that its finances are run with utmost probity, and largely we do have very skilled members but there's always a need to keep re-scaling and assessing what's going to be required next, there may be
some change in government funding, change in national policy, some local circumstance that we didn't anticipate and you know the impact of Grenfell for example, no one could have foreseen that, so we need board members who are able to understand what's going on, what the implications are from a business point of view, what the risks are, and to be able to translate that into a meaningful debate at board meeting and influence the decision making.

**Interviewee:** Right. Could you tell you a bit about the makeup of the board in terms of what percentage of the board is made up of independent members, what percentage are council nominees and what percentages are tenets or residents?

**Interviewee:** Yes, so I mentioned we’re a group structure, so we have a parent company, with two subsidiaries, so I'll talk principally about the parent company because that is the that's the ALMO, the subsidiaries are constitute slightly differently, so the parent company, [borough] homes, has eleven board members, we've set up the constitution in such a way that it could be, as few as nine or as many as eleven, but we currently got a full quota, and we have no council nominees at all and that was the decision of the council about five years ago. It owns a number of companies and that provide different services around the area and they chose to not have board representation on those companies and accountability is set up in a different way, and so the constituencies we do you have, you mentioned customers, we have three customers on the board and again our constitution is flexible in that respect and we, of the eleven, that's the maximum we say that no group can be in a majority, so we could never have six customers for example but in theory we could have up to five, now at the moment we have three, and there's a second constituency or group of members, they’re independents and they’re people who typically held a senior role, either in housing or a related, complementary, sector of the economy, so most of the independents have been directors of finance or maybe chief executives in housing bodies but we also have a lawyer, and a chief executive of an organization that manages [Organization P], and then our third constituency, which was only formed when the council stopped nominating members, it’s called stakeholders and the stakeholder, a stakeholder—excuse me, I just got to plug in for a second—

**Interviewer:** No problem take your time.

**Interviewee:** Okay, I’ll only be a moment. Alright sorry about that.

**Interviewer:** No problem.

**Interviewee:** Yes, the third constituency are stakeholders, and a stakeholder must be someone who is able to demonstrate some kind of local connection to [borough], where we’re based. So that maybe by living in the borough or having a connection through the borough through employment and so we have three stakeholders at the moment. One of whom lives in [borough] and works for another housing provider in the area. The second who also lives in [borough] and is the chief executive of a national housing body and the third one who happens to be a local authority elected person, but you understand that we've appointed them rather than them being nominated to us, so that is on the basis of their skill, not because we've been told we must have them.
Interviewer: So are you a customer or resident of [borough] homes –
Interviewee: No.
Interviewer: Oh okay.
Interviewee: I am purely an employee.
Interviewer: And you mention that accountability is set up in a different way, because there are no council nominees, could you elaborate on that a little bit?
Interviewee: Yes, certainly yes, so I think there are two principal levels to that, there's a bigger professional accountability through the staff of the council and our own organization, the ALMO, so there's a range of meetings and sounding boards, discussion forums and so on, so that a professional officer level and... [unclear audio]...The ALMO is accountable for the money they got from the council, and then at the political level, the council has set up a committee, which is called the member committee if I remember rightly, and they have a meeting that meets four times a year and it consists of councillors on the cross-party basis, so it's not monopolized by single party and it receives a range of reports, from finance, performance and members of staff attend that to give an account of [borough] homes to the council that ultimately does own this.
Interviewer: Understandable, great and so, you mentioned earlier that a single group can't make up a majority of the board.
Interviewee: That's it, yes.
Interviewer: Could you tell me what the sort of particular reasoning is, of the division one third one third, one third?
Interviewee: Yeah, so it's, it's not strictly one third, so that the mathematics of it, if you like that there can be no majority of 11, there are currently 3 stakeholders, 3 customers and 5 independents.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: So that preserves the no majority principle.
Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And it's really just a safeguard to minimise the risk, albeit small risk with a group, say independents want to be in the majority they could probably be partisan in the way they sort the organization, so just to be clear we never had a situation where we felt that kind of factionalism but emerging, it's purely a precautionary measure, but if a single group were seen to dominate and they could be perceived to have the [unclear audio] hand in decision making and that's something we want to avoid.
Interviewer: Right. Now at the board level, since [borough] homes is managing such a large stock of housing-
Interviewee: That's right.
Interviewer: I presume the customers are residents who are involved get some type of training right before they get involved in the board or as they go along?
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: So overall do you, how long does it take for tenants to sort of feel on the same page in terms of what's going on?
Interviewee: Yes, so the three customers we have on the board, they've been with us for differing lengths of time, one has been on for less than 2 years, so he is relatively new and the other 2 customers have been on for about four years. To answer your question how long does it take for them you know, to feel on the same page, to become familiar, I suppose I would say the settling process is typically about a year, by which time they will have seen a full cycle of meetings and the process of the big issues such as approving the budget, approving the accounts and so on. In terms of us assisting those customers to make a valuable contribution and we recruit competitively so we try to attract people who we feel would have the correct attitude and disposition to be able to make a worthwhile contribution and I would say we're successful in that and then we offer a comprehensive induction program and so, the incoming members will get to meet key members of staff, they would be especially supported by my team and myself and we hold six monthly, one-to-one meetings with those customer members and would offer, if they want it more frequently we would facilitate that and then each incoming member is also assigned a director of the organization, one of the salary directors, who is called a link officer, so that's someone who's not become part of the formal governance machinery but they can use that person as a sounding board, maybe run questions by them that they would like to discuss and so it's just another avenue of support they have. In terms of just a little bit more on that if it's okay—
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: There's also regular opportunities for training, for all board members, where we run an appraisal, a review process, a performance, to help people identify individual or collective needs that the board may have to improve its skills, and I think one more thing to say about that is that the customers, regardless of their own background, bring a particular perspective to the board deliberation so the three we have at the moment and two of them had previously run their own business, one has been a part of a couple running a pub, so it's a small business but still a lot of transferable skills and experience and then the other the third person the most recent joiner, works in IT, I'm not sure his exact role but he's a, I think he's a programmer of some sort, but he brings quite a lot of fairly sophisticated skills relating to our IT and its value to the business and so on, so we try to play to those individual strengths and in the early days I think it's true to say we've got more customer members who were perhaps enthusiastic and concerned with community issues, local issues for their particular area and I would say there’s a trend towards being slightly more professionalized.
Interviewer: Right, great. So, could you tell me a bit about how decisions are made on the board, is it a majority vote or is it consensus-based?
Interviewee: It's consensus, it's nearly always consensus then there's a provision in our standing orders for voting very rare anything is ever put to a vote formally, so discussions are quite—Well very amicable, the chair of the board tries to reach a consensus facilitate a common view and if
there is a lack of clarity perhaps officers might go in there to do a little bit more work on something, to refine a recommendation and I think in the nine years, I've never seen something go to a vote on a show of hands, although there was something I think the year before I joined, the decision whether or not to enter into a particular significant contract, but that that was approved and the contract is still in place.

Interviewer: So, what happens when there are disagreements among board members?

Interviewee: Well there aren't that many I would say and I'm not saying everybody always just says exactly the same thing but there is not tension of such, it’s quite a coherent board, they work well together. There is the facility if someone wanted to record their dissent, if everybody appeared to agree something but one person, had a particularly strong view, they would ask or could ask for their disagreement to be noted and I would say the level of disagreeing, if there's any, occasionally, of course the board and the members of staff, the officers, don't necessarily see things from the same point of view so there's some negotiation around why a particular course of action is being recommended or not recommended, and so they’re talked to in a fairly frank manner and officers are rightly, members of staff are asked to give an account for why they're doing something or why performance, didn't go quite as well as maybe was hoped in a particular area and so on, but overall I would say it's a strong board and there is—just trying to think of the correct phrase. I would say it does function very much as a critical friend and both aspects of that are true, it is a friend, it's a constructive relationship but there's no absence of criticism, so on some occasion, something might be sent back to be refined. The board has no anxiety of saying no, if they don't think something is not good enough.

Interviewer: Great. So my next questions are related to the relationship between the ALMO and the local authority –

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: So, how would you describe that relationship overall? As positive, as negative, challenging or?

Interviewee: Yes, well, it’s extremely positive, so I'm sure you know the constitution of ALMO places it in a very particular relationship with the council from which it comes—

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So yes, I would say that the greatest, the strongest example of its positive nature, is in the fact that the first decade of the ALMO being in existence, there was the option for the council to either extend the arrangement or to terminate it, so the contractual document governs the relationship, it’s called the management agreement, and there was a constructive negotiation of a new management agreement that runs now until, I think it's 2041, it was twenty seven years from the date it was struck. So the best of my knowledge I think that's the longest management agreement that any ALMO has with its parent account, so, that reflects a measure of confidence on both sides, that the relationship is working and the management fee, which is the money the council pays to us for providing the service is where some of the challenges, from year to year,
because we’re required to achieve certain efficiencies year on year, which I would say we largely do and very successfully, and yes, [...]... So that builds some constructive tension into the relationship because each year, I think it's maybe two percent or something we’re required year on year to provide better value for money, so there’s that incentive there, there’s a reward packet, a reward element within the contractual arrangement so we're not just being told to perform better, there’s a reward attached to it in other ways, and there's a number of forums for maintaining constructive relationships, so officers of the council and [the ALMO] meet regularly, the council has a strategic housing team, which is our principal interface I would say and because the relationship is largely financial, our director of resources and our head of finance effectively, meets regularly with the councils’ borough treasurer, the senior finance person in the council. So those relationships are candid, they have to be, but we’re monitored in terms of the service we provide, and we can honestly say you know it's reported annually through, it’s called a delivery-plan feedback report, and we, we demonstrate the level of service the council is getting for the money it pays. So yes, and so it’s a good relationships and the other thing I mentioned earlier, the member committee, which was set up in lieu of the council nominating people onto the board and, there’s challenge in those meetings, very much so. We provide the material and then our members of staff go before the elected, some of the elected people in the local authority, and again, those conversations are extremely candid about the level of service, performance, if there are any areas of concern around performance that have to be justified and again I would say, frequently it’s the case that those elected members are very complimentary about the work we work we do.

**Interviewer:** Right, so you mentioned earlier that you do have sort of a budget that you work with and that can be challenging, has that changed over time, has it become more challenging in recent years or sort of roughly the same sorts of constraints?

**Interviewee:** Yes, it has become more challenging because as you know, you’re perhaps aware of that. Maybe three years ago, two years ago, the government insisted that all social housing providers would apply a one year, a full year, one percent reduction to their rental stream, so from a customer point of view that looks good because rents are going down but from a business planning point of view that's more challenging because it means it’s a reduced revenue, so and so they had to do a re-profiling of investment works related to that, which we’ve been able to do successfully, so really we're, we've not cut work out of the program but we've got to organize the program somewhat differently [unclear audio 29:07- 29:10].

**Interviewer:** No problem.

**Interviewee:** So yes that’s been an issue and then, the other side, the other challenges would relate particularly to welfare reform, the wider welfare reform changes that are coming in, in England, and so some individual customers may be working with an overall smaller pot of money and so that's a challenge to not just us, but to every social housing provider in terms of rent collection and so on, so we put a lot of work into preparing for that, providing oversight and particularly providing support most likely to the customers most likely to be affected adversely
by those changes and yes, I think that's a fair summary, without getting too complex about the way ALMOs are funded, the money that comes in through rent is paid to the council and then the vast majority of that is forwarded on to the ALMO as the management fee, but the council is able to use some of—I wouldn't know the exact proportion but for what, of course strategic housing activities, so um, it's not the case that one hundred pence in every pound comes directly to the ALMO, there is, that pie has to be cut in some way but the vast majority comes to the ALMO. The principal thing I would say from the council’s perspective is that we, the ALMO has this document called a delivery plan and that really says what we're going to do, and that's then the bench[M] against which we're measured, so if we say we're going to fit a thousand kitchens, they need to know we fitted a thousand kitchens and so on, so that delivery plan is really a critical tool in the relationship.

Interviewer: Right. Great, so, let me see, among the homes that the [ALMO] manages are there also tenant and residents’ associations or tenant management organizations that exist and does the ALMO communicate with them in any way?

Interviewee: Yes, but there are no tenant management organizations, but there are very specific constitutional form, and there are none in [borough].

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: There are lots of resident’s groups of various kinds, usually attached to a particular neighbourhood, so that might be round, you know just a particular part of the borough or where there's concentrated development and those groups are supported in a variety of ways. For more details on that I would have to speak with some of my colleagues but just an example with which I am familiar, we'll provide administrative and secretarial support to a resident’s group and we would help them if they wanted to formally constitute, have a budget and so on, then we would enable that to happen. So yes, there is support of various kinds and then there's also wider support, perhaps around customer training for example, if a customer want to develop a particular skill, or to address, say if they’re lonely, then we would have various teams, who are able to respond to that in some way, so we try and collectively as an organization, we try to do more than be just a landlord who collects the rent and maintains the property.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And I think there's quite strong social dimension in what we do, besides having someone have a roof over their head.

Interviewer: So, another one of my questions, you mentioned there was no TMO. Is there any particular reason why there aren't any TMOs or is it just sort of that tenants haven't taken it up? or is it sort of not seen as necessary or?

Interviewee: I've never heard any expression of interest or support for a TMO in [borough].

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: And I know in some parts of the country, in [City X] and parts of the West Midlands, there are a number of TMOs but it's not something that seems to have attracted attention here, I wouldn't know if there’s a particular reason, I mean positively we would be able
to say that, by and large customers are happy with the service they get through the ALMO, and don't feel the need to exercise their rights to push for something that is more directly managed and influenced by tenants.

**Interviewer:** Right, that makes sense, going back to the current board for a moment.

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned and as is in all ALMO boards, there's sort of those people who have very specific expertise in housing, or their entire careers are built in housing, I'm wondering if you get a sense of whether there are people on the board who are more influential because of their experience or is that sort of influence downplayed a bit? If that makes sense.

**Interviewee:** Yes, I think there are people who are undoubtedly more influential.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** I would attribute that in part to their expertise, there's no doubt there are some think there ever an extremely sophisticated understanding of a particular area of the business, so I would say that their influence is particular to their skill, so someone might be particularly skilled in financial matters, so they are more influence than those who are less experienced in that field, but then there may be someone else who is more, perhaps fluent when it comes to diversity or performance, so I don't think there's one or two members who are say, influential out of all proportion to the others, but people's influence is closely correlated to the skills they bring and then, collectively, I'd say those influences are what make up the board as a whole, and there's certainly no one on the board who I would say, brings no influence, that brings nothing to bare.

**Interviewer:** Great, I have a couple more questions—

**Interviewee:** Sure, that's fine.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, so you mentioned that there's a lot of, there's a strong connection between the council and the ALMO.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** If the ALMO has some kind of concern to bring to the council or vice versa, if the council wants to do something, put in bike lanes or a parking lot or something anything that would affect any of the homes that are managed by [the ALMO]. What is that dialogue like? Is there a lot of consultation? Are there certain things that either the ALMO or the council won't consult each other on and sort of things of the do always consult each other on? If that is clear.

**Interviewee:** I think I have to qualify my answer there and say that there are things I don't know because I'm not directly involved in the management of the physical space where the properties is, I’m involved in the governance processes and I tend to be related to some of the strategic things around finance, performance and so on, but what I would say, what I can say with confidence is that we do have a positive relationship, so an issue. this would be the case with any other ALMO you speak to, there's a lot of open space, green space around [the borough] and sometimes it's, the to the uninformed observer, it's very unclear whether the council or [the
ALMO] manages a particular piece of land and so those kind of issues, they’re very operational but there are things in place to manage all of that so both are dealt with at an operational level so you know someone complains about a tree—

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: If it’s growing too fast, we would start with taking that forward, but the board would have no concern –

Interviewer: With that—
Interviewee: That level of engagement and I would say for all the other things there are established channels dependent on the level of issues that are being considered for directors or housing officers or antisocial behaviour managers, to work hand-in-glove with the council. So because the ALMO has been in existence for probably fourteen fifteen years now, those things are well established and work well. We also have, I think it's worth just saying in this connection, we have a central customer feedback team and any inquiries from the local authority that come through an elected member or if someone wants to speak to their elected representatives and they are there all centrally-managed to ensure that everything is properly tracked and all that in order to the elected member gets a satisfactory reply and we explain a particular course of action or why something can’t be done. So I would say that every level of the organization there’s fairly sophisticated processes to ensure that ourselves and the council work well together.

Interviewer: Right, great, and so yeah, a last couple questions would be related to resident involvement.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: You mentioned that residents who are members of the board are recruited through like an interview process kind of thing.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Apply as if they were applying for a job sort of thing

Interviewee: That’s right yes.

Interviewer: So how is this position advertised across [the ALMO]?

Interviewee: Yeah so we would advertise on the website and through a range of social media channels, so we would use Twitter, Facebook and so on and we have an established presence there, but also run an advert in a local news group, you know, a hardcopy newspaper, and we would also promote it through the network of different resident involvement channels that we have. So the colleagues who work directly with me that I mentioned would go out to meetings, and usually a couple of times a year, we'll have some bigger resident involvement event and so there might be a particular issue, where we're trying to get some residence together to canvas their views on something or to promote a particular service and we would go and have, my governance team would have a presence, at that to try and really [press the flesh] and engage with some individuals say we found maybe suitable for coming on the board, where we would encourage them to apply.
**Interviewer:** Great, and how does the board communicate with or receive feedback from residents who are not on the board?

**Interviewee:** Right, so in a number of ways and I would say that the principal way in terms of, the board understanding customer’s experience and views about services, there's a, twice a year there's what's called a customer experience report which goes to a committee of the board and that, there’s a lot of metrics in that, around different aspects of customers experiences and views, and then on an annual basis, there's a larger, more comprehensive report which is called the, I can’t remember its exact name. I think it's called tenants experience report.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Rather than the customer experience report, but that is a much broader analysis not just of direct customer feedback but the degree of engagement with customers, any trends that have been recognized over the previous year, how those have been responded to. So, they use the two customer experience reports and the, I may be misnaming these, apologies. The twice-a-year customer feedback report and the once-a-year is the tenant experience report, that's probably a useful distinction, the experience report is the bigger, more comprehensive and is worked on jointly by number of contributing authors. The customer feedback report, which is done twice a year, that is done with our customer feedback team, it's still got a lot of information in it, but slightly narrower and outside, more statistical in its focus, whereas the tenants report is more descriptive and analytical.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, I'd say that they're the main things in terms of the board having a direct window into customer views and experience.

**Interviewer:** Do you think there might be any factors that limit tenants from expressing their views or coming to, either being involved in TRAs’s or trying to become involved with the board?

**Interviewee:** Well, I'm sure there are factors and yes, I think those two questions there really, in terms of the of individual customers and their views being made known to the board, it’s obviously not possible or desirable I think, for individual board members to be, or individual customers and board members to be interacting at that kind of operational level, so I think the way we do it, with structured reports that give a snapshot of some really useful data and analysis of that is very good. In terms of wider involvement, there’s many ways for customers to become involved, and our mantra, I suppose, is that we encourage people to be involved, at a level that suits them, so some people are happy to receive the service, they pay the rent and receive the service and that's the extent of the relationship they want with the landlord, whereas other people want to get more closely involved or they perhaps have a particular issue that they have an interest in.

**Interviewer:** Right.
Interviewee: And then I would say there are plenty of opportunities to either through groups or activities we offer and feedback they can give, directly through the website, they can make a complaint, and there are a range of older people's activities as an example. Are there limitations? Well yes, I suppose some people may not find it interesting... Our buildings are accessible and we will support people if they want to attend something, we're trying to cover their out of pocket expenses, we would cover child care costs if that was an issue for someone if they said otherwise they wouldn't be able to participate, so we try to be as flexible as we can, and I'm certain there are barriers and we try to work as creatively as we can and quite a lot of our work, my colleagues on the engagement team, would do fieldwork, so we employ a skilled outreach worker that you know you gather that a lot of their work is done in the classroom, in assemblies and so on.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And yes, so we try to target our engagement fairly imaginatively.

Interviewer: Do you think more resident participation is always good.?

Interviewee: Well, that doesn't feel like a great question—

Interviewer: You could qualify, you could qualify it, most of the time.

Interviewee: It depends on the quality of the engagement really and what outcomes follow from it. I mean I think. To consider the extremes so there's, there clearly needs to be some engagement, I wouldn't want to be employed by an organization that had no resident engagement.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Just even a very minimal level of service but the engagement that's offered has got to be meaningful and of value, both to the people who participate and the organization, so I don't think it would be fair to you to say that engagement is always good—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It depends what the engagement is and what it achieves, but good engagement that results in better services and happy customers, sure, yes.

Interviewer: Great, and you have any comments on the future of resident participation? Where you see that going, moving forward?

Interviewee: Well, yes probably a couple of things, I think the Housing Green Paper, that's now going to start a consultative process and journey through parliament will probably try to encourage more resident engagement. I think one of the long-term changes that will flow from the terrible disaster of Grenfell is that they'll be a need for landlords to be more visible and more directly accountable to customers. So, I think that's an area of change, and I think a lot of things that have perhaps been traditionally thought of as resident’s engagement, will perhaps have to be modified a little bit, taking into account the fact that we live in so much more of a digital age now and that's--I don't want to generalise but people want different sorts of engagement, not in my experience not many people want to come along to a meeting on a Tuesday night and express an opinion about the colour of front doors. We've probably got to get a bit more cohesive than
that. So yes, I think it will have to change, and of course on the technologies, that each new cohort of tenants that's moving into properties is more technologically literate than the next generation up and so on, so we've got really you know just as any news or media, or retail organization, is having to respond to that, I would say so are we, and I think we're trying do that, in terms of having a good electronic interface with our customers but also have the customers who still need or prefer face to face and being able to do that. So, I think, it’s quite, it’s certainly not a static thing, engagement, and as the world, the economy around us changing, we have to look at that change.

**Interviewer:** Sorry, I'm losing the connection and I'm yes, yes sorry just for a second there—

**Interviewee:** I can hear you.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** Sure, yeah, so it is sure to change and just moving from our particular organization for a minute, as you’re probably aware, there are a number of organizations within England, that exist purely to facilitate creative thinking around engagement and understanding what the benefits can be if it’s done well.

**Interviewer:** Right. Okay, I have a couple of general demographic questions but before we get there, I wanted to ask you are there any other comments you wanted to make or if you have any questions?

**Interviewee:** Only single comment is about, just through the other groups, have you come across TPAS, as a part of your research? T-P-A-S.

**Interviewer:** I don’t, tenant participation advisory service?

**Interviewee:** That’s right, yes.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Briefly--but, yeah.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, so I’ll say there, in terms of the work you’re doing and the brief you sent me—

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** It would be worth to make in contact with them, their office is in [City Z] and so, whether they’ll be able to help you in any way, I don’t know, but I’ll say they’re worth a look.

**Interviewer:** Great.

**Interviewee:** I’ll be happy to take your demographic questions.

**Interviewer:** Okay, great, I will pause the recording...

Appendix 6: ALMO Interviewee “Liliana” Transcript

**Interviewer:** So, just before we begin, you were part of the same TMO as [name], was it? Which TMO?
Interviewee: I’m an ALMO with [borough ALMO].
Interviewer: [ALMO]. Perfect.
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: Okay. Okay. I mixed you up with someone, okay. But that’s fine. So, could you tell me about why you decided to get involved with the almo and how did you join?
Interviewee: My story is quite unique because the reason I joined was because I was being bullied in my current employment and I wanted to do something that would make me feel elevated but at the same time help my community. So, the opportunity came about, I was invited and I went for the interview. So, that’s how…
Interviewer: You got involved?
Interviewee: I got involved.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: And are you involved in any type of, or have you been involved in any type of, management work or politics work or housing work before, or was it completely new scenario?
Interviewee: Completely new to me. I had never ever done anything to do with that level of management. I’d done supervisory work but I hadn’t done like managing, overseeing, strategy, things like that. I’d never done anything like that before.
Interviewer: That makes sense. And overall, do you enjoy your involvement in the ALMO?
Interviewee: I love it. I absolutely love it. I— they gave me a lot of training. For somebody with no board, Director background, they’ve trained me up and I am now the Vice Chair of the Board and also the Chair of the Remuneration and Ethics Committee. So…
Interviewer: That’s great.
Interviewee: Yeah. Plus I sit on Performance as well.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So, I’ve done quite well considering I came from zero knowledge.
Interviewer: Do you find that—so, is your position full-time position, voluntary position?
Interviewee: It’s voluntary.
Interviewer: Voluntary. Okay.
Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you find any skills well transfer on any work you might do later on or anything like that?
Interviewee: Well, I do have a legal background, I have a law degree. So, that was a bit pervasive across the Board. So, that helped me with reading the papers, with summarizing, with knowing what kind of questions to ask them, how to ask them. So, yeah, I suppose my legal background. Yeah.
Interviewer: Great. Could you tell me a bit about [the ALMO] in terms of how meetings function, how often they occur…?
Interviewee: Alright. [The ALMO], their main board meets every two months. Yeah. So, their main board meets every two months but within that, we have committees that meet also on different days. So, it used to be a lot more regular but they’ve cut it down because it wasn’t time-effective for some of the residents, because you have resident board members and you have independent board members. So, yeah, we do have quite a lot of meetings. But they’re mainly every other month. So, twice… every other month, yeah. So, the last one we had was in July so, we won’t have the next one until October.

Interviewer: And so, how much time do you dedicate to this voluntary position per week or per month?

Interviewee: Wow. If I were to calculate it, it’s quite a lot because I sit on Performance so, that would be at least two hours… wow. If I were to calculate it, it would be…

Interviewer: A lot.

Interviewee: A lot, yeah. It’s quite a lot of time. I spend a lot of time on the board.

Interviewer: Is it sort of like— could you estimate how many hours per week? What of your personal full time work?

Interviewee: Yeah, I could because… yeah. Because Performance is every other month as well and it’s two hours. Board is every other month and that’s two hours. In addition to that, we go on conferences as well. We go away. So, yeah. It could be two hours every two months for Performance, two hours every two months for board, so that’s four hours every two months.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. Just for the sitting at board.

Interviewer: Just for the sitting.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then there’s other times…

Interviewee: But it depends on how many committees you’re on because other people will be increased depending on how many committees they sit on. Some people sit on other committees. I only sit on Performance and Remuneration at the moment because of my time constraints.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: And do you dedicate also time outside of that to work on, like prepare for meetings…

Interviewee: Oh, definitely. And that could be quite a lot more hours because sometimes, the papers are up to 300 pages, especially the main board so, you have to prepare for that in advance because if they invite you to take questions and you haven’t got the paperwork, then you’re not going to be able to function at board level. So, yeah, I’d say that’s a few hours every time.

Interviewer: A few hours; do you think it’s, altogether, maybe a couple of hours every week kind of thing?

Interviewee: If you were to calculate… No. It’s going to be a few hours like say the week before we go to board.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So, if we add those hours on to what I do so, that would be 5 hours every two months.
Interviewer: Every two months.
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: You get what I mean?
Interviewer: That makes sense. Yeah. So, little more than an hour a week.
Interviewee: Okay. And could you tell me about how decisions are made? Is it sort of like based on expertise or is it a consensus vote or a majority vote?
Interviewee: Well, you have the board directors…
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: … and then, you have the operational directors who are to execute the mission of [ALMO].
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: We are the people that oversee the strategy and the mission to look up and to make sure it’s being enforced at operational level. So… sorry, your question is how…
Interviewer: How decisions are made. So, is it majority vote or…?
Interviewee: Yeah. So, what happens is those directors will bring us the reports every two months for the varying departments and they will ask us to either make a recommendation, monitor or make a decision. Depending on what’s being asked, we act accordingly. So, that’s how we do it. So, decisions are made when we get paperwork. We ask the questions. If we’re satisfied that it’s in order, we will allow that decision to be made. If we’re not happy, we have concerns, then we ask them to bring it back and we’ll monitor it.
Interviewer: Cool.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Okay. So, that makes sense.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: So, could you tell me a bit about how responsibilities are distributed between the individuals on the board like sort of people do different things, people that aren’t doing similar things…?
Interviewee: Yes. People sit on different committees.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: So, for example, I sit on Performance & Remuneration. So, other people will sit on Auditing, Risk, Repairs, Regeneration & Investment, Property. So, are you asking how we…? Because it’s at Board level, it’s a bit different from… you’ve got two different types of directors.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: You’ve got the board that oversees, that’s why we’re able to do it voluntarily and then, you’ve got the operational staff who are the people who have to execute that work. So…

Interviewer: Right. So, I guess what I mean is— so, how does, for example, are tenants more involved in certain aspects of committees or are tenants kind of equally in all the committees?

Interviewee: Now, once you’re a director, you’re a director.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, whether you’re a resident or whether you’re an independent, it doesn’t matter. You’re treated in exactly the same way for board purposes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, are there… Okay.

Interviewee: So, the expectations are the same. So, that’s why we got the training.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Because an independent will have more of an operational level of expertise because they tend to have been directors in operations. Finance directors, Audit & Risk Management, all of that. But the residents don’t have that same level of expertise so they get the training to get there and then, you’re appraised yearly to see how you’re getting on.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now, could you tell me a bit about some other specific things that you’ve been involved with in terms of overseeing in your committees, in your work?

Interviewee: Yeah. We oversee everything. So, we oversee [the ALMO] Board, [the ALMO] as a whole. So, I’ve been involved in the whole aspect of it but as I say, it’s broken down into committees. So, some of us will look up repairs in detail to make sure that it’s functioning. Some of us will look up performance to make sure that’s up. So, if I talk about myself at my areas, I look at performance. So, for example, with the staff levels, is there a high level of sickness…

Interviewer: Could you say that again?

Interviewee: Is there a high level of sickness in the organizations? Are the staff members happy? Are they fully engaged? Are they being developed? I look at all those kind of things at performance level. We look at gas servicing and repairs, we look up all the outcomes. So, if you say you’re going to do something and we’ve sent you away to do it, we want you to come back and say, “Here are the results,” of that outcome. And if we identify any problems, “Were there are any complains?” If so, why? So, we look at, we have to it [...] it, because we can’t look overall. We have to look at each committee in detail which we don’t have time to do that at board level. I mean, that’s the main board level. So, you break it down into groups.

Interviewer: Committees.

Interviewee: Yeah. Into committees, yeah.
Interviewer: So, the Board is a way of keeping the executive responsible.
Interviewee: Exactly. And accountable.
Interviewer: That makes sense.
Interviewee: Yeah. And before we make decisions, obviously, it’s on us. So, if we’ve not looked at something then it’s down to us at the end of the day. The directors would say, “Well, we gave it to you, you read the report and you approved it.” So, that’s up to you… you know? So, we have to ensure that we are covering ourselves as well and not just pushing things through when they bring it to us. We have to challenge, we have to hold the executive to account, we have to challenge, we have to probe, we have to scrutinize everything that they bring to us. Yeah.
Interviewer: And what sort of happens when there’s a disagreement between the executive and the board in terms of you disagree on some results or on some...?
Interviewee: Oh, yeah. Yeah. That’s where the scrutiny comes in because sometimes, the report isn’t as we would have hoped so they have to take it back, look at it again and bring it back to us. So, if there is a disagreement, they do accept that we are challenging them. So, they just basically say, “Okay, if you’re not happy with this then we would go away and look at it again. Just give us some pointers. What is it that you’re looking for that you did not see in the report and then, we’ll bring it back.” They don’t see it as an attack because it’s our job to scrutinize and challenge and hold them to account.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: So, they take it well and if it’s a disagreement, they go back and look at what we’ve asked them to do and they bring it back to us.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewer: So, why did you choose to get involved with the committee that you’re involved in as opposed to the other ones?
Interviewee: Because people say or residents say—Residents see things in one way like the services that are provided by [the ALMO] and the board may be seeing the paperwork a different way because the executive may be feeding them with what they want. So, I came in as a like more of a grassroots person to see what the comparison is. What they’re telling us they do, have I experienced it as a resident? That’s how I look at it. I’m like, “these reports, they look good but I don’t… I or my other residents don’t feel that this is improving. So, how come the figures say that they are? There’s something wrong.” So, I chose that because Performance will tell me overall how [ALMO] is doing as a barrow, you know, for the residence. Because at the end of the day, they’re there for us. They’re there for our services, to give us homes, to keep our homes in good maintenance. So, we need to be seeing that in the performance levels and if we’re not and there are high level of complains then they’re not performing. So, that’s why I chose that particular one. Yeah. And then Remuneration is to do with staff engagement. The CEO, we recruit for the CEO salary, pay and, you know, I’m concerned about staff as well because they’re on the frontline everyday, the executive are way up there but the people on the ground are the
ones who are taking the flak from the residents. So, that’s why I got involved in Remuneration and Staff engagement.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** And I’ve done a few talks with staff as well to see how they actually feel anonymously. Because they’ll say one thing about…

**Interviewer:** They’ll say it differently but it’s anonymous. Yeah, that’s why we’re also not in this because…

**Interviewee:** Yeah. Exactly.

**Interviewer:** So, you mentioned before that tenants receive a lot of training to kind of bring everyone to equal sort of knowledge about how things work. So, do you think the approach that is collaborative when it comes to problem solving because everyone has kind of the same useful knowledge, or is it more like people with expertise bring forward the ideas?

**Interviewee:** Yeah. That’s a good question because it evolves over time.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** When I first started on the board, I was so intimidated because I knew nothing and I had all the other board members contributing in a way that was just totally alien to me. So, I went on a lot of conferences, I went on lots of training to get myself up to speed and then, I started to— and then, I went on a particular training called Housing Diversity Network which actually teaches you what questions to ask a Board and how how ask them and how to have that knowledge you’ve just got a reference pack and then, they thought I had a head transplant by the time I finished because I was way up there with the rest of them, you know? Because they were like, “Wow, what’s happened?” You know, “What’s happened to her?”

**Interviewer:** So, it’s sort of like at the beginning, it’s a bit difficult to…

**Interviewee:** It’s very, very daunting because you don’t know if something you ask is a silly question or is it “How could she ask that? Should she not know better?” You don’t know what to ask, what to say, how to say it, how to bounce off of others, but it evolves. You learn as you go along, as you read the papers, you kind know and if you’re not sure, in the report, it’ll tell you you can go to a particular director and they’ll assist you, like finance, I got a mentor because I knew nothing about finance. So, I paired myself up with a mentor and then, I was able to read the papers and ask questions.

**Interviewer:** Are there any people on the board who are more influential than others in terms of their experience or background?

**Interviewee:** Oh, definitely. The independents. Because they have the knowledge, they have the experience and they know exactly what it’s all about. So, they’re very, very good. So, definitely, I would say the independents. The residents, only if they’re operating at executive level elsewhere would I say that they have…

**Interviewer:** A similar…

**Interviewee:** … a similar background. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Right.
Interviewee: Yeah. To be honest.
Interviewer: And so, is the board, is it sort of like one-third tenants, one-third independent, one-third council?
Interviewee: No, 7.
Interviewer: 7?
Interviewee: 7 residents...
Interviewer: 7 residents?
Interviewee: 5 or 4 independents, I think.
Interviewer: 4 or 5?
Interviewee: Yeah. So, it’s the residents ratio is higher.
Interviewer: Oh, is it like sort of over 50%?
Interviewee: Oh yeah. Yeah. We want it that way because we are the people who it affects. So, we want to be sure that what you say and you’re doing at board level is what we see in the paperwork and what we see happening operationally.
Interviewer: I think that’s actually quite unique as far as ALMOs go.
Interviewee: It is unique. Oh, yeah. It is unique.
Interviewer: For most of them, it’s limits like, you know, 30% tenants, 30%...
Interviewee: Some don’t have any residents at all.
Interviewer: Yeah. That’s also true. Yeah. So, it’s interesting.
Interviewee: Ours is very unique and it’s very diverse as well which is also very unique, you know? So, quite a few women, and it’s unique all round in terms of diversity.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: My next question would be why do you think tenants represent that particular percentage or amount of people on the board?
Interviewee: Because that’s how [the ALMO] wants it. [The ALMO] wants a situation where residents can see that [the ALMO] are what they say on the team.
Interviewer: Right. Yes.
Interviewee: They have unparalleled choice. They are, you know, thriving communities. All of what they say on the team is what we should be seeing.
Interviewer: That makes sense.
Interviewee: And if we’re not, then we could lean on the MPs, we can, we have influence. Yeah. It’s quite strong actually.
Interviewer: So, then, my next question was how much influence do you feel that tenants have in terms of determining the agenda for a meeting or sort of assigning the outline of the meeting?
Interviewee: Yeah. Well, we do because— well, it would be the Chairs. The Chairs actually decide that and quite a few of our Chairs are residents. So, that helps. So, they set the agenda and run with that. If there are any other things that they want to add too, they can ask the other members if there’s anything else.
Interviewer: So, what happens when there are disagreements on the board, within, among members?

Interviewee: It has happened.

Interviewer: It’s just [distraction]

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah, it is actually. Yeah. […] as well.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: But anyways.

Interviewee: Yeah. Disagreements do happen quite a bit. You get—you see, because you have different personalities on the board and there are some that like to dominate the meeting sometimes and then, there’ll be that, two people who may disagree and it’s difficult but we’re encouraged in every meeting to be respectful of our colleagues and you know, you can forceful but you can be respectful as well.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, we try to work it out and try to keep the disagreements to a minimum, but there have been serious fights before.

Interviewer: Yeah. But yeah. I hear that quite often actually that there’s often…

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: There’s always one or two people that are more opinionated and yeah.

Interviewee: More opinionated. And then, they’re opinionated to a fault because sometimes, what they set out to achieve is demolished by their approach. It’s too aggressive, it’s too forceful, it’s not allowing the rest of the purpose to be pushed through and it’s defeating the whole object of having a meeting. So, you do get that quite a bit.

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense. As part of your role, have you had an experience where you felt you weren’t being listened to but that was not necessarily on the board but, you know, with the executive or with other tenants or sort of like you’re being…

Interviewee: Not being listened to.

Interviewer: Heard of, I guess.

Interviewee: Yeah. When we wanted— we have a development team. The development team are responsible for building new homes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: And it was a real problem because every time the papers came back to board, there was always a delay in procurement. Which is like where you have to get the contractors out, get the specs, everything that you need to ensure that things run smoothly with the contract. And every time, there was the same thing, oh there’s a delay, or there was a delay. So, I said, “There’s a problem here. You can’t have…” There was a persistent delay every time and what we discovered was that the procurement process didn’t have the relevant expertise from the executive. So, that’s why there was always a delay. Because procurement is very, very technical and if you don’t get it right, you could be back to the drawing board, hence the delay. And those
delays, they were costing residents the opportunity to move into a new home. So, I felt I wasn’t being listened to so I went and got myself some procurement knowledge and I started firing back and they were like, “Oh, yeah. Well, we didn’t have the technique” they accepted that they didn’t have the technical expertise. So, what we decided was that there should be a procurement board that monitors what they are doing as well.

**Interviewer:** Right. Oh, interesting.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So, it worked out kind of…

**Interviewee:** It did work out, yeah. But it took a few good months because it was the same thing over and over so, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Are those kind of challenges frequent or rare kind of experiences?

**Interviewee:** They’re fairly frequent because sometimes, the executive are under pressure. They’ve got a lot to do, they’re short staffed, people are leaving, they’ve got lots of challenges on the ground but we still need to see results so, we’ll keep pushing.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Does the board, especially since it’s made up of so many residents, communicate with the TRAs in the area at all?

**Interviewee:** Oh, yes. In fact, this is something that’s very recently began to happen because the TRAs were the people that were saying, “You don’t do enough, you’re not doing this…” and I said, “What is it exactly that we’re not doing?” This, this, this and this. So, I asked to be copied into the minutes of meetings and that if there’s any particular area that they say we are not doing and we have not done it, I personally will take responsibility for finding out the reason for it. So, there’s a closer relationship now because of that. But before, it used to be the TRAs, the residents on the board and then [ALMO]. But now, it’s a bit more cohesive…

**Interviewer:** More integrated in a way.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** And that’s pretty recent?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, that’s in recent times.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Like last year kind of thing?

**Interviewee:** Because the TRAs were becoming like a peer group, like an agitator.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Simply because things weren’t getting done. So, if they have a meeting, they [unclear audio] off and then, it’s all silent. So, now, it’s getting pushed through a lot more because I competently did the minutes and I look at what could be happening.

**Interviewer:** That’s good.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** That’s really good.
Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, are residents on the board, are they—Well, actually, I guess the first question would be what is the make up of leaseholders versus rental tenants in [ALMO] roughly?

Interviewee: Yeah. So, we have—Currently, we have two leaseholders and we have 5 residents. Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that about the same...does that reflect the makeup of everyone who lives in [ALMO]?

Interviewee: No. but there are less leaseholders anyways. Also, in terms of percentage, it might balance it out but there are definitely more residents than leaseholders in [the borough] because social housing is mainly rented accommodation through the Council.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: People do own their homes but in this day and age, it’s difficult to even buy the home you’re renting. So, yeah. But yeah.

Interviewer: That’s very real.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, my next questions are going to be about the local authority and the relationship between...I guess the first question is how do you describe the relationship between [ALMO] and the local council at [the borough]?

Interviewee: They are the people with the finances, we are their managing agents. So, we carry out the work that they want us to do but sometimes, when it comes to making a move, they can be quite slow.

Interviewer: They can be...

Interviewee: In making...Yeah. So, what we’re doing to try and deal with that. We have a new CEO, Chief Executive Officer, and her relationship with the CEO of [the borough] Council is a bit more connected.

Interviewer: Okay. That’s good.

Interviewee: Yeah. Because there was a big gap there. It was like the previous CEO used to tell us what the council was saying but it was always, “I’m having difficulty trying to get through.” Now, she’s smashed through that barrier and she’s really hitting hard. So, hopefully, it should get better.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. That’s good. Okay. So, when the local authority’s making some kind of decision either the financial or about something happening in the community, anything that affects [ALMO], do they consult [ALMO] about that type of thing or is it just something that kind of do?

Interviewee: Well, they give us the blueprint of what they want as the managing agents. So, it’s for us to carry it out as a managing agent. So, they just give us what they want us to do.

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: But sometimes, that would planning permission, for example, they’d be holding onto things. I don’t know what the technicalities are. There are some issues that just take ages to deal with and I can’t answer as to why that is.

Interviewer: Are they not very transparent about like why that is or …?

Interviewee: No. The Council can be very closed-shop at times but from a financial point of view, we manage what they give us within our agreement.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I suppose if there’s a delay, the CEO has to say, “Look at what’s happening.”

Interviewer: Are you satisfied with the financial support that the council offers or do you feel it’s not enough or challenged a little bit?

Interviewee: Well, there has been lots of cuts because of the recession and we have to work with what we’ve got. So, we’ve got our budget and we work with that. It’s as simple as that.

Interviewer: So, if you or another member of the board expresses an issue to the Council, what kind of response do you expect?

Interviewee: Well, as a board, we do it in a group fashion.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And we don’t really liaise in that way with the council. It’s for the CEO.


Interviewee: Yeah. It makes sense. You know, we wouldn’t go to the council directly and say, “Look, we’re not happy with A, B, C or D.” We’d say to the CEO…

Interviewer: “We’re not happy with this.”

Interviewee: … at board meetings, “What’s happening here? Can you go back to the Council and talk over there?”

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yeah. That’s how we facilitate it.

Interviewer: Right. That makes sense.

Interviewee: But can I say something?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Before [the ALMO] took over as an ALMO, the council worked really, really bad. So bad that it was just beyond description how bad they were.

Interviewer: Was there no sort of like oversight of anything going on or sort of?

Interviewee: No. In terms of quality, in terms of delivery, in terms of services, everything was so bad. But now, in the last 8 years or so, since [ALMO] took over the managing agent, things are a lot better. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, the next couple of questions are about… are actually just more general about tenant and involvement and stuff to finish off the interview. So, oh yeah, we already talked about communicating and receiving feedback from other tenants which you do very well with TRAs. So, there are other tenants who are not involved either in TRAs or in the board. Do you think they feel they have a voice when it comes to their homes?
Interviewee: Well, yeah. Because you’re allowed to make a complaint and [ALMO] home tenants are very good at making complaints. And we on Performance, we monitor complaints and the reasons for them and what’s been done about them. So, there is that pressure to get the job done. So, yes, they do have a voice and if they’re not happy, they’re ready to voice it. Yeah, they do, definitely. Yeah.

Interviewer: Good. Do you think there are factors that limit tenants from becoming involved or being heard whether that’s joining the board or trying to join the board or joining the TRA or…?

Interviewee: Well, joining the board is […]. So, they advertise for that. So, you’re welcome to go if you want to but what I think prevents some people from gaining access is the digital transformation. Everything is online.

Interviewer: Yeah. Everything is this prompt this, paste that. So, some people…

Interviewee: Is there an online application?

Interviewer: Yeah. Everything is online. So, that excludes maybe the mature… I personally, I’m not good with online stuff. I’m in my 50s and I hate it. So, what about my mum? If I hate it, she’s going to hate it so, you know, what do you…?

Interviewer: My Mum can barely send an e-mail so…

Interviewee: It’s really like I’m just antique. I think it’s my age so, that kind of exclusion with the population is getting older and you need to reach out to that sector of the community and I think they’re being pushed back a little bit so that the younger ones are helping them now to be digitally included rather than [ALMO].

Interviewer: So, it’s like somebody is helping their grandma fill out the application.

Interviewee: Exactly.

Interviewer: That makes sense. But then, is there another issue where you don’t have… do you have young people who are interested in becoming involved or you don’t have any…?

Interviewee: Yeah. We have the youth. We have a youth mayor.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: They apply every year for that post and it’s very vocal and there’s a youth conference every year as well. So, the Mayor of [the borough] as well attends it every year. So, yeah.

Interviewer: So, it’s very involved.

Interviewee: Yeah. So, it’s very involved. Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: Not always.

Interviewer: Not always?

Interviewee: And I’ll tell you why. We have a department called, a meeting called Resident Engagement. Now, that is always a problem because the agitators, they’re always at that meeting. And sometimes, it’s not as effective as it could be… They’ve got their own personal issue that
they want to bring into a meeting. So, the Chair is constantly struggling to keep order in that meeting because of that. So, yeah, that’s one area where there are some issues. Yeah.

**Interviewer**: Do you think that’s maybe a benefit of having like organization or structures like this for tenant involvement because it’s like we could focus on the bigger issues rather than everyone’s…?

**Interviewee**: Yeah. Definitely.

**Interviewer**: Do you have any comments on the future of tenant participation? Where you see it going at [ALMO] or in general?

**Interviewee**: Well, I just think that the tenant should always be involved at that level because what I’ve discovered is that nobody knows and even the MPs sometimes, they don’t know like for Brexit, for example. If you ask an MP now about Brexit, they’re like, “Just keep on doing what you’re doing as an organization and we’ll get back to you.” And the reason for that is because [...] to undo 43 years of legislation, and really, nobody knows what to do.

**Interviewer**: Yeah.

**Interviewee**: So, I don’t know.

**Interviewer**: That makes sense.

**Interviewee**: Yeah. I see the future, people should just keep on trying to voice, see what’s happening at that level.

**Interviewer**: Yeah.

**Interviewee**: Try to get involved politically, maybe, with the MPs. Yeah. But there should be just more of the same.

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Interviewee**: Yeah.

**Interviewer**: Until you know where it’s going.

**Interviewee**: Yeah. And people who are passionate about it as well. Not just people who just want to sit on the board just for sitting on the board sake to put something on their CV. Do you get what I mean?

**Interviewer**: Yeah. Do you have any comments or questions or anything else you want to talk about?

**Interviewee**: No, I think you’ve covered everything.

**Interviewer**: A lot of things. Okay. Then, I’m going to save this really well.

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Appendix 7: ALMO Interviewee “Marcus” Transcript

**Interviewer**: Okay great, so I’ve began recording, can you tell me why you decided to join [the ALMO] and how you got involved?
Interviewee: So I used to live in New York for five years, and then my son and I moved back to the area, I wanted to do some voluntary work, um, I was uptown, I was at the [City X] School of Economics, doing my masters in organizational behaviour, helping [...] in the business sector, I wanted to change my career, so I would do sometimes, starting on my new career in organizational behaviour, organizational psychology, I wanted to some kind of voluntary work alongside that. We were new to the geographical area, so I thought it would be a better option to kind of get to know the area better, so I originally thought voluntary work, I wanted to do something in the homeless or homes sector, where I suddenly have got a background of living in social housing, although [unclear audio 01:10 - 01:26]. I fundamentally believe [...] it’s important. So, I was thinking about I would probably end up doing some kind of work in a homeless shelter or a soup kitchen, or somewhere like that. I actually had another person that I emailed about doing voluntary work, who was an still is a board member at [ALMO], and she said, “Oh well actually you may considering doing, we have a board member position, you should apply”. So that’s how I got into it, completely by chance really, and luck and then, I was there for a year, before I became the chair of the board. I’ve now been [here] for maybe four years.

Interviewer: Great and are you—so you mentioned you went to LSE and you have sort of an educational background in organizing, in management. Are you involved in any other sort of organizational work or management?

Interviewee: So, I run my own consultancy now, which is a kind of, organizational behaviour, organizational psychology consultancy, that sort of thing, we work with a range of clients on whole aspects of human [involvement]. [Unclear Audio]


Interviewee: Hi.

Interviewer: Hi, sorry.

Interviewer: Start recording again great, okay, so we can go where we left off. I think and I’m kind of just outside of Oxford and the service may not be so great on my end.

Interviewee: Alright.

Interviewer: No worries. Great, so you mentioned that you do your own sort of consulting, overall do you enjoy your involvement in housing and in [the ALMO]?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah I do, I mean, I think it’s not without its frustrations. Yeah, I do very much, I really enjoy being chair of the board and I feel as though I am involved in social housing at a very critical time, there’s a lot of change going on, but importantly I suppose there is increasing social awareness and pressure for additional social housing, so it feels as though it’s an interesting time to be involved, so yes I do. I will say it’s not without its frustrations, and there are many, but you may well ask me about those in a minute.

Interviewer: Yes, that makes sense can you tell me a little bit about the board and how meetings function? How often do they occur?
Interviewee: So, we have six board meetings a year, we also have two away days, one in summer, one in winter. There are ten board members, there are two board members from another side of council. There are three tenant board members and there are five independent board members. We also have individual board members who [unclear audio], we have one for community, one for health, one for new build, one for governance, and then in addition to the board we have a separate board [new build and risk] committee, so we have a chair, a vice chair of new build, and those two are also board members.

Interviewer: Right. So, do sort of the—Before I get to the next question, how much time do you dedicate to this work within a week or a month besides meetings?

Interviewee: I would say that, my contribution as Chair of the board is probably , up to, say , a week, it’s probably no more than that, it does probably average out at that across the year. I think an average board member would be spending no more than a full day a month—

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: In that we have the board meetings and that sort of thing, to lead too. [unclear audio]

Interviewer: That make sense, so how are responsibilities distributed? Is there any distribution of responsibilities between the different groups on the board, so, residents, independent members and council nominees, do they have sort of different roles?

Interviewee: Not really.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I think that all board members are treated the same, I think the only thing different to that is the different audit and risk committee [unclear audio 03:26-03:34] so it’s not about board membership, or independents…[unclear audio].... but an additional or specialised role on the board.

Interviewer: Right. So, people do sort of bring their skills, whatever that may be to the board as well.

Interviewee: Yeah and I think their skills and/or their interest area.

Interviewer: Yes, okay, that makes sense, so could you tell me about your specific role and sort of what you do distinctly as chair and as an independent member?

Interviewee: I started with an independent member shift at first. First week I was appointed to the board, many board members were able to bring their non-housing sector inside knowledge and I had a pretty strong commercial background, a strategic commercial background, and a strategic involvement with people background so those were probably the two key areas and skills that I bring and basically each member has strong but different skill sets based their experience, and I think we have an attitude, where even the tenant board member can [unclear audio 05:09] arrive at or are fully qualified to provide insight which—myself included [unclear audio 05:20-05:34]. In terms of my specific role as Chair, that is quite specific because it adds to the governance of the organization. I should have said earlier there are 10 board members, 3 members of the executive chief and the company secretary who sit in all board members, of
which are [unclear audio 05:56-06:00] So my role as the chair, I think, more anecdotally I still see as being attached to the board until a certain extent, with the council as well. So, I—the specifics of my role are actually a lot of responsibilities, rather it be finding documents or calling special meetings or taking responsibility for actions arising from board meetings, whatever they may be. They are functional, guiding our day-to-day direction [unclear audio 06:50-06:58].

Interviewer: Right, that makes sense. So, how would you describe the problems, problem solving approach on the board? Is it sort of collaborative? Or how would you describe the process of coming up with solutions to problems that arise?

Interviewee: Can you hear me? Because you were breaking up.

Interviewer: Okay, I can hear you pretty clearly now, if there’s an issue, I’ll just call you back. I hear you.

Interviewee: Yeah, okay that’s fine. I think that we are absolutely collaborative, so I feel absolutely strong about that—so in terms of ultimately agreeing on an issue, to monitor and problem solve are absolutely [unclear audio], so when we, I think that often, the focus is more on monitoring than it is on problem solving, but I am increasingly trying to push it in that direction where we have a set of challenges, we as a board in collaboration between ourselves and also with the organization, want try and come up with the best solution that we can and it’s important, the structure of the board, that everybody has a word and participate in that discussion, so we definitely [unclear audio 08:24-08:40]. We come to a conclusion or a decision that takes into account all opinions, I think also as a chair that is my job really, to make sure those voices are heard.

Interviewer: Right. That makes sense to me. Now do you have any sort of the opinion on, whether there are more influential members in the organization? Either based on skill or sort of connections or other factors?

Interviewee: Within the organization or within the board?

Interviewer: Within the board.

Interviewee: When I first joined the board, I would say that was actually the case, that we had a couple of really strong voices on the board, and they absolutely dominated the narrative.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: I think that that is partly what it is, [unclear audio 09:37-09:53], During that turnover those voices left, which allowed more participants in. I do think it can be a challenge, particularly because of the relationship between [the ALMO], the board and the council. Those individuals who seem to have a closer relationship with the council sort of seem to have a larger voice.

Interviewer: Right, that makes sense. So, I'm-- so looking at the structure of the board, I noticed they’re two tenants and lease holder members with one vacancy, it looks like five independent members upon vacancy and two council appointed members. Any particular reason for these sorts of numbers? So it looks to be slightly disproportionately independent members compared to
Interviewee: Sorry, you were breaking up, [can you repeat the question again?]

Interviewer: Just—is there any reason for that particular number in each group? If that makes sense.

Interviewee: I don’t know the answer. I know that before I joined the board it was a board of about fourteen, and it was too many, and it was reduced to ten. But I don’t know why.

Interviewer: Right. Okay, do you know if the tenants and leaseholders are they tenants or are they leaseholders or both in the board in the current board? Hello? Oh no.

Interviewee: Hi.

Interviewer: Hi. Sorry about that again, next time I'll probably go into town to do these calls, but my question was, do you know if that the tenants and leaseholders on the board if they're tenants or lease home holders or both?

Interviewee: So we currently have, as you said, two board members and one vacancy, the two that we have are tenants, and we are looking for a leaseholder, that would be great, because we haven’t [had a leaseholder for 18 months].

Interviewer: Was that the leaseholder? Right.

Interviewee: Yeah, so it would be good to get that, I think the additional challenges also are the demographics of the board members.

Interviewer: Could you repeat, what’s the challenge with—

Interviewee: It’s about the demographics of the—

Interviewer: Demographics, yeah.

Interviewer: The diversity of the board is a general issue as well. We tend to have interest from tenants, who are older retirees, so we currently have both a man and a woman tenant on the board, who are older, retired or around retiring age, and that is [a tad problematic] because you obviously want to have a younger voice on the board as well —but there’s a combination of different types of voices you can try to bring in, it would be great to get a leaseholder, a younger voice on the board as well, but that is something we openly discuss on the board as a challenge.

Interviewer: And do you think there's any particular-- So time is a big one right and are there any particular challenges that limits getting certain tenants involved or leaseholders involved, and are there our overall less leaseholders is that an issue as well?

Interviewee: Yes so I think for us leaseholders are about a tenth of our [unclear audio], I think generally when you’re looking at the younger demographic, it is somewhat a lot difficult to get younger tenants or younger board members, I think the main comment is that [unclear audio]. I think there is also, I would say, there is a bigger issue about confidence, being able to contribute at board level. I think particularly when you’re looking at tenant or leaseholder board membership, if there is a position, they are already qualified for that position by virtue of being a tenant or leaseholder.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: There may just be a sense that there [needs to be something else] to justify their place on the board.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Actually, that’s not the case, although it may be the case on some boards.
Interviewer: That makes sense. So, I want to talk about how agendas are determined for board meetings and sort of how you go through or talk about the issues or monitoring. So how much influence do independent members hold, with respect to determining the discussion agenda for meetings?
Interviewee: So, the short answer is not very much, the longer is...So, if you take a step back, the board agenda is, pretty much decided a year in advance. So, every year we will do a board meeting schedule. The reason we do that is because there are certain things that have to be discussed at various times for the year, whether it be a budget issue, or, it’s generally a budget issue. Our accounts need to be signed off and to be reviewed, health and safety need to be reviewed at some time of the year. Diversity inclusion policy needs to be [signed] at some time of the year. So there are a number of activities already in place, so [there are agenda items] in the monthly reports and meetings they’ve been allocated. So when I first joined the board that kind of month by month, we know what we’re going to be talking about, who is dominating the entire agenda, and I felt that as a result of that it limited individual’s ability to ask questions or have discussions that fell outside of that quite strict remit—so at the same time as those conversations were being had on the board agenda, we were working on the core values, or core principles, or the core purpose of engagement of [the ALMO]. [unclear audio] Our core activities are built around three core principles, it’s built around homes, people and community. As a result of that I, we had a board meeting, and then 50 percent of that board agenda [unclear audio] health and safety, and 50% of the agenda would be a more open discussion around one of those core themes, because we have 3 core themes and we have 6 board meetings, that means, on rotation, each of those things would be discussed twice a year board meetings. The way in which that works now is that we have a short presentation on that, generally is not a board member, someone actively involved in that area, weather that’s somebody in HR actively involved in that area, maintenance part of the business talking about homes, and they may just come in and talk about [unclear audio 08:59-09:04] more freeform conversation with them, with the executives and with the board members.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Board members control the discussion but, they are—[unclear/inaudible: they are trying to cut back 15% to give people more compensation on their money and in discussion]
Interviewer: Right. So that makes sense to me and how do you determine -- So is it sort of a consensus-based decision making on the board or is it sort of a majority vote? How do you deal with disagreement on the board?
Interviewee: Typically, it’s a majority vote, there are exceptions. I think that we, sort of as an unwritten rule is that we will talk about an issue and wait until it is near unanimous decision-making, as always. There’s always room for those situations where it is not an unanimous decision. I think for the last two and a bit years it has been a very small hunt for those occasions that the decision hasn’t been unanimous, and I think that the reason that we are able to get to that is we fundamentally [unclear audio]

Interviewer: Sir, could you repeat that last sentence? We fundamentally—

Interviewee: So the recap is [inaudible 10:49-10:53].

Interviewer: Hold on, one moment. I’m going to—

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Interviewer: Hello, okay great this might work better. Again, my total apologies.

Interviewee: No, its fine.

Interviewer: Yeah, I’m just slightly out of town at the moment and the service is very bad, but yeah, so we were talking about disagreements among members and consensus decision making or... and I was wondering what types of decisions are consensus based? And what types are majority vote based?

Interviewee: I would say that, tell me if you can’t hear me, I would say that the majority-based is where decisions, I don’t know off the top of my head if any of them has to be unanimous.

Interviewer: Right. Yes I can hear you much better.

Interviewee: I’m pretty sure that, as I said just a moment ago, I think there are some occasions when it has to be unanimous, but I don't really know what those are. I can double check that if you want me to and follow up.

Interviewer: Sure. Either way is fine.

Interviewee: I’m going to see where it has to be.

Interviewer: Okay, so it's very rare, it's uncommon, they’re usually majority kind of decision.

Interviewee: Sure, I think it is but mostly, most of our decisions are unanimous, it’s very unusual for us to not have a unanimous decision, but that’s not to say it has to be unanimous, so, I think I’m not so sure that it's—I can double check.

Interviewer: Okay. We could do that probably after the interview, just to make sure that you have enough time and everything, that's great. Right. And is there any time I see is there certain I want to get sort of a sense of when people have disagreements and what disagreements are about, and whether it’s council nominees and independent members and tenants have different views on similar issues?

Interviewee: So I did sort of say earlier, but I'll just say it properly now, is that I think the reason why we often don't get disagreements is because in the facilitation of that dialogue, I always try and bring it back to what are the core principles of the organization, which are built around community, people, and homes, so it often means it can facilitate a dialogue, which we can get. That is our core purpose that is what we’re here for. So, what are we doing, is it the best for
people that we serve, homes that we built that maintain all the communities that we nurture. So, it’s kind of easy to reach a unanimous decision. I would say that the only time we really had a massive problems or disagreement tend to be around individuals and pay.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, we, the board, decide the chief executive’s pay, and also we have the right and also the rights of opinion on the pay of the Executive Director too.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, to give you an example, I have had significant issues, kind of significant issues, but issues with the remuneration of the chief exec, so when I was made Chair of the board and it just happened that it was coming up. The standing height was that the chief executive was on a temporary salary. He had been on a temporary salary for 18 months and it was agreed in the governance that the chief execs, a decision about the salary should on a bi-annual basis. So, every two years with external data, and but a decision about the chief exec salary should be made based on external data, so the chief exec, when I joined the board was massively underpaid, but he has pushed it, proposed largely relevant or – so, at the time was about 15 thousand pounds underpaid and put forward a recommendation that that is the benchmark data for Chief Executive, so there for the board of [the ALMO], that is what we should be paying the chief exec, and I think the reason...so the reason we had pushed back that is because then again, that gets us in deep water.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because the argument was that he did not deserve that, and my argument is that the chief executive of an organization should be paid that amount. It is a separate issue as to whether the current chief exec. exactly is performing at a level that is adequate for our need when we need to be paying at the [M]et rate, we need [M]et-rate expectations. That's been a long conversation.

Interviewer: Conversation.

Interviewee: Ultimately, we reached a conclusion on that yes, our responsibility is to hold [the ALMO] at best practice standards and that includes the board members and chief exec. And therefore now that he is being paid at [M]et rate, it means that our expectations of him are [M]et standard,

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Which, I mean, that caused a problem with performance management...at least there's no kind of unsaid discussion, about, “Oh well he’s not really paid [M]et rates so we can accept a lower standard.”

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: Yeah, [that was a long discussion.] We don't really have that many problems with conflict of opinion or like apart from when it comes to individuals and personalities and connecting that to your earlier question about big personalities. I can see that's why I'm happy and keep to make sure that there’s a show of voice and that some of those larger personalities
that have got agendas that or perhaps not always exclusively [ALMO] related are no longer on the board, because when you get to a situation, when you’re trying to resolve a conflict, you got those loud personalities with agendas then it’s very difficult to bring everybody into a shared agenda, around the core purpose of [the ALMO].

**Interviewer:** That makes sense, and as part of your role, have you had any experiences where not necessarily on the board, but as a board member, whether that's with the local council, or with other tenants or other independent members or counsellors an issue where you felt that you weren't being listened to or that your opinion was not taken seriously in any way?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, so, yes is a short answer. So, I'll give you an example, 18 months ago, we had two independent board membership vacancies and we had three applicants and one of those applicants was a former counsellor who joined his tenure on the council, had portfolio responsibility for housing, and has held that responsibility for 6 years. So, absolutely knew the HRO, the finances of social housing from a council perspective inside out. When we were recruiting the other two candidates, one had a really strong insurance background and a risk background and the other one had a really strong new build background, and so there was three people on the panel, there was myself, [inaudible], and the chief executive, we agreed that the person was the insurance risk background should be appointed, and the person with the new build experience should be appointed and there was debate around the appointment and certainly the chief exec. did not agree, but it was--so here is example of conflict, we [didn’t agree] but we have agreed because we were unanimous in our opinion and were able to very clearly articulate and justify that the skills that the ex-counsellor provided were great and strong but they were the duplicated skills that we already had on the board.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Whereas the other two candidates were bringing new skills, the board that we absolutely wanted. Anyways, we appointed the two, we rejected the guy that was in the council and then behind my back, the chief exec got a bit of a backlash or push back from the council, basically, how did you not appoint [K], as he was also responsible for housing for six years? He was responsible for 6 years, he knows all there is to know on social housing we can’t believe you didn’t put him on the board as a result of that the conversation that I wasn’t part of, our chief exec offered him a [inaudible] board membership. So basically, that's an annual appointment you don't have a voting right but you participate in board meettings as any board member would—so that was offered, without the head or myself knowing [unclear audio 13:10- 13:13] and then, that has caused a number of problems, which are ongoing to this day, because, you know, it ultimately, it's fine. I understand that it's annoying but I--I know it's okay, but to me it is a breach of the integrity of the board because the board is there to act as the interface between the business, and really, the council. I mean, the council as you know, the way that ALMOs are setup, they are set up as arm’s length, that’s in their name. The board is there to monitor the [inaudible], but I’m sure as you know the truth is the council [inaudible], and that is always a challenge.
Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: I was illustrated by that occasion to try and make sure that the board is full of cross over conversations.

Interviewer: So overall, how would you describe the relationship between the council and [the ALMO]?

Interviewee: I mean it’s very good, just before I joined that they've just been awarded a 30-year management agreement, which is long by its standards in that sector...and that's a result of the great hard work of [the ALMO], so I don’t want to paint a picture that’s not it, it's very good because of that backchannel going on between the board and the council, I think that it’s sometimes, slightly problematic at times, when the board sometimes feels they are being [put outside] of conversations.

Interviewer: So, what are the types of-- So, you gave an example of an instance where the council didn't consult you or the board about their decision for the board, are there other types of decisions relating to homes whether that’s changes in the neighbourhood, whether that's as simple as adding bike lanes or more complicated? And related to the board, and are there certain decisions that they do not consult you on and certain ones that they do? And where is that kind of line? Is that a clear line?

Interviewee: Before answering. I just wanted to say there is a nuance for what you just said. Of course, is it's not the board, the council didn’t inform us of their decision, in relation to that aspect. It's just that they use their informal influence to make a recommendation, which, was agreed to without our knowledge. Now, it has to be clear that... the chief exec does not have the right appoint a co-optee.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, by the time it got to me, it already been communicated to the current team, so it was presented as a fait accompli, so I didn't really feel I had any option but to agree to that co-optee appointment, but it wasn't in [inaudible] for the council to make an offer, it was only an offer the board could make but it was that kind of informal influence or pressure that we were under to to do, to be a good partner and do what they wanted, and it’s actually kind of fine. So, that we’re clear about that, there are some nuances to that which are important. In terms of the overall relationship, I would say that there are many, many things that the council do and make decisions about which they don't involve [the ALMO] in that decision-making process and probably the vast majority of those are legitimate. I think there are a number which perhaps aren’t legitimate, but it’s kind of fine, it's just we as an organization, we have to work hard to make sure that we have our seat at the tables. So we’re not the only social housing provider, there are a number of social housing providers in the area.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: We have the [provision from the] council, but it doesn't mean that we have a preferential right, to be sat at the table, having conversations with them about infrastructure or anything also, to give you an example... but having said that we have a relationship, a great
reputation. We are increasingly finding ourselves with a [inaudible]. There is a big initiative at the moment, about the extension of [the borough]. There’s two towns close together, and there's a space in between and ultimately, I want to imagine that over the next 20, 30 years, we’ll see those two towns joined together to form one larger city and actually, there’s some excitement and interest about what that could be and there was some really exciting plans about using that central space, let’s say, as a new addition for how we could live in the future. So, really thinking about ability, mixed land use and [inaudible] spaces and more of a gig-economy type, shared work space, all that kind of stuff, it's pretty exciting. And we, as [the ALMO] have—so this point anyway, successfully secured our position in that conversation as the people to talk to about social housing needs in that, in that vision. So, we have to work hard to get that. It's not just... because [the council] own [the ALMO] and the properties that we provide—it doesn’t necessarily mean we have an automatic right to be a preferred partner for social housing.

**Interviewer:** Understandable. So, if you or another member of the board expresses an issue to the council, what type of response do you expect? And how quickly do you expect them to get back to you?

**Interviewee:** We expect an honest response, which is based on the agenda of the council, based on their [inaudible] side and their political view. So, we expect a pretty robust and honest answer and we expect it quite quickly, and I think in general they do that, so I think there’s a pretty good open channel between [the ALMO] board and the council, that is going back to what I was saying before, sometimes we as the board are not always included in that loop.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Sometimes, legitimately sometimes annoying not legitimately.

**Interviewer:** Are you satisfied with the budget provided by the council? Could you tell me a bit about the financial background of the [ALMO] organization and how and how much of it comes from rent or whether there’s also grants, or other money provided from the council?

**Interviewee:** So, we don’t necessarily have additional money from the council, what's provided by the HRA, the housing revenue account, which ultimately comes from central government and is—

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** So, the truth is, is that actually we have more sympathy from the council and they [want] to help us, because we’ve weathered the austerity storm better than they have, because we don’t have the legacy issues they have, more nimble in our responses to... [inaudible]. So, we had a year on year which is the very final year of four-year, year-on-year minus-one budget percentage growth, so basically a government policy for maybe the last four years, reducing rental income by one percent year on year. So that’s obviously been hard to [inaudible], it’s now been announced that it’s going back to plus one percent growth, next year, which we are relieved about because, it forced us as an organization to look for ways to be able to drive efficiencies. I think that we were correct and lucky at to be able to say that going back to our core values, the
people, property, and community that we weren’t going to sacrifice our communities for budget cuts and I think actually other social housing providers have not responded in the same way. We are also an ALMO not-for-profit which is different from housing associations, so we’ve been able to dip into our reserves with the knowledge that long-term financial viability of the business is pretty strong. So, all of our revenue comes from rental, we get a little bit of grant income while we apply for that grant, for example, we just received I think about a quarter million pounds from Homes England for a regeneration master plan for one of our areas. So, another region regeneration plan, but that tends to be a minor part of our total income, but that income is, under my perception, it’s not really the council that determines that, it comes from central government, so any feeling we have about it is attached to central government, not the council.

**Interviewer:** Great, okay, and I have a last couple of questions before we wrap up. So how does the board receive or communicate with tenants? How does the board get feedback from current residents?

**Interviewee:** So there’s kind of drip feed, which is the kind of—we have tenant surveys, we have, we monitor our inbound traffic to a call centre as well, we get anecdotes or evidence from our frontline staff who are interacting with tenants, and so, we have monthly, quarterly, KPI’s which we monitor all the time.

**Interviewer:** KPI?

**Interviewee:** Key Performance Indicators.

**Interviewer:** Okay, yeah.

**Interviewee:** We—and they’re useful because they allow us to do, you know, [[M]ing], so if something is going awry we can probably pick it up in those KPIs. In addition to all that, I think the most important element of our tenant interaction is through our tenants’ scrutiny panel. So, we have a panel that sits on a monthly basis, who are about eight individuals or tenants, who operate independently, and they are specifically there to look at areas in business that, for which they set the agenda, so they look at [businesses] worthy of discussion. They also—

**Interviewer:** Sorry?

**Interviewee:** They also scrutinize [the ALMO’s] policy and strategies. So, if we make a decision, at a board or an executive level, then the tenant scrutiny panel will, respond to that too. We on an annual basis, there’s always a long list of activities or recommendations that the tenant scrutiny plan recommend and then we report by how we've responded to those recommendations.

**Interviewer:** Do you think more resident participation is always good?

**Interviewee:** I think that the de facto answer is, yes, I would agree.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** I think that’s, that’s not to say, to be clear, it’s not the same thing as the tenants making the decisions. It's tenants participating in an active dialogue with the organization to ensure that the decisions being made by the organization are fully informed and the more participation—we have a problem in driving that level of engagement, not in ignoring what
people say, so you know, it is a problem, it's difficult to try and find ways to make sure that tenants are engaging with us and we target that voice, so we have things like the tenant awards every year, we do additional ways, they are difficult to describe but, community days, kids book days, where we have our frontline members of the team, like housing officers or [public relations] officers whoever it may be, work and talk to members of our community with the intent that stuff is discussed and raised, and we have [people] on the ground [so] we can hear it. You know, it’s quite understandable, people have busy lives, our tenants have busy lives, they don't necessarily want to spend a huge amount of time talking to us, particularly if the services are fine, but we do to find ways to make sure that we are uncovering any problems before they become major problems.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and I have a last question before I get into just the quick demographic details, do you have any comments on the future of resident participation or where you see it going in the future?

**Interviewee:** I mean think the outcome of Grenfell is going to be incredibly interesting. I think that, I'm hoping that it will put the closer stop-lights on the need to, not only to, because what’s interesting about Grenfell is obviously that was a tenant-run organization, it’s not about helping, it’s not just about having tenants on the board, it’s about having tenants on the board who have a voice that can be heard. It's also about making sure that there is a commitment within the organization to listen to the tenant voice and to act on it. I’m trusting that what’s going to come is a positive outcome from a terrible situation. I think that technology should facilitate that, I think it is a responsibility of housing organizations to embrace new ways to engage with the tenant population. That’s probably it.

Appendix 8: ALMO Interviewee “Noah” Transcript

**Interviewer:** I’ll start recording now.

**Interviewee:** Are you able to provide me with a transcript at all?

**Interviewer:** Absolutely, yes, although I won’t have a transcription ready for a while, because I have a lot of interviews to transcribe, but when I do I am happy to send you one. I’ll make note of that — if you don’t hear from me from a month, please email me and I will send you a transcript.

**Interviewee:** Excellent.

**Interviewer:** That’s totally fine. Alright, so, do you have any other questions before we begin?

**Interviewee:** No, I don’t think so, over to you.

**Interviewer:** Could you tell me why you decided to join the housing board and how you got involved?

**Interviewee:** Um, okay, so there’s a little bit of history to it. At one point, the local authority was actually consulting on whether or not to carry out a stock transfer, a pre-ballot stock transfer
consultation, so I took part in that, and from then I actually thought this is quite interesting, and then [the ALMO] had an opportunity for Resident’s Scrutiny, so I took part in that and took part in two reviews, and I thought actually I like this, this is quite interesting. So, that led me to apply to join the board. There was some altruistic reasons I suppose, wanting to engage constructively, sort of — shout from the sidelines shall we say, raging against the machine is never really terribly helpful, you want to understand how things work if you want to influence decisions, and that was one of the reasons, the other was to improve my own skills, experience, help myself stay relevant in the current job [M]et.

**Interviewer:** Great, so there were altruistic reasons, as well as experience, useful experience that you can gain as well.

**Interviewee:** So there was a mixture of altruism and self-interest, not only from a career and skills perspective, but also I’m a resident, a council tenant, so I need to understand how these things work — decisions are taken about me, and about my home, so I need to get involved to see how I can influence those decisions.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that makes sense. Are you involved with any other sort of management, organizing, or advocacy work, or before you got involved?

**Interviewee:** Yes, yes. Where to start with that one… I am also a trustee of [charity X], a charity with a statutory health watch function in the borough, we also [unheard] complaints for the NHS, I advocate for people around health, social care, social security and welfare rights. I teach aspects of social work to social work students at the [X University], that is focused on aspects of involvement, of engagement, understanding a system, understanding how things actually work, for example, you might have something like the Care Act, that would detail a legislative framework. You would have regulation… [4:50]… guidance, and how that is lived and translated at the local level, which varies of course from borough to borough and across the country. How legislation is interpreted...

**Interviewer:** That sounds fascinating, like something I’d like to study actually.

**Interviewee:** Yeah. It’s kind of… all born out of my lived experience, I needed to do it. It’s one of things you need to do for yourself. And then you think, what are the skills I’ve learned and how can I use them to help others?… [5:24] and then you keep building skills. So, it’s a way of doing that really.

**Interviewer:** That makes sense. Do you enjoy your involvement in the housing board currently?

**Interviewee:** Absolutely, yes. It’s interesting, it’s exciting, it’s challenging, it’s quite stimulating, it’s provided a number of opportunities for training and development, so yeah, what’s not to enjoy I suppose, the only thing you might not want — might not enjoy — is realizing the constraints that the organization operates under, which I think if you are an ordinary resident and you are not aware of that, it means that you are asking for things that can’t be done. But on the other hand, you become aware of what can be done and what is being done, which is a really exciting and interesting opportunity.
Interviewer: That makes sense, could you tell me a bit about the board, in terms of how meetings functions and how often meetings occur?
Interviewee: Full board meetings are quarterly, committees tend to meet in line with that as well. So there are five committees, standing committees on the board, and they tend to meet on a quarterly basis, except for the committee …[7:19]…that tends to meet more frequently. Um, could you repeat your question?
Interviewer: It was just how meetings functions, and how often they occur?
Interviewee: Okay, so that’s how often they occur. How they function…The board of course, and the chair of each individual committee…Can we unpack what you mean by how they function, please?
Interviewer: Oh, um, yes, well, I am looking for your perspective on, um…if you could walk me through a meeting. What the meeting looks like, what the agenda looks like.
Interviewee: The agendas vary of course from board meeting to board meeting…it varies…are you looking for the lived experience of how it progresses?
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: They are invariably chaired very well, they tend to stick to the agenda, but there is not always enough time to get things said and done, and so you kind of have to…I’m trying to still acquire [that skill], trying to stay focused in terms of the questions. You ask for forms and information…if you are an independent, you may come with a set of skills that are directly related to the housing sector, whereas as a resident, you are bringing a resident’s perspective, but it is a disadvantage occasionally because you are not working in the housing sector. But different members of the board bring different things too, so, um, yeah, I certainly feel like I can see my influence, whether or not I can track it formally is another matter.

Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: And everyone is listened to and everyone who wants to speak gets to speak, so it’s quite an inclusive process, which may come as a surprise to other residents. So it works.
Interviewer: And, how does decision-making happen during meetings, is it mainly consensus-based or majority vote?
Interviewee: I’ve never known a vote take place, it tends to be through consensus — some things are mandatory, it’s rare that you actually get something that is pushed— things usually go through committees, statutory stuff like accounts go for approval — a lot of the time, things are commented upon, occasionally you’ll get something for decision, perhaps not a quick decision, perhaps a observation that more things need to come to board from committees for decision-making.
Interviewer: Right, that makes sense, how much time do you dedicate to your position?
Interviewee: Oh, a huge amount, it’s almost full-time.
Interviewer: Almost full-time?
Interviewee: It’s probably 25-30 hours per week.
Interviewer: Wow, that’s a lot.
Interviewee: Yes it is, if you take part meaningfully, and to get an understanding of it, you need to immerse yourself in it — otherwise you’re not getting — to participate meaningfully you need to commit, you cannot just read the papers and turn up to participate, you need to be embedded in it to understand what’s going on, as you might need to have meetings outside the committee or board, so you need to be able to ask questions in formal settings.
Interviewer: That makes sense to me — my question then is that it is a full time position, that you receive some sort of compensation?
Interviewee: No, no I don’t, so that’s been a contentious issue for a while, although that was approved, was supposed to happen, the panel on that…[…] I understand that will be implemented from September. The organization decided to do that a few years ago, but there’s been various hold-ups due to be resolved in September, so that again is somewhat problematic yes, because it means the organization is a bit of an outlier in the sector. Even the rates…have been adjusted as well.
Interviewer: That makes sense. Could you tell me how different responsibilities are divided on the board, how tasks are divided, who does what?
Interviewee: Right so you have an executive, and you have non-executives — so you don’t have executive responsibilities. …At least in theory, all non-executive directors have the same responsibility, to influence or determine strategy, and to monitor performance and to monitor and ensure compliance with legislation. So, those are the kind of rules that any non-executive member would have. Committee chairs would have a slightly different role, they are also responsible for setting an agenda, at a higher level at a form of a chair’s meeting — but generally speaking non-executives have the same responsibilities. The board tend to draw particular board members who are local, it’s actually quite diverse, with members from different parts of the borough…diverse in range of skills and backgrounds that people bring, which means that everyone at the table…from a tenant’s perspective, and then people with particular expertise in one area or another, like health and social care, which are crucial aspects of social housing provision.
Interviewer: That makes sense.
Interviewee: Does that answer your question?
Interviewer: Yeah, to an extent. Do you want to elaborate on the types of things you’ve been involved with, or roles in specific detail?
Interviewee: Okay, so I have a particular interest in communication and reputation management, in health and social care, and in terms of how the organization builds relationships with the wider system, particularly the third sector…[...]…of course you’ve got quite a lot of challenges coming up, a lot of pressure on our local housing provider, there’s been a lot of cutbacks in the government. People look around and go okay this organization is the last one standing, it is the best-resourced, it provides resources to significant number of people in the borough…I do a lot of research and have a network of my own that I have the organization in
touch with, building partnerships here and relationships there, it’s […] we need to do that more, especially with the introduction of Universal Credit, where the rent is no longer given to us…you know, we are proactively connected. So there is an ambassadorial role as well as a more practical role, suggesting to the executive the things they need to do, or may be useful…to achieve the objectives and the business plan, and putting them in contact with people. The executive is quite responsive…the leadership team and lower level as well […] [I would say to the …], “Do you know why in this particular organization…”“I didn’t know that, I didn’t know that”. Well, actually we have a conversation — maybe hob and spoke — creating touch points for people to get in touch with one another, so people can build relationships….[the Borough] Tenant’s fund as well which works in partnership with [the ALMO], so there’s quite a lot of things I’m involved with, and they tend to align, they mutually interact with one another. This adds value to the [ALMO] brand, and to my personal brand, so, yeah.

Interviewer: That makes sense. How would you describe the problem-solving approach? Collaborate or people with expertise speak to issues? How is the approach?

Interviewee: It’s a bit of both. People with expertise are expected to speak to the issues. They are also expected to be open to engagement and to constructive criticism and they invariably are; the officers and executives seek not only to be challenged from non-executives but they also seek advice and support as it helps them, and the organization to do better. The executive will lead on things, but if you want to make…want to get something on the agenda or want to be able to do something generally in line with the direction of travel, if you are asking for something that is not a priority for the business then it is going to be a problem.

Interviewer: Right, that makes sense. And, so, in your opinion, are there any people on the board who are more influential on the board due to their experience or position?

Interviewee: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: Do you want to elaborate?

Interviewee: …I think the independents are, you also have councillors who are influential, so I think there is probably a hierarchy — an unofficial one, of course we are equal, but some are more equal than others — residents are somewhat disadvantaged by that, but I think resident board members are not just there to reflect the resident voices, although that is part of their role. But um, yeah, I think some people, just by nature of their knowledge, their experience, their network etcetera, are better connected or more influential. Perhaps just the way it goes, but I think that’s the same with any board — so I don’t think that’s particularly unique. Boards do tend to choose people who are actually of use, and therefore some are more useful than others. It’s also a matter of trust as well — it does take a while in an organization to establish your credibility — establish trustworthy relationships — some people will share when they feel safe, and have confidence in you, that you are acting in a collegiate manner, and not going rogue or renegade or what have you.
Interviewer: Right, that makes sense. So is the board 1/3rd tenants, 1/3rd independent and 1/3rd council nominees?

Interviewee: Not quite, there’s a board of 15, and there is six independents, six residents — [..] tenants although that’s not fixed, and 3 are councillors.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So 6-6-3.

Interviewer: 6-6-3. So why do you think tenants make up, I guess, why do you think are six tenants? That specific division in numbers?

Interviewee: I think that’s a legacy issue, there have been suggestions to change it in the past, although that would be too controversial, although many local authority housing providers don’t have as many tenants. Yup, maybe there will have to be something about that post-Grenfell, after the Green Paper comes out. But, so, there has been a tendency to role back tenant involvement on boards or to confine it simply to matters of performance, or to consultative forums — so residents are not really anything that involved. So actually I think [the ALMO] is in a good place, um, especially considering the events over the last 12-18 months because it hasn’t done that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And, but I think, that you know, that set-up started originally because the idea that [the ALMO] would be tenant-led — but at the time, wanted to preserve the confidence of the shareholder, the council, and they had a need for independence and for particular expertise.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: So that’s how it was originally set up, there was a talk of a reduction but that would have only left one councillor on the board and they were not happy with that, so…

Interviewer: Right. So, um, how much influence do tenants have with regards to determining the discussion agenda for board meetings?

Interviewee: Um, it very much depends on…how…you mean how much influence tenant or resident board members have?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Well, the agenda is by and large determined by the chair, but if you want something on the [26:39] plan, something on the agenda, you can make a case a for it — not really a challenge to get something on the agenda, and you can always have a conversation with the committee chairs yourself to say look, I think this particular issue is coming up, or I think you should consider that — I really [haven’t] found a problem with making a case — sometimes you win, sometimes you don’t. I’ve asked permission and they’ve said no, or sometimes had to wait…sometimes they realize you are right, and actually go “Yeah we should have had that, shouldn’t we.” And I think when that happens, your credibility actually increases because you said…

Interviewer: Mhm.
Interviewee: …that something […] and it wasn’t, so those kind of things, you know, I don’t really have a problem getting something on the agenda if I need it to be there, or to have a conversation — so it’s not really an issue.

Interviewer: Great, uh, when it comes to decision-making, you mentioned that um, for example, based off of expertise or position, there might be sort of, more control in some instances by some members than others. Um, how would you say that control is divided between tenants and other members with respect to decision-making?

Interviewee: I think the executive drives a lot of it in terms of decision-making, but really, it’s the independents who actually take the decisions, because decisions are made by the chair and the committee chairs, and the chair is independent. and […], and 3 out of 5 of the committee chairs are independents, and they are not chairing the performance committee or renumeration, but they are chairing regeneration and investment, and risk […] so they, the independents control the decisions really around the areas, they will have more of the agenda, and access to the execs, as they are chairs…so um, that doesn’t mean that tenants are not included, it just means that perhaps that they must satisfy the confidence of the shareholder, so, um, that’s how it is.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So it’s less about what the organization, and more about what the shareholder wants — remember there is only one shareholder.

Interviewer: And that’s the council.

Interviewee: Yes, that’s the council. And if the council feels more confident that the fact the independents, those with the expertise are actually in charge of the organization and its direction of travel, then that’s how it’s going to be, there’s not a great deal you can do about that.

Interviewer: That makes sense. What happens when there are disagreements on the board? How do you come to consensus?

Interviewee: Um, well, our board strategy sessions — which are kind of, sort of semi-formal, they happen quite frequently, and board-learning sessions. Our board strategy sessions are helpful, because if there are any disagreements there, sometimes about housing procedures…a lot of the direction of travel is determined by the shareholder.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, if the council wants you to proceed in a particular way, they are actually setting your overall travel, what you are really doing as a board, shaping what you are doing as a board to achieve what the shareholder wants — your statutory obligations and what your requirements are, which is understandable, but disagreements tend to resolve through consensus. There are occasional disagreements on the board and committee, but generally speaking you work through the issues, if there are any kind…of contentious issues, in board strategy sessions. So, um, yeah, that tends to be how it works.
Interviewer: That makes sense. As part of your role, have you had an experience — not necessarily on the board, but in engaging with tenants or local councils, you felt you weren’t being listened to or nobody was taking your opinion into account?
Interviewee: Um, no…I can honestly say no. I am always listened to, you don’t always get your way — but sometimes it’s just about timing. You can make a case for something but the timing isn’t right, so you can come back to it later on when times have changed. When times change and people change…sometimes it’s about taking time, building relationships, becoming credible — so I’ve kind of always felt listened to and engaged with. The local council or authority has a particular view, um, about …the role of the organization, so you will always be listened to, but ultimately, as in any business, the shareholder will determine what is going to happen.
Interviewer: Right, that makes sense. So the next questions will be about the local council…how would you describe the relationship between [the ALMO] and the local council?
Interviewee: In what sense?
Interviewer: Um, in the sense that…are they positive, are there tensions, a general description…
Interviewee: Positive, with tensions.
Interviewer: Yes. *laugh* So what are some of the tensions that come up in that relationship?
Interviewee: I think there is a tension between what the local authority understands is the capacity and role of [the ALMO], so, when we talk about the council — who in the council are we talking about? While there may be an understanding among officers in the council, a settled understanding, but that might not [coincide] with what politicians want…recently there has been a lot of change, everyone is adjusting to new political realities and that causes tensions to start with, but they are often resolved — the council, at least the mayor, is clear about what he expects, and it’s up to [the ALMO] to adapt to that, really. And I think, cause of tensions is that if you are going to be a developer you need to build new homes…but you also need to be addressing the issues, the fallout of Grenfell, universal credit, and a variety of other things, so it’s about being able to do what you need to do as well as building the new homes the administration committed to. So, there’s always tensions there, making sure you got the balance right.
Interviewer: Yes, that makes sense. Um, and, so, moving forward from that, to what extent — there are some activities that are council related, council decisions that effect [the ALMO]…to what extent do you feel that the council will consult [the ALMO] about decisions that they are making, that are relevant?
Interviewee: Um, I think it could probably be better…I think [the ALMO] is viewed quite rightly by the council as a provider, so I think we are consulted, but sometimes you know, we are informed…so I think it’s a work in progress. It might be up to the council to consult and engage with us on issues that would impact us, and also think it…[the ALMO] must have the relationships in place not only with the most obvious parts of council, but the wider system in place, you know, getting an idea of what might act on our words — so that is part [of the role of] our execs…So much of the work is out-ward looking, looking at the horizon and saying well, we may not have heard of this formally from the local authority but it’s underway, so if we’re asked
to provide for this we need to actually have an answer. My general response is if we are asked, we must have an answer. We might say no, or look for more information, but a lot of the times it’s not acceptable to say we didn’t know…we have an obligation to look into what’s going on, and we are better at that than [the boards] of the past I think.

Interviewer: That makes sense, and um, could you tell me about what types of decisions the local council would consult you about, and which they might not? If there is a distinction?

Interviewee: They might consult us about changes to planning policy, or to changes in services they want us to take care of…they might not consult us about social work, or any issues that affected residents that they were dealing with in other ways…if we are talking about internal comms within the wider system, there are some areas that the council would…it’s a matter of a trust and profile. If your profile is high and you are trusted as an organization, then they go, “Ah yes okay, we need to speak to [the ALMO].” If your profile is sufficiently high, people will say “Ah, this is happening, ergo we need to speak housing providers including [the ALMO]” rather than contacting us as an afterthought, which occasionally has happened to us in the past. People haven’t always thought of us first off, which can be problematic, but again that is partly our responsibility as well.

Interviewer: Right, um, so — as a tenant, as a resident, is your relationship different to the council in any way? Are the things they would consult you about…would they consult the board as a whole about, or other members?

Interviewee: Not really, there might be specific instances where they would consult directly with residents as opposed to the board, and occasionally that happens, often they will consult with residents through [the ALMO]…the Local Authority will tend to use [the ALMO] as a vehicle for consultation, although not necessarily….for example, ballots on the state for regeneration — that’s probably the direction they are heading in, clearer divisions between the responsibilities of council and [the ALMO]…consultations…[the ALMO] was doing, but if there are policy issues, then it’s a matter of Local Authority. So that’s what we’re working through, so uh, the board may be doubly consulted in different ways about the same thing.

Interviewer: Right, so that makes sense. And, so, um, let’s see, if you or another resident member of the board expresses an issue to the local council, what type of response do you expect as a resident and a board member? Do you except it to be a quick response?

Interviewee: Um, well, we manage the Local Authority’s stock…so they must depend…I would always expect a promptly response from both the provider and the local authority, but it would very much depend on what the issue was, because depending on the issue it may take longer coming from [the ALMO]…but I may get a more prompt response because I know the system.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But, generally speaking, I would get the same response as any other resident. If it was a council-related matter, I would get the same type of response as any resident of the borough — unless it’s someone I happen to know personally, it’s unlikely that I would receive a prompter response than anybody else. […]
The bottom line is, there is a little bit of advantage of knowing the system, and in terms of knowing individuals in the same system it may be able to help you with the response and who to speak to in order to get you know, the right response, but there is little benefit to being a board member per se, you know it’s not like you, “Ah, okay well, I am a board member, I can get a preferential response in a preferential time frame.” It doesn’t work like that at all. Although perhaps some people might think it does, it doesn’t.

Interviewer: Alright, and, um, are you satisfied with the allowance that is provided by the local council? And has that changed over time?

Interviewee: Allowance? What do you mean by allowance?

Interviewer: Well, um, sort of the…um, you mentioned the local council is the shareholder, so let me rephrase that…is there financial support offered by the council or are you completely dependent on rents?

Interviewee: Oh, there’s a management fee. The rent service charges are collected by us for the council, all that we collect is a management fee, from the local authority, and that hasn’t changed for quite a long time.

Interviewer: Right. Um, overall, do you feel that the financial situation of [the ALMO] is in a good place?

Interviewee: At the moment, but given the increasing demands on it, and given there are a variety of threats to funding sources more generally…but at the moment it’s fine, um, how it will look in eighteen months time I don’t know.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

So I know that there are tenants and residents organizations in the area, are there tenant management organizations in the area that take on some responsibilities, or is it just TRAs?

Interviewee: There are a few coops and a few TMOs.

Interviewer: Yeah, could you speak to the relationship between these organizations and [the ALMO]?

Interviewee: Okay, so we’ve divided services to some cooperatives and TMOs, we provide some services to them — in terms of TRAs, a formal TRA process is where [the ALMO] and the council will recognize the TRA, while [the ALMO] Tenants Fund has the responsibility on the part of — the council wants tenants and residents to have the capacity, and to be sufficiently well-organized to consult them, and so that’s why — we support the development of TRAs and also to [...] up of residents in order to have meaningful conversations with the local authority and its agent, i.e [the ALMO], but only [the ALMO], but also the manager of the housing stock as well [...]. Generally speaking the relationship with TRAs is a constructive one…some TRAs are very assertive, and very organized and effective and engaged, others less so, increasingly the are…well-organized at making their voices heard, and do.

Interviewer: Right, um, and how do you receive or communicate feedback with or from other residents?
Interviewee: Um, me personally?

Interviewer: Uh, yeah, as a tenant on the board.

Interviewee: There isn’t really a requirement to do that — but on my own estate I talk to people about what I do, so I am a point of contact — but you’re not mandated or accountable to other residents because you’re a resident board member, that isn’t part of the deal. And, so, I certainly speak to many people in a variety of different capacities — there’s always the Resident Engagement Panel, which is an opportunity for TRAs to come along an engage, I always attend that…I don’t have a problem with explaining what [the ALMO’s] or the council’s position is, although I won’t normally take a position on that. I’ll explain what it is, but I won’t normally take a side on it. But you’re not mandated, you’re not elected by the residents so you are not directly responsible to them in that way, it doesn’t work like that.

Interviewer: Right, um, that makes sense. So there are other residents who are not involved in the board. Um, do you feel that they have a voice when it comes to their homes, whether that is through TRAs, TMOs, or in other respects?

Interviewee: Yes they do, they most definitely do, they have a voice through their local ward councillors, through TRAs, [the ALMO] has a variety of other ways for residents to get involved…often some residents are more interested than others, there’s a longstanding argument that oh, they’re just not that interested, but residents are interested — what they are not interested in is things they feel have no benefit to them, or for which they are not getting anything back — and getting something back will vary depending on the resident and resident’s particular perspective of what they need. Sometimes a resident will just need you know — to see results — as a result of what you said, we did — to be able to track back their input. […] Many organizations engage in consultation and they may well make changes as a result of that, but they don’t actually communicate that back out — I think there is a rather vague expectation among officers, some politicians that people will do this for altruistic reasons, but a lot of people are thinking to themselves, “Well actually, there needs to be something in this for me,” and that makes politicians and management and organizations […] you miss the feel-good factor, you miss having a chance to [do your part], but well actually that’s not enough, it’s the same with volunteering. If you’ve got a volunteering offer…it has to be clear what the ask is and what they are offering in return. So, those are just my thoughts on it.

Interviewer: That makes sense, I have two sort of more, uh, general questions about tenants and tenant participation. Do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: No, I don’t think it’s always good. What do you mean, in practice or in principle?

Interviewer: Um, both. You could elaborate.

Interviewee: Oh, okay, so as a principle right I think it’s absolutely essential. Absolutely essential. I don’t think — I look at organizations that have reduced or got rid of, or have token representation in terms of tenants on their board, and I think they are actually missing […] it’s like the [RP?] sector, where there is no democratic accountability at all, and I think that it is a problem. As a principle, I think it is essential at every level of the organization that residents are
involved and take ownership and responsibility. Whether or not we do in this particular context, some are more active Interviewees than others...I don’t think anyone fails to participate at all, but you have limited time to do this, and so far no renumeration for this, and so people prioritize accordingly. If you want people to take part, there has to be something in it for them.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** People have got to know that it works.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any comments on the future of tenant participation? Or where you see it going, not necessarily just in [the ALMO], but in general?

**Interviewee:** I think it needs to be broader, deeper, and better actually — it’s very important that landlords and local authorities do not have control over it, um, and I think that it is important there are independent organizations around, whether independent tenant organizations...to build and maintain capacity, to engage constructively with whoever the landlord is. And I think there needs to be a statutory obligation for landlords to engage. If there is no statutory obligation, then it becomes — essentially it becomes — a nice to have, but not essential thing — so I think the law needs to change —

**Interviewer:** — to make it statutory.

**Interviewee:** To make it, to oblige. And I think it needs to be fairly restricted as well, because otherwise not everyone will — some people will see it as management mitigating tenant involvement rather than sort of — I think it needs to be fairly prescriptive, with standards, so that people could be bench[M]ed against one another and [...] accordingly. I think it needs to be regulated. If you look at Grenfell and you look at what happened there, that was supposed to be a TMO or an ALMO, what you have there is people who were outside of the formal tenant structures raising a lot of issues — which were there for anyone to see — only to be ignored.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And that, you know, is unique to Kensington and Chelsea and that council — it might be more widespread in the registered provider sector than in local authority housing. There is an opportunity, at least in theory, to influence through local councils. I think it needs democratizing to some extent, and I wouldn’t necessarily suggest you need a separate set of elections for board members — [...] you don’t want boardroom battles, pitting one constituency against another. Certainly, there needs to be some more involvement, and there will be, but I’m not sure how that manifest itself in the current political situation and the fact that this will only be indicative in the Green Paper as well. I think ballots are a good idea for regeneration, as that has been problematic. There has been a lot of positive efforts made, but they aren’t registered [at all], not embedded across the board, and I think if we are not careful the moment will pass.

**Interviewer:** Right. Um, so, do you think there may be any factors that would limit tenants from being heard or being involved in tenant participation?

**Interviewee:** There’s loads of them, loads of them. Um, because they are in absolute poverty, relative poverty, they’re time-poor, they don’t have the capacity, they don’t speak the language, you know, um, the jargon, their engagement is not particularly welcome by housing professionals
or by politicians...there’s a whole raft of reasons why, of barriers to getting people actually engaging...some of them are personal, others are more systemic and general...some effect everyone...but in some areas the social housing tenants is more stable than people think, but also issues around whether or not English is people’s first language, how they engage, a lot of people living in social housing are increasingly segmented — you have second, and third generations of people who have bought the leasehold, so now they are living in the same housing block as social tenants who may have lived there for a long time or...may actually be quite a mix. If you have leasehold properties where there are private landlords, tenants could be changing on a regular basis...so it’s about who you are actually seeking to engage with...is it just live-in leaseholders and social housing tenants, or why not tenants renting from private landlords who just happen to live in the block? So there’s quite a lot of barriers — what Grenfell showed was that the Local Authority and their team did not know who was actually living in its properties. And everyone was saying if you don’t know who is living there, then you don’t know who your customers are, there’s a lot of “don’t knows” there, you don’t know their particular needs — what barriers there might be to engaging them, what value added you might gain from engaging with them. So, lots of barriers to tenant involvement.

**Interviewer:** Great, so —

**Interviewee:** Not insurmountable, but you have to identify them [...].

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Um, great, thank you, I have some general demographic questions. [1:03:46-01:11:38 is demographic information]

Appendix 9: Interviewees “Atticus” (ALMO board member and TRA member) and “Theodora” (TRA member) Transcript

**Atticus:** Hello.

**Interviewer:** Hi. Is this [Atticus]?

**Atticus:** Oh, hi. [L].

**Interviewer:** Hi, it’s [L]. Nice to hear from you. How are you doing today?

**Atticus:** Not bad at all. Not bad at all. I’m going to put my phone on speaker because my wife’s here with me as well.

**Interviewer:** : Great. Okay. Then, I could...

**Atticus:** I suppose --

**Interviewer:** : Yes.

**Atticus:** Here we go, done.

**Interviewer:** : Great. I’m going to adjust my phone as well... this is probably the best place to put it.

**Theodora:** Sorry, hi.

**Interviewer:** : Hello.
Theodora: I’m alright.

Interviewer: Great. So, I can ask a question and both of you can respond in your own sort of way. So, could you tell me how you got involved with [the ALMO] and the TRA?

Atticus: Yeah. [Theodora], my wife, has been a [borough] Council and a [the ALMO] resident for 30 years?

Theodora: Yeah.

Atticus: Yeah. Over 30 years.

Interviewer: For 30 years, okay.

Atticus: Over 30 years, yeah. And about 5 or 6 years ago, [the ALMO] were looking to start the TRA up again because it had sort of died with no interests from residents.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: So, they sent a sort of simple “Yes or No” questionnaire around the estate, people sent responses in, the responses were positive, the number that they had, and so, they kind of began the consultation process to set it up. But when [they came] to getting people involved committee wise, it only would be [Theodora] and myself that put our names forward. And so, the sort of TRA was set-up, constitution was all done and it’s been running. I think this is the 6th year.

Theodora: Yeah.

Atticus: It’s 6, isn’t it?

Theodora: Yeah. But also, before that, as we got together, we were doing separate things, we were looking at some activities that we can actually do together as a couple. And again, the TRA was a option that we could actually do something together…

Atticus: Something around the estate.

Theodora: … that was positive.

Interviewer: That makes sense. And so, was there any particular event or it was sort of just wanting to be involved, wanting to do something together or were there any other factors that led you to join the TRA?

Atticus: It was mainly also a little bit of frustration at trying to, A. Find out what was going on generally with social housing around our estate and also to get things done in terms of well, who do we go to if this work needs doing and who can we ask? Because you sometimes run up against a call centre system where you don’t really get very far and I mean, [the ALMO] has improved that over the years but initially, it was like a call into the [back and beyond], and nothing else happened unless it was an emergency like, you know, electrical problems or a break in repair, that sort of thing.

Theodora: Oh yeah, and you could call up the call centre and sort of, like if you have a leaky roof, they’ll put you through to the wrong department or, you know, just wait around in circles till you actually try to find out who you can actually call or get to do the repairs or the call centre just weren’t helpful at all and we were finding that’s the same problem with the rest of the residents as well. They were having problems trying to get work done or work being done to a
block which said was being done etcetera and through setting up this TRA, we actually found that they listened well to...

**Atticus:** It was almost like, “Oh, you’re only social housing residents, Oh, now, you’ve got TRA. Now, we need to listen to you and do something to get things done.” And I don’t mean that in a negative way, but there was definitely an opinion change. And of course, it meant from a TRA point of view, we got to know or get to know the Senior management team of [the ALMO] more closely and build up a better working relationship. I’m a [ALMO] board member as well now and I’ve been for a couple of years as the resident board member but [Theodora] as a TRA member could probably name the whole Senior management team and some of the board directors by first name terms, which we couldn’t have done 6 or 7 years ago because we have evolved. So, there’s been that benefit and, of course, residents know, some of the resident now know if they got an issue, they can come and speak to us and we are the TRA speaking to the right area or the right person or the right project manager, you know, we can put a bit of pressure on to… if not much to get things done but at least, you get answers even if it’s not the answer you want but at least, people are getting told, “Well, we can’t do this because…” An epic example when our estate, there’s a road called [X Street], and some of the houses there, they’ve had some work done or some new windows being featured into their roof space and individually, the properties have had some issues with leakage and such like and [Theodora] as the Chair of the TRA, one of the residents mentioned it, she got on to [the ALMO], was put in touch with the project manager...

**Theodora:** Well, initially, there was, you know, one resident came to see me, initially they’ve got to do the work themselves, they’ve got to go through the core avenues and try and get the work done. They found out they weren’t getting anything done so I actually did a thorough look around the area and found there was like new roof properties with the same issue…

**Interviewer:** The same, sorry, the same issue?

**Theodora:** Yeah. Same issue.

**Interviewer:** Same issue. Yes.

**Theodora:** Yeah. So, with that, I could actually, I actually contacted one of the senior directors in [the ALMO] who actually put me through to someone else, [[G] McName], and lo and behold, we’ve managed to get all these work done. Actually, set up for me with [the ALMO], the contractors and the residents so they can actually air all their issues and what problems that they’re having. That led to the [the ALMO] and the contractors having to walk round and looking at these issues.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Theodora:** And it actually got done.

**Atticus:** Well, it’s just getting done. The contractors said that these issues weren’t happening leakage or whatever and the residents individually have been trying to sort some issues out and some of them were getting sorted. When [Theodora] as the chair of the TRA got involved on one of these executive team directors, the operations director became aware that there was these
issues, there was a much more focused intention to get the issues resolved and then there has been then when the residents try to do it individually. And the contractors were sort of, had their socks pulled up as well from under the [inaudible] in terms of well, you know, these things are… One of things that all the residents were complaining about for a small example, was that the contractors rather than using the scaffolding to come down and then go up between individual properties were walking just straight across the roofs.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Atticus: Because one of the housing safety issue had been falling off. They were breaking the roof tiles which was then making the leakage problem worse as well and the contractors said, “Well, our guys are not doing that,” and then one of them admitted they’ve actually seen the workmen doing it. Little things like that, you know? So, we’ve had other issues around the estate where the TRAs take the job with [the ALMO] for a resolution. We are actively involved with monitoring what’s going on with one of the blocks or flats on our estate where the cladding from the Grenfell issue. Within [the borough], three blocks have got the same cladding or the same type of cladding, the ACM, that was used on the Grenfell block. Two blocks from across the road from us but one of the blocks is about 70 yards away from where we live. And so, that comes under our TRA. And so, we’ve been really involved with the management team of [the ALMO] about being kept in involved communications with what’s going on, what they’re doing, what they’re telling the residents. Any issue the residents are having, they know they can come to the TRA if they think that [the ALMO] are not reacting proactively enough.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: But so far, from the TRA point of view, we’ve not had any major issues because I think from the communication point of view, in particular, the head of housing at [the ALMO], they’ve been on the ball with telling residents what’s going on, what’s happening, why are they doing this and what the further plans are. So, nobody out of the 52 properties can say they’ve not been told.

Interviewer: Great.

Theodora: I think it’s all… now, with the TRA, our TRA and all the other TRAs in [the borough] because we’ve got that communication going, all the engagement going with the top management. They know what’s happening but before, before, about 3-4 years ago, it wasn’t there. So, you’d go to the call center or you’ll go to your housing officer but the guy sitting on top didn’t actually know what’s happening on ground level and they have actually got that access now. They do know what’s happening and they’re…

Atticus: [Doing the work]

Theodora: Yeah. They actually got more involved more, they want to know what’s happening. They want to know their residents. So, yeah, we’ve got it good.

Atticus: There’s a new Chief Exec at [the ALMO] now, [Jane Name], who’s coming with a different, slightly different approach, ideas, a different background although she’s worked in housing for many years, she’s come from a housing association background rather than a social
housing association background. So, she’s got different ideas and she although she can see things slightly differently as well. So, with her taking over early this year, that has, I think within [the ALMO], generated some new ideas and some new ways of doing things. It’s like anything, if you don’t try it, you’ll never know, will you?

Interviewer: Right. That makes sense. Before we move on to the next question, I forgot to ask at the beginning if both of you have read the briefing form that I sent to you.

Atticus: Yes.

Interviewer: Great. And are you comfortable being recorded or would you prefer…

Theodora: Yeah. That’s alright.

Atticus: We wouldn’t be talking to you if we weren’t.

Interviewer: Okay. Yes. I just wanted to double check because I forgot to ask from the beginning.

Atticus: That’s fine.

Interviewer: Great. Okay. So, I wanted to ask, you mentioned that there was a couple of issues around the estate that were also a motivating factor for being involved. Would you have become involved if those issues, if those problems weren’t around or present?

Theodora: Yeah. I think so because there was nothing commandeering it. It’s also an asset for getting residents together because we’ve got people next door, I mean, I’m happy to say that we’ve got someone now but, you know, you don’t know your neighbors. You go in, you shut your door and that’s it. And we’ve actually put on some activities where it’s getting everyone out together. And that was our really to…

Interviewer: Okay.

Atticus: I grew up in Birmingham as a kid, living in council housing in the 60s & 70s and you hear a lot of people say, “You know, back in the day, …” Yeah. You didn’t need to lock your door and so on and so on. But I still remember as a kid quite a few occasions where my mother knew I’d done something before I even got back in the house. Because it’s the neighbors, you know, it was that type of, “Oh, I’ve just seen your son doing this type of thing,” and you know, duck you in or whatever. But now, I can quite honestly say to you, I don’t know the first names of the neighbors living beside of us where we live. I really don’t and [Theodora]’s lived around in this particular house where we are for over 30 years. So, she’s seen a lot of changes on the estate both in terms of construction, new buildings. [X] housing association, probably have got 50-60% of the properties on our estate that are all new builds, which was all green grass, you know, 20-30 years ago.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: But socially, because she’s lived here so long and see, seen a lot of physical development and a lot of different people move in the estate and everything else. And obviously, from the TRA point of view, we’re only involved with the [the ALMO] residency, we’re from
the same area. Which probably makes up the other 40% of the total number of properties. And we try and get them involved and we’ve arranged a few events…

**Theodora**: We arranged weekends away.

**Atticus**: Yeah… on two occasions, we took 30-odd residents and kids away doing some adventure training in the [Y] borders. So, they had four days of no mobile phones, no internet, no Facebook, nothing like that at all and it was all rock climbing, country air, up sailing, those strange things called farm animals, and all that sort of arranged activities in a proper adventure training business organisation that’s licensed to do that sort of stuff.

**Theodora**: And also, some of the families haven’t actually been out of [the city], more or less even out of the borough of [redacted], they’ve not been out of that borough but it was all— it was distant for them such like the coach trip was like three and half hours to get there. It’s as long as they’ve been being on a coach and it was like how far are we going to camp? You know, how much longer is it to get there? Once they got there, the fresh country air and everything, you know? At first, you gave the kids to rebellion because they had no internet so they couldn’t play games and they couldn’t do whatever they did on their computer but after that, they just settled down and enjoyed the activities and the bonding sessions and what not and a lot of families that are still in contact with each other, some going on that trip…

**Atticus**: And the only thing we did with a couple of the families families, they actually spent more time with their kids over that four days that they generally do during the course of the week with work and schooling and everything else.

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Atticus**: But because they couldn’t go anywhere, there was no transport, the nearest town was about 5 [G] away, the only way to get into town was our car and that wasn’t going to happen. So, it was like four days at being in an enclosed bubble on this lovely station in the middle of nowhere doing various outdoor activities. So, it was a bit of an adventure for all of them. To be honest, it worked out quite well.

**Interviewer**: Right. That sounds great. Could you tell me, [Atticus], a little bit about how you got involved with [the ALMO] as a resident board member and how you sort of, at what point did you go from being involved with the TRA to being involved in that way as well?

**Atticus**: Basically, the previous Chief Executive, [Cameron Name], politely suggested I should put my name forward as a resident board member because he thought I could do some use as a resident. [Theodora] was asked as well but the interviewing process at the time, 3 or 4 years back, was effectively interview by panel. 6 or 8?

**Theodora**: Yeah.

**Atticus**: 8 or so people. So, [Theodora] wasn’t comfortable with her interview panel process although she actually put her name forward a couple of years before I did. But because of the feedback from [Theodora], and I think a couple of other people, about how this interview process felt quite overbearing and almost like trial by question.
Interviewer: Yeah.

Atticus: But they changed it. So, I submitted application paperwork when the timeframe and everything got up and based on the conversation I’ve had with the previous Chief Exec, [Cameron], and the interview panel then was a councillor, couple of directors, the Chief Exec and the Chair. So, there was about 4 people. They were actually happy with the answers I gave to the questions and I was duly appointed in 2016.

Interviewer: Great. Could you tell me if either of you have any experience in management or housing related work before getting involved or was it a completely new— back when you both got involved with the TRA, was it just a completely new avenue of work?

Theodora: Well, my job, I’m a chef by trade and I actually school catering. So, I’m actually, I’ve been managing kitchens for God knows how long. [...] Yeah. So, I’ve been managing kitchens and managing staff of 14 or more at a time. So, I’m used to doing management and dealing with staff and customers and stuff like high management in that type. But at the same time, I don’t know.

Atticus: From the TRA and the housing point of view, it is all new. I mean, her sort of experience is as been, as council house or social house tenants and also having that feeling of what we think should be right like, it’s not right that workmen come into your house for 6 weeks and do a range of improvement works and use your living room as their dustbin for their empty coke bottles, their cigarette ends and all of their rubbish. It’s about treating people’s properties with respect. And that’s one thing that personally really really gets me angry and a few times, I’ve sent off some pretty, even as a board member now, as a resident, I’ve sent off some pretty sharply worded emails to [the ALMO] complaining about the workmen not treating the properties as though they were their own. And that has made a difference. And [the ALMO] are getting better at that contract management in terms of, you know, feeding it down the line, individual housing estate if not, don’t do it with our residents. You know? And it leads back into that general public thinking of, “Well, you’re a Council house resident so that puts you farther down the scale,” but that doesn’t actually because I combined salaries for [Theodora] and myself. And we’re a lot better than some people who are in that financial position of being able to either provide the rental or have a mortgage. Because of our ages, we’re not in that frame to do that but my work background also is sort of business management and business operations and such alike and that’s an area where I was able to bring something to [the ALMO] board as well. Not just as a resident but from my working background as well. It’s experience there as to what to me seems a proper way to handle something not necessarily, you know, the other… because [the ALMO] grew out of a council setup and as you probably know, the local authorities are rigidly structured, they no sense of humor even some of the buildings looked like they were built in 1960’s Moscow.

Interviewer: Yes.

Atticus: And you need to get away from that. And I think they’re still struggling to do it, to be honest. So, our background. But coming into what’s our knowledge of housing and everything
else, probably at the start, that was [23:40] rather than our personal experiences. And that’s what the pair of us have been able to develop over the years by having the ability to talk to people who are the professionals and when they come back and give an answer, either accept the answer or say, “Well, hang on, why can’t you do this or why can’t you do that? Or why won’t you do it this way?” And, you know, there must be that degree of flexibility that allows you to do something in a different way. And in some instances, there is, you know?

Theodora: It’s also helped with, you have a residence [24:16] TRAs because we do actually go out, we’re involved in the [borough] tenants fund as well which, do you know what [the borough] tenant’s fund is?

Interviewer: Somewhat but please feel free to let me know, to elaborate…

Theodora: Okay. The [borough] tenants fund is for each tenant, council tenant in that sense, when you pay your rent, you pay dividends, which is, well, at the moment is 13p of it which is… can you explain it better?

Atticus: Yeah. So, basically, the tenant fund is an organization set up and monitored by [borough] council. It’s set up as a limited company with a board of directors and one part time employee who’s a qualified accountant bookkeeper. And all of the [ALMO] tenants have 13 pence a week deducted from their rent and that 13 pence a week is provided to the [borough] tenant fund. So, all of the books and all of the finances are all transparent. And what the fund is there to do is to financially support the residents associations with various types of grant applications like for example, a grant application to provide the data they need for the TRA like paper, stationary, printer’s ink. The ability to produce some leaflets or fliers for the TRA and also to conduct your meetings. So, if there’s a charge to hire a community room for a TRA to have a meeting, the tenant’s fund helps to cover those costs and also organize community events or whatever TRA might want to put together as a community event like say small garden party or something like that. So, their ability there to make an application pretty granted. We’re not talking huge sums of money, we’re talking, you know, the event grant for example, is £1200 in a total in a year, in a financial year. So, they’re not huge sums of money but if you want to have a community event of some description, you can make a bid to the tenant’s fund and provided the money is in the bank for what you’re looking to organize, meet requirements of the tenant’s fund rules, you get the money.

Theodora: Well, the board also sit down and look at it and..

Atticus: Yeah. And the board of directors meet every quarter and they review the work that the fund administrator’s done over the previous quarter. And it may well be that there’s a request for money towards a special project which the board of directors will then consider and provided the money is in the bank and it can be afforded to be done then, there’s a vote take and the granting of that money is approved and at [the ALMO], we run an annual garden party for [ALMO] residents and the tenant’s fund contributes about £8000 a year towards that.

Theodora: It’s not the resident, it’s [the ALMO].
Atticus: Because it’s a direct benefit to the [ALMO] tenants. Now, even though, you know, at the garden party, you will have leaseholders and possibly other people turn up, it’s still a worthwhile investment to help, you know, the garden party event run, with in the aspect of music and some arts & crafts, we have tidbits for the kids to do, it’s a general chance for the gathering.

Theodora: [28:05]

Atticus: Yeah. There’s some of them was various residents they’re doing various voluntary activities. It also gives [the ALMO] a bit of a chance to talk to residents and also publicize some things that they’re doing or some of the plans in the pipeline like the estate gardening works and planting and gardening, flower beds and all that sort of stuff. And looking for ideas as well for people or from people who [28:38] estates. So, that’s where the tenant’s fund fits in. So, it’s completely separate to [the ALMO]. And it is supported and monitored by [the borough] council.

Theodora: And I’ve just become the Chair.

Atticus: And [Theodora]’s just been elected as the Chair to the tenant’s fund as well.

Interviewer: Great. Okay.

Atticus: So, now, she’s responsible for a budget of about £94,000 a year.

Interviewer: Okay. That makes sense. And thank you. So, do both you overall enjoy your involvement in the board and the TRA?

Atticus: Yes.

Theodora: Yeah.

Atticus: Yeah.

Theodora: Yes, we do.

Atticus: It’s quite nice when somebody turns around and says thank you for sorting something out or trying to get an issue sorted out because they’re not getting anywhere themselves. Or even if we’ve just organized like a day trip event down to [29:31] for the day for people to, you know, [29:35] coastline on the South Coast and it’s a day out, and you can’t beat people saying thank you for that.

Theodora: Yeah. And so, you know, with being in the [the borough] tenant’s funds as well as our TRA, the tenant’s fund platform, we can actually go out to other TRAs as well just to see [29:59] and offer advice and it makes a big difference to other TRAs especially the new ones seeking from setting up our TRA and what we’ve done in there, we can actually advise them or give them advice of where to go, who to see, what not to do. So, we get a lot of thanks from that side as well. Because we’ve done it, we have a problem, you know, we say we know who to go to, [30:31] they’re sort of running around to, we say like, “Go to XYZ,” or we will take it which impacts on [30:41] as a board member, he can actually take it and find out the answers.

Atticus: It’s all about saving time and, you know, it’s the usual thing is it’s not what you know, it’s who you know. And one of the things I’ve seen as a board member that the housing officers, they obviously sometimes are working with a huge workload in terms of the number of properties that they’re responsible for. I mean, the [the ALMO] housing officers are individually
responsible through the region of about a thousand properties each. Now, some of those properties oversee the residents and the tenants are not a problem at all, they have no issues. There’s always those who for whatever reason, whether it’s illness or disability need more help from the housing officers and more steerage and more support and so on. But because [the ALMO] like any organization, has a management structure. So, sometimes, the housing officers, they can get equally as frustrated with a small act when they’re trying to get some issues resolved and it’s not getting pushed up far enough up the management chain for those managers who can say, “No, this has to stop or this is what we will do,” becoming aware of it. Now, that is improving in [the ALMO], I see that as a board member. But as board member, it’s not just about us helping out the residents, it’s also about giving the support to like our own local housing officer, [J Name]. If he’s got some issues and if he’s struggling to try and get some things resolved, then I know, even if it upsets people, I don’t care, I can go straight to the Chief Exec and I can say, “Look Margaret, your housing officer is having an issue here,” because we don’t know what the problem might be. But if that means somebody further down the management chain like a supervisor or a head of department, gets a bit of a challenge because they’re not flexible or helpful… well, to be honest, if they were being helpful or flexible, they wouldn’t be getting that [32:52] anyway…

Theodora: [32:54]

Atticus: Exactly. And of course, then, you know, it’s stopping the housing officer doing their job or trying to resolve what the issue is which means they’ve got a resident or a tenant then who is not happy because it looks like the housing officer is not doing anything.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: And that has got better because certainly, some of the older people in [the ALMO] who may well have been quite searching their ways as to how they work, those are getting fewer as they retire. So, there are changes that are happening there and I think that, I think they’re making that working environment certainly better from the communication point of view. Well, individually, I have no problem at all going straight to even the Chair sometimes with these particular issues. It’s like, “okay, this is not right, it needs sorting out.” And then, of course, that feeds back down the line then to people knowing, let the board know and it’s surprising how the attitudes can change quite quickly. In a good way, to be honest. So, yeah, I’ll milk back for all I can.

Theodora: Yeah. That’s what they do.

Atticus: Absolutely. And one of the other good things as well that works is there’s a residence engagement panel which meets every quarter and that’s basically made up of representatives from each of the residents associations. And it has a sort of set of agenda items and it gives [the ALMO] a chance to tell the TRA representatives what [the ALMO] has been doing for the last quarter, what future plans are that are coming up and it’s all about information that can be fed back to the TRA so you can then feed it back to the residents either through a newsletter or
through Residents’ meetings to say, “Look, this is what’s going on, this is what’s been happening, these are some of the issues or the problems that [the ALMO] are having to deal with…” and this sort of gives out background communication as to why something might happen or has not happened. They can go maybe, “Alright. Oh, okay. Now, I understand why there’s been a problem with this,” rather than just frustrating and banging their head against a brick wall and not getting a response.

Theodora: But also, with the engagement panel as well, the representatives of some of the TRAs, they have actually got a voice as well in that if say [the ALMO], they’ve got a plan they want to actually implement, the engagement planning can actually look at it well and say, “It’s not going to— certain aspects won’t work because of A, B or C.” And they do take you on and they do actually make those changes as well before it’s actually rolled out. So, the engagement panel is a good thing as well.

Atticus: I mean, a few years back, I used to get quite frustrated with the engagement panel because lease holders also attend and without [the ALMO] to side off lease holders, sometimes some of the issues they bring to the table then become their personal issues as lease holders and that’s not what the panel is about. The panel is about that sort of cooperate uniformity of “Okay, this is a general problem around the borough […]

Theodora: It’s not a personal issue. Like if we’ve got an issue in our property, it’s not about that, it’s about collectively…

Atticus: But the Co-Chair of the engagement panel has got that quite well under control now at the moment. And when there are various sort of little discussions sessions, that gets controlled quite well as well. So, it doesn’t become a ‘this is all about me and my service charge’ type of meeting, which in the past, it has happened and both of us have got really frustrated with that. We’re giving up 3-4 hours of our lives so, I really don’t care about a lease holder’s service charge but I do care about a block of flats that’s got aluminum cladding fitted to it [37:08].

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: You know? But it’s actually a level of what’s more to you is what’s more important.

Interviewer: Pressing. Yeah. That makes sense. How much time do both of you dedicate per week or per month to your involvement?

Theodora: [Atticus]’s probably more than I do because he’s got this whole…

Atticus: On the TRA side, [Theodora] tries to organize a meeting… on average, we have to have at least 4 a year anyway. That’s a requirement of the TRA constitution. So, if you just took it as a minimum of 4, you’re looking at two and a half to three hours for the meetings, state of admin, running around [37:54] and stuffs like that. So, each meeting probably…

Theodora: Lasts like two hours.

Atticus: 2 hours. No, no, say about 5 hours per TRA meeting.

Interviewer: Okay.

Atticus: On the [the borough] Tenant’s Fund side,

Theodora: Yeah. But [the borough] Tenant’s Fund so, you get… [inaudible]
Atticus: That could be 10 minutes or it could be up to a sort of a week’s worth of e-mail exchanges with various people at [the ALMO]. Like in the [X Street] example we talked about earlier, I mean, if we were to sort of run a time sheet on that, I would say that [Theodora]’s time has probably taken up equivalent of or easily 3-4 if not 5 [days] of her full time job over the course of two or three months.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: In terms of organizing the meeting for residents and [the ALMO], attending the meeting, door knocking, e-mail correspondents… in fact, we have an e-mail...

Theodora: … the whole [works], you know?

Atticus: Updating… updating as to what was happening with the leakage problems around there. Now, the e-mail didn’t need a response. It took us 10 minutes to what she sent through because it’s quite detailed and it’s not to give us that update, you know? Yeah. As a minimum, you could say probably, I don’t know, the equivalent of 20, I mean, just turn it into working days, probably the equivalent of 3-4 working days a year in terms of just for meetings. On the Tenant’s Fund side, that involves [39:48] of the meetings again which last a good three hours but the information pack that comes out beforehand is a good couple of hours of reading the information that’s part of the meeting itself.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: So, again, probably equivalent there of 3-4 days of the equivalent work.

Interviewer: Okay.

Atticus: On my side on the board, we have that last three hours. The pack to read part to each meeting takes a full day. You’re talking about 190 pages worth of information to be read before each board meeting. So, that’s a full day per board meeting that it takes me to read that. So, that’s what? 4 or 5 extra so, that’s 6 or 7 days. Then, I’m also a member of two committees. There’s committees again quarterly, they usually don’t last more than 2 hours, that’s 2-4-6-8. And again, for each meeting, there’s a good three hours worth of reading the information pack before each of those meetings. And then, we have a two-day away session and then, we have various training sessions as well, strategy sessions, I think of which off the top of my head, we have at least 4 a year. So, I think probably in terms of my time, it’s probably the equivalent of 3 if not 4, 4 working weeks.

Interviewer: Mhmm… wow.

Atticus: Might even be a bit more than that. And that’s just as a resident board member. Obviously, the likes of the Chair and the Vice Chair are a lot more involved. But I’ll say probably 4-5 weeks on the board side of equivalent working time.

Interviewer: Okay.

Theodora: When we said at the beginning that we sort of like started going just to do something together, it’s going so much that we’re not doing activities together anymore, we’re actually doing…
Interviewer: Yeah.
Theodora: Yeah.
Atticus: I support [Theodora] at the TRA meetings because I’m the TRA treasurer. Anyway, that’s like one day’s work a year to put the accounts together.
Interviewer: Right.
Atticus: But then, with my board meetings and the committee meetings and everything else, I could be doing that as well as the same time, [Theodora]’s likely to be attending her Chair at the Tenant’s Fund. It is worthwhile, it is enjoyable. And it’s… you know, you learn a lot. Certainly, I have. I mean, I’ve learnt lots and lots about the issues that [the ALMO] has with legislation and funding in terms of wanting to develop properties, wanting to provide a level of decent homes to live in. The constraints the [42:49] has in regulations put in place that prevents that where [the ALMO] as an organization could so much more if people were willing to either take the risk or relax some of the legislation to allow them to do that. Because certainly, the organization started in the right place but there are frustrations there not least of all from the council that do prevent some of those ideas happening which can get quite frustrating.
Interviewer: So, overall, how would you describe the relationship between the TRA and the local council and [the ALMO] and the local council?
Atticus: Well, the relationship with [the ALMO] and the council is really good to the point where the contract for the services [the ALMO] provides has just been formally re-signed for another 10 year period because the council could have said, “No, we’re going to take all back in-house,” which other councils have done. They’ve taken their housing stock back in-house to run it themselves but [the borough council] took the decision to not do that and to carry on using [the ALMO] as the management organization to do that on their behalf.
Interviewer: Right.
Atticus: Certainly, there are certainly the issues where it works really well and the new [borough] Mayor used to be the candidate representative for the council for the housing strategy anyway. So, if he doesn’t know what’s going on as the new Mayor, then he really wants a good kicking because his previous his job with working really closely with [the ALMO] as the cabinet member dealing with the social housing elements.
Interviewer: Right.
Atticus: TRA relationship with [the ALMO], I would say for our TRA personally, is really good.
Theodora: Really good. You know, we know people on first name terms especially we at the top management.
Atticus: Yeah. And it’s a good working relationship. Yeah. It really is— I think other TRAs are in a similar position. Newer TRAs, although they’re given the information as to who to contact on what to do, because ultimately, at the end of the day, they are more made up of residents who are generally quite new to being involved in even this sort of, you know, committee type sector. And that’s where [Theodora], as the Tenant’s Fund
Director and Chair and myself as a [the ALMO] board member, we will go to TRA meetings as much as we possibly can to just give a bit of help and advice and support. And sort of, “if you’re having these problems, right, okay, this is the person you need to contact, this is their email address,” I have no [concerns] about handing over the email addresses of the executive team of [the ALMO]

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Atticus:** Because that’s what they’re there for.

**Theodora:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Atticus:** And so, I think, overall, the TRA relationship with [the ALMO], I would say for all TRAs, is probably pretty good.

**Theodora:** [The ALMO] wants to have that.

**Atticus:** Yeah, they do. They do want that. Because as I said, if the residents and the tenants don’t tell us what the issues are and what the problems are, how can we fix them?

**Theodora:** Yeah.

**Atticus:** And, you know, we can’t know about them. And at the end of the day, there’s only 500 employees in [the ALMO] and they’ve got 17,000 properties to look after. So, you know, I think it’s going good. And the TRAs tend not to deal with council because, obviously, it’s [the ALMO] who runs the stock on behalf of the council. So, the main relationship tends to be [the ALMO] as an organization with the borough council and the TRA’s relationship with [the ALMO] as is the residents unless it’s those areas where the council have responsibility like street lighting, car parking on the main roads, you know, rubbish collection, and some of the general park areas. You know? So, it depends.

**Interviewer:** And what sort of issues does the council consult [the ALMO] on or the TRA on? For example, like street lighting or some of those types of things. What sort of issues do they consult on on other and which issues do they just sort of just go ahead with?

**Atticus:** It’s hard to tell because for our particular estate, we have three board councilors who, although they’re labor party councilors from the support they provide to our particular estate that they’re responsible for, their level of service is absolutely excellent. We have no problems at all in saying to people, you know, these three guys do more than most councilors in terms of getting answers to questions, letting us know what’s going on where like for example, development building works just across from our main estate is sort of, I don’t know, maybe 50 yards or so away across from the borough border. But our three councilors from the onset when the planning commission applications were put in, they were telling the TRA straight away that this was going on, it was happening and this is what’s likely to happen. So.

**Theodora:** But they actually attend our meetings as well, TRA meetings and give information.

**Atticus:** Yeah. [48:36] is really good.

**Theodora:** Really good.
Atticus: And individual residents on the estate know the councilors as well and they’re always around the estate officially at least once a month. Unofficially, there’s always one of them around the estate at some point even just sort of having to walk around also in the area. So, from that point of view, a TRA relationship with the councilors, for us personally, is really good. I do know that there are some councilors and TRAs where it’s not that good at all because the councilors to be honest, are just not interested.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: You know?

Theodora: It’s just a name for them and that’s it.

Atticus: Yes. But for us personally, we’ve evolved. And they do work hard.

Theodora: And they’ve always got an answer for you. If not, they get an answer for you and, you know, it’s not pushed down the line, it’s finesse.

Atticus: Yeah. And it’s the low level supply— where we live is a particular minor issue with a property that’s been converted into four or six flats. There are 8 dustbins, 2 for each flats, they’re all out on the pavement in the front of this block rather than being inside the gated area.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: They leave the bins out to fill them with rubbish so when the dustbin comes along once a week or once a fortnight, they don’t take it. We emailed the councilors and said, “Look guys, this is going on and it’s getting ridiculous.” I mean, in about 4 hours, we have a reply from one of them saying he will find out who the landlord of the property is because it’s not [the ALMO], it’s a private landlord.

Interviewer: Oh, Interesting.

Atticus: And get on to them to get their tenants to tidy their act up. That was just before we went on holiday a week ago. So, yeah, there is some relationship there and for us personally, it’s a really good close one.

Theodora: But also with the pub…

Atticus: Oh yeah, we’ve got a local public house at the end of the road and there were issues there with people outside the pub smoking and drinking.

Theodora: All tables outside on the pavement where if you like to walk or a disabled person in a wheelchair, you can’t get on the road to walk because there’s just so much people on the pavement. You know, we contacted the councilors…

Atticus: They had the enforcement officer from the council around there within a couple of days and the pub was reminded of their license requirements and that no tables outside and keeping the pavement access clear because it’s not very wide anyway at this particular point but that was resolved within a matter of a few weeks and now, the public house owner knows that if he transgresses his license, the enforcement officer will pay him a visit. So, little things like that, it really does work well.

Interviewer: Great. And are you both satisfied with the current budget available to the TRA and the current budget with [the ALMO] overall?
**Atticus**: Well, the TRA’s funding comes through the [borough] Tenant’s Fund.

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Atticus**: The TRA gets no money at all from [the ALMO].

**Theodora**: Yeah.

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Atticus**: It all comes from the [borough] Tenant’s Fund. That’s the whole sole existence for the [borough] Tenant’s Fund.

**Interviewer**: Right. Are you both satisfied with the budget that you have available as a TRA from…?

**Atticus**: Well, we could always have more money but yeah. And I mean, well, the current funds that are there, they are adequate but if somebody turned round to us and said, “Well, this is £10,000, go and organize an event for your estate,” we could absolutely spend £10,000. No problem at all. But the funding that the tenant’s fund is able to give us in terms of equipment grant and event grant and the admin grant, it is what it is. You know, we have to run the TRA within those budgets with constraints.

**Theodora**: When we did that weekend away, we did actually look out for extra funding from various other…

**Atticus**: Yeah. We spent six grand and they came from [the ALMO] and their special projects fund.

**Theodora**: Yeah.

**Atticus**: [The ALMO] used to run a special project fund that they used to budget £65,000 a year. So, a TRA could go to them and say, “We’ve got this event and we’d like some money towards it,” and the maximum sum was 6k. And we’ve benefitted from that twice but they no longer run that community involvement budget like they used to. It’s all done slightly different now through crowd funding which is maybe, I think, a little bit more complicated. But again, it is what it is.

**Theodora**: Yeah.

**Atticus**: And, Of course, [the ALMO]’ budget is negotiated with the council anyway in terms of the management fee and the services that [the ALMO] provides.

**Interviewer**: Right. Great. My next question is what is the decision making process like in the TRA and on the board? Maybe, [Theodora], you could speak to the TRA and [Atticus], you could speak to the board. Is it consensus based? A majority vote? Tell me a bit about how meetings function and how ideas become actions, I guess.

**Atticus**: Well, on the board side, obviously, there’s the senior executive team that runs [the ALMO] day to day.

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Atticus**: Any issues that come before the board that needs a decision can either be done by General consensus or a majority… I mean, a majority vote will actually rule overall if it ever came to that. There’s also an arrangement in place where the Chair, if the decision needed
quickly, where the chair can make a decision on behalf of the board and then, if there’s any discussion around that, it would happen at next board meeting. And so, that generally works quite well because there’s a senior executive team there to run [the ALMO] day to day. And, of course, the board is made up of volunteers in terms of the independent directors who are being appointed because they have a particular skill set such as housing legislation knowledge, financial areas around housing legislation and the housing regulations act and so on or people themselves as residents who actually live in the properties generally have got an idea to what’s going on on the estate and can bring those issues to the board in the general sense to let the board know what’s going on. You know, something that’s a small issue now, later on might become something quite major. So, if we’re in a position to stop it before that happens—I go back to the block of flats that failed the fire testing at the Grenfell, within a matter of hours, 24 hours, samples were being taken off the blocks that may have been affected within [the borough] and were being sent off for testing. Residents were being told by letter put through letterboxes that this was happening and this was why it was happening. The results of those tests came back and it was realized that only three blocks had got cladding on that failed. Those residents were then written to and told that this had failed and then, there was a project plan put in place to get the cladding off, to get the scaffolding up to get the cladding off and then, once that was done, “Okay, what do we do about replacing it?” So, all of that was communicated and over the course of about three weeks, the head of housing in particular, I mean, the [inaudible] girl, I don’t think she went home for 3 weeks. She sort of slept in the office. But as well as being praised by the board for the way she handled it, we just supported the executive team obviously and her colleagues on the housing department side but residents could not say they hadn’t been told what was going on and what [the ALMO] was doing about it. So, from the communication point of view, that was a perfect example for me of how it can and should work, you know? Well, on the TRA side, because I used to be the Chair of the TRA, I mean, [Theodora]—because I took on the [the ALMO] board, I had to step back so we didn’t have any sort of risk of a conflict of interest but the TRA, we only normally get small numbers turn up around about 12-15-20 people on an estate of 300 properties. It is what it is.

**Theodora:** The Board, you know, it is made up of the Chair, Executive Chair, the treasurer, we haven’t got, there isn’t a Vice Chair…

**Atticus:** And [58:03]

**Theodora:** Yeah. And [58:05]. So, you know, if we’ve got a decision, it’s made there. You know, we plan the trips. We asked them sports they would like to do, we don’t get much of response so what we do, we plan something, and then, we will actually put a letter through every door and say like to haste things, “if you would like to go too, drop off the feedback through the letterbox,” and then, once we’ve got a response, then we would actually plan that event. That’s how we work and it was like…

**Atticus:** And if anything needs a vote on, like for example of the ATM, you know, except in the accounts and such like vote show of hands for majority.
Atticus: And, of course, the housing officer just try and get along to all the meetings because it is part of their responsibility to keep up that time in the evenings, to attend TRA meetings and sometimes, the housing officer’s in a position to feedback some of the low level stuff like repairs and such like that’s going on but it can be quite useful information as well.

Theodora: We do also invite to other guests to come along like you might have the head of care-taking or…

Atticus: Services, gardening.

Theodora: … or sort of like directors from [the ALMO] or someone like that just come in and give a talk on what is currently happening or what they are actually doing to resolve issues that some of the residents may have collectively.

Interviewer: Right.

Atticus: And then, issues that come up at the meeting, they totally come along just to simply say that, “I’ve got a problem with my sink, I need fixing,” then, you know, the housing officer takes issues like that away whether to try and get it resolved and sorted out and then we as TRA just keep on top of it whether it’s… we see as it’s progressing because it can get quite frustrating that 3-4 months, the residents won’t come back to us and let us know that something has been done or nothing is being done. And then, they say because maintenance hadn’t been done or, you know, if you don’t tell us, we can’t chase it up. We don’t have crystal balls that we can see what’s going on.

Theodora: Yeah. Example, we had a block which had, they had a lot of work done on their [1:00:48], the outside was tinted. The builders said they’d actually completed it, it was all signed off and residents came and said, “Look guys, this hasn’t been done,” so it’s like they had to walk around taking pictures of the work that hadn’t been done and again, sending that in which [the ALMO] wasn’t aware of and within days, those things could actually be completed, they could actually go back to the contractors and say, “why hasn’t this been done? Can you get it done ASAP?” So, you know, that’s sort of what our role is or my role is as well. Like helping the residents, complete tasks, and…

Interviewer: I was wondering, any particular reason why residents opt for TRAs rather than TMOs?

Atticus: Well, the residents association maybe is just a link to [the ALMO] whereas a Tenant Management Organization is a legal entity organization that runs the, as I understand it personally, TMO effectively runs the housing stock. And it was a TMO that was running Grenfell. Whereas TRAs, as I understand it, as a residents association are really a communication bridge between residents and the landlord. As that focal point. So, from a legal responsibility point of view, there is no legal responsibility unless, obviously, if we were to organize events and something goes wrong and we have public liability in place in case somebody says, “I’m going to sue you because I broke my leg on that coach trip,” or whatever. But in terms of a legal entity type arrangement, it really is just a way of communicating with the
landlord through the residents to channel information both ways so that you haven’t got up to 400 people all complaining about the same thing when you can just have the TRA or one of the committees members from the TRA pass on whatever the issue is to the likes of [the ALMO] and say, “Look, you know, we’ve had two or three hundred people coming to speak to me about this. There’s actually a problem and you guys need to fix it.” Like for example, the properties in [X Street], with those leak in their windows. They were all individually speaking to [the ALMO] and not getting anywhere. They talked to [Theodora] about it and within a matter of a couple of weeks, it’s treated more seriously.

**Theodora**: As the individuals were reporting it, they were too certain individuals that the link wasn’t put in place that whole block that’s having these issues. It was like…

**Atticus**: Ten separate problems.

**Theodora**: Yeah.

**Atticus**: But actually it was one for all ten properties.

**Theodora**: And that’s what we got across to [the ALMO].

**Atticus**: The TMOs, as I understand it, as tenant management organizations are physically responsible for running the properties themselves which…

**Theodora**: A TRA cannot.

**Atticus**: … which TRAs are not [...]. Personally, there’s no way I’ll want to be involved in having that pressure of that legal entity or responsibility. Especially because I’m pretty certain that the organization that was responsible for the Grenfell was a TMO. No, thanks. Just sign me off.

**Interviewer**: Great. So, the next questions I have are mostly for you, [Atticus], and related to the board specifically. Could you tell me how many tenants there are in the board compared to independent members and sort of councilors?

**Atticus**: Yeah. Right. Let me think now. We’ve got… But I’m going to count them up on my fingers. There’s myself, [x], [y], [z]—the board members [predominantly total] in numbers, the majority [tenant] number is greater than the leaseholder.

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Atticus**: No, it’s not that many because of the independents. I’m trying to think—I have a feeling, I’m just to the faces round the table. Certainly, I can name 5 of which there are two leaseholders and three tenants. And then, we have a range of independent directors of which there are… that makes 6. I’m sure it’s 7 or 6. Let me try and count them up. We’ve got… but off the top of my head, I think we have 5 independents and then residents/lease holders, there’s myself, there’s [redacted list of names]. So, off the top of my head, I can count at least 7 residents or leaseholders.

**Interviewer**: Right. And in your opinion, why do you think that the board has that particular make up of tenants and independents?
**Atticus:** It’s part of their constitution. It actually states that we have to have X number of leaseholders/residents and X number of independent experts appointees. And the majority has to be resident/leaseholder. I mean, the previous Chair for [the ALMO’s] Board was a leaseholder/resident. The current chair is officially classed as an independent expert. So, it’s within the constitution that there has to be a resident majority.

**Interviewer:** And how much influence do tenants on the board have with regards to decision making or is it sort of…?

**Atticus:** No. Absolutely 100% equal [01:07:44].

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Atticus:** Yeah. There’s no differentiation there at all. A board member is a board member is a board member. It doesn’t matter what their background is.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Atticus:** And I think that’s one of the reasons why they have the majority as residents because at the end of the day, [the ALMO] is there to run the housing stock for residents.

**Interviewer:** Great. Thank you. Now, my next questions, last couple of questions, are for both of you. As part of your roles in the TRA or on the board, have you had an experience where you felt that you weren’t being listened to whether that’s from the council, from other tenants or any sort of circumstance?

**Atticus:** Personally, for me, no.

**Theodora:** I’ve been satisfied with where we’ve been so far.

**Atticus:** Yeah. Up to date, that’s not been an issue for each of us, I think.

**Interviewer:** Okay. And so, there are other tenants who are not involved in the TRA or who don’t go to meetings and who don’t get involved with the board. Do you think there might be any factors that might be limiting them from being involved?

**Atticus:** Other than [they] can’t be bothered, no.

**Theodora:** There’s some of them that’s got young children as well which restricts… Yeah.

**Atticus:** Their meetings attendance, yeah. Because, obviously, the TRA, All the meetings actually are all in the evenings. So, as [Theodora] said, we do have a couple of residents who we know they’ve got young kids and, you know, they can’t just leave them at home for a couple of hours to walk up the street to the community center we use to come to the meetings as much as they’d like to. So, we’re aware of that issue. But it’s difficult for us as well because we both work to arrange a meeting in the day time and we did try once arranging the meeting for Saturday and nobody turned up.

**Theodora:** We’ve also, with residents, they don’t want to come out unless there’s an issue. We have new faces come out and we say, “Oh, we’ve got new faces,” and they just come down because they have actually got a problem or what not or they were actually come knocking the door or a friend called because they have got a problem. Once those problems are dealt with…

**Atticus:** You don’t see them again.
Theodora: … you don’t see them again until…
Atticus: The next one.
Theodora: … the next one. But, you know, at the same time, you’ve actually met those residents so yeah, I’ve got that rapport.
...
Atticus:…they’re not strangers anymore.
Theodora: Yeah. And there is that “Thank you for helping me sort out my problem because I’ve been pulling my hair out, running around in circles and no one’s actually listening to me or supporting me.” That we do as well. That support till that job’s completed.
Interviewer: Right.
Theodora: So, you know, to me, if we have 5 or 10 or probably a 100 come out to meet, which we haven’t had a 100, but it doesn’t matter because whatever happened around the estate, and they know there is a TRA, they know that if they’ve got a problem, they can actually approach is, they can come to the TRA. So, that’s what we’re there for. That’s me. So, they’ve got someone they can go to if they so wish and also so each residence to actually get to know each other but it’s not isolated, [01:11:33] is not isolated.
Atticus: And to be honest, we’ve seen it within [the borough] when we’ve been to other TRA meetings. Turn out to other TRA meetings is equal as well. I think the best turn out we’ve ever seen at a TRA meeting is about 25 for an AGM a few couple of months back. It is what it is. It’s, you know, it’s people… and sometimes, it’s a real struggle to get people come forward and volunteer to get involved as well. We know some TRAs have really struggled around the borough to get people who want to step up and take on a bit of a voluntary role and get involved. And when they do, they sort of then start to enjoy it and they say, “I’m learning so much,” it’s getting them over that threshold of wanting to get involved and then sort of taking the risk to do it.
Interviewer: Right.
Atticus: You know, it’s… there’s not much you can do at the end of the day. I think the best turnout we’ve ever had at a TRA meeting has been about 10. But we’ve been to a couple where they’ve been two.
Theodora: You know, I’ve been to ones, it’s an AGM and they can’t run it because they haven’t got enough residents there to do it.
Atticus: There is definitely a degree of residents [inaudible] absolutely.
Interviewer: Right. Do you think that more tenant participation is always good?
Atticus: Oh, of course, yes. Definitely.
Theodora: Yeah. Yeah.
Atticus: Absolutely. It’s like, you know, if you’re not registered to vote, well, don’t complain about the result if you didn’t exercise your right to vote at the end of the day.
Interviewer: Right.
**Atticus**: I use the same set of principle, well, you know, if you want to do something, you have to get involved.

**Interviewer**: And do either of you have any comments on the future of tenant participation, where you see it going?

**Atticus**: Personally, I would like to see it improve. I think that [the ALMO] can still do more work on the community involvement side but then you always want to see improvements on such areas, don’t you?

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Atticus**: We’ve got a major building project that’s going to start on our estate next year and so far, the information coming from the council, because this is council project, as been quite good and they’ve kept us up to date with what’s going on and in fact, one of the housing departments managers will be coming along to our TRA meeting in September to give us an update on who the build partner is going to be, who’s going to do the building work and everything else. So, that works but we can always improve on that in terms of telling people what’s going on and we do what we can around the estate. We’ve got three young kids who deliver, we call it a newsletter but really, it’s an agenda for the [housing association X] meeting. I mean, they usually give a list around the estate and so, it goes through the front doors of 350 properties and we get 12 people turn up, you know? But whether that’s work, whether that’s [01:14:53], whether it’s not interested or, you know, it’s couple of instances we know people have got young kids and can’t come along as much as they’d like to.

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Atticus**: Or it’s leaseholders who don’t care either, it’s, you know?

**Theodora**: When we first started, you know, we had so few people turning up at our meeting but now, it’s… Yeah. It’s what it is and we know that it… the messages don’t get in around to each resident, they know there is a TRA in there and they know that’s where they can go for support but from our point of view, what we’re actually doing TRA, we’re actually happy with it. We know we’re giving that support. We’re sort of, you know, when something’s done, you know, a thank you, it’s like you do something for someone and you don’t expect a thank you but when they come back with thank you and, you know, you’ve done a really good job and you’ve helped us a lot, it does actually make your day.

**Interviewer**: Right.

**Atticus**: The last event we organized, which I think was sort of [01:16:15], there was 30 people including kids on the coach out of an estate of like say 300 properties. So, you know, relatively low numbers but those that came along—and it was free, didn’t cost them anything—those that came along had a lovely day. We had a lovely day as well laying down on the beach and it was good to just talk to different people from around the estate. Yeah. So, for those who didn’t turn up, it was their loss.

**Interviewer**: Right. Great. That concludes all my main questions.
Appendix 10: TRA Interviewees “Logan” and “Amelia” Transcript

**Interviewer**: Normally designed for one person. I can ask a question and both of you can answer. So why did you decide to join the TRA?

**Amelia**: It's where I live. Yeah, its social housing had seen as social housing, and I think people have certain perceptions of social housing that I don't necessarily buy into. If it was home ownership, if I owned where I lived, I would still be engaged in the area I live in so I am engaged in the area I live in. I am retired I had a little time so it was, instead of being peripherally involved I could get more involved.

**Interviewer**: Before getting involved were you generally involved with your community and other ways or in previous places?

**Amelia**: Yes, I've been involved in the TRA...I think it was [name redacted] and I that kind of set it up all of these years ago. Have spent some time away and various people have kept it running and it has grown from [strength to strength.]

**Interviewer**: Could you tell me a bit about how you joined? Like what the events were leading up to it?

**Amelia**: Yeah, what set it off... We have a lot of problems with flooding in the block. And tenants had enough and got together to get [compensation] and get the local authorities to deal with the problem. That was the sort of the main event that kind of started it.

**Interviewer**: Catalyst, yeah. Would you have joined, if not for that event?

**Amelia**: Certainly, yes.

**Interviewer**: What do you think?

**Logan**: Certainly. Just be engaged with the community and to, I think you know as tenants and residents to be responsible for the block as well as not just relying on the social housing provider, and I've been involved in a previous, similar organization before I came here. So it just seems the right thing to do really and it's also a good way of getting to know people within the block and it's also I think it's important that as tenants and residents we have some influence over the social provider and their policy and strategy development, and what's done in the block, these are the main reasons. I can't remember it was so long ago, I can’t remember how I joined. [laughter]

**Interviewer**: How long have you been involved again?

**Amelia**: I can't remember. Probably since the nineties.

**Logan**: It had stopped by the time I came, yeah, so I was going to start again with [name redacted], so that I think was about 16 years ago. But it had been going previously.

**Interviewer**: And are either of you involved in management or organization work sort of as careers or outside of this context?
Amelia: I’ve...not always. My whole career has been involved in housing but not as a housing manager, more sort of subsidiary things around housing management such as budget.

Logan: I've been involved as a manager in the voluntary and community sector. Not specifically housing but basically volunteering, I specialize in.

Interviewer: Overall do both of you enjoy your involvement in the TRA? Do you benefit from it? Is it more stressful or challenging?

Amelia: I would say frustrating really, but I think it's worthwhile. So I suppose yes, in a [...] sense I do enjoy it but I'm frustrated, probably, sometimes with other tenants but largely with[the ALMO], and [the borough] council. It’s the nature of anything.

Interviewer: We’ll get into that a bit.

Logan: I'm, yeah, I suppose I do enjoy it, I enjoy the interaction. Yeah, and I suppose I enjoy knowing what's going on as opposed to just reacting to things that are happening. So, but, equally it can be really frustrating, and part not just with the council but with other tenants and residents, just trying to get people involved and carrying a bit of the load can be frustrating.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a bit about how meetings function and how often they occur sort of how many people show up and what kind of rules that there is sort of the structure and functioning?

Logan: We're quite structured, really.

Amelia: I think we are properly constituted.

Logan: We meet about six times a year, six or seven times.

Amelia: It could be more because we missed out.

Logan: It might be eight. Yeah, so roughly every six, seven, six to eight weeks we meet and we set an agenda, we have standing items on the agenda, issues tend to roll over. So we have an agenda and we have minutes. We minute our meetings and we send out invitations, we post notices of the meeting in the building so people can see and then people who are signed up get papers, get an agenda and minutes from the last meeting and any other relevant papers. Those go out to, obviously officials at [the ALMO], because we are an ALMO not run by the council anymore. Yeah, but also officials from the council, counsellors, our MP. So basically we are constituted the way we've got the chair, vice chair, secretary and treasurer.

Amelia: And, attendees can fluctuate from this and that, a dozen to a few. It depends on the time of year which day of the week it is, if England is playing, you know, there are social factors that fit into it, but I mean there are always people in attendance.

Logan: We have an AGM every year. We've got to be quorum for that. We need quorum for any decision making but there's not been any problems with that. I remember just the two of us were there, but that was holiday time.

Amelia: Yeah. On the whole, it runs

Logan: It can be very lively.
Interviewer: So besides the meetings, how much time do you dedicate per week or per month? In hours?
Logan: It depends. It really depends what's going on. It can be as little as maybe just a couple of conversations in a week to, if you're writing a report or you're dealing with council officials...I think generally every week there is some interaction between us in the council which we copy each other in so that everyone's aware. So it's never just one person dealing with it. If it's the TRA then there's any that's we those officers that we mentioned are on the committee, you know, the executive committee. So they're always copied in. I don't think a week goes by that we are not...
Amelia: There is always something that's flying around.
Logan: Since raising an issue. But if there is something bigger going on then it could be meetings, other meetings. Meetings with the council, extra meetings with the council or I mean we had a lot going on after the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, so because we are a tower block of 20 storeys.
Interviewer: Which one is it?
Logan: It's that one over there. So there is two, and there’s the third over there that's been sold off. Okay, so there was a lot going on after that. So we there were public meetings, meetings with the chief executive, meetings with counselors, MPs. It was really busy. So it just depends really.
Interviewer: Was that sort of around people being concerned about safety issues as a response and addressing them?
Logan: Yeah, and I mean the big controversy still is what we advise is to stay in your flat; it was people that noticed that was still [the policy]. Which is very serious and the advice is still the same.
Interviewer: I don’t think people will follow that.
(Logon and Amelia say “No” in unison)
Interviewer: So we talked a bit about the structure of the organization. Could you tell me about your very specific roles in terms of what your, not day-to-day, but you know whenever you do work on this, what you're doing?
Amelia: Logan is the Chair and I am the Vice Chair stroke secretary. So I do the minutes. We share at meetings or we go to meetings. And I also do blocking, the title block inspections. Periodically I've got access to all the floors because we have security system and I just go around looking at it from the sort of ongoing repairs point of view, of things that have not been picked up in the common areas, not been in flats just in the common areas or if there's any health and safety stuff that I think should be picked up. So it's that kind of stuff that I do. Plus, I think all of us on the exec committee particularly if we see something that needs reporting then we also report that as well. So I think that probably sums it up.
Logan: I am the Chair, so I chair the meetings. I put the papers together and then organize meetings with the executive. If not me then one of the executive committees will meet with the
council as well and trying to make sure that there's a wider spectrum of people that know what we're doing and where we are. So trying to keep councillors involved, trying to keep our MPs involved. That's not very easy, so, and linking to other, because we get attendants in part of another group, for a safe living panel, so that's working with the local police on issues involving them as well, copying them into what we do.

Amelia: There’s a movement at the moment there are some more TRAs is in the area are setup and they're kind of looking to join together on common issues and maybe some area development because of all the new build around here. So we'll probably be engaging with that on some levels as well.

Interviewer: So yeah, so around of neighborhood development issues and common ones. During meetings, sort of committee meetings and as well as the general meeting, how would you describe the problem solving approach? That's a very broad question but up for interpretation.

Amelia: I think it's about keeping things at the forefront in terms of getting the respective officers to do what they need to be doing in [the ALMO] and not letting it slide. So we actually follow things through and it might be quite frustrating. It might be quite a tiny process but a bit dogged really, and it gets results. I think as a TRA, I think we're quite respected because we don't shout at them. We are politely firm and if have to take it to another stage or complain and we'll do that but we do it in a considered way.

Logan: I remember we said our purpose is to work with the [the ALMO] to find a solution. So I mean, we could be reasonable and practical sometimes and things that we want will never be going to get but maybe we'll return to the solution, but it's just making sure that they understand what the problems are and that they respond in a timely way to what we're asking them to do, which is not always the case. So I made, we're going to [inaudible] rate issues now. Some red, amber, and green, so we can see, and they can see very quickly because otherwise keeping track of some issues going from, some issues going on for years. So it's just going to be an easier way for people to look at something and say well, you know, this has been a long time and to let them know that we're still onto it and we're not going to let it go. I suppose the answer to your question is that we try to be [consensual], but if we feel we're being obstructed or we're not being given all the information that we need or that the communication is not good, then we will involve Senior Management and we have gone directly to the Chief of Staff before, to get results. But we try not to do that. But, as I said we have to make it plain.

Amelia: And it's not just about practical things, like if electrics need doing or something. It's also about trying to influence policy as well. So that neither loopholes in policy or what we're doing isn't what the policy is supposedly saying they're doing and then we highlight that as well and feed into that as well.

Logan: We turn to raise an issue. Then there you get quoted policy back out of the law, and particularly because our officer wasn't there the last time, but when somebody else fills in then they think they've got the tell us which is a bit frustrating. Just going to point out a little, we have
been doing this for a long time. We know what the policy is; don't quote policy back at us. What we're saying is your policy, and what policy is and what practice is are two different things.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned that rarely but sometimes you do go to the sort of the head of the [the ALMO] or you, sort of mobilize together or how often does that happen? Or does that need to happen?

**Amelia:** It’s on an as-need basis, really.

**Logan:** I mean, it hasn't happened for a while, but it goes through stages. There was a stage when we were doing a lot and it just yeah, it's just if we're not getting responses that we need to get. So, if that happens once a year then basically that’s the most. But we went through a stage where the whole block was refurbished, but the contract was given to someone who’s since been sacked, but a big company who didn't do it well.

**Interviewer:** Like what, like [Company C] or one of those?

**Logan:** It was [Company M]. Terrible, terrible company. So, they did it very badly and they didn't retreat to the extent...so for example, the taps that we had were taken away. They replaced them with something far inferior to, and all of my taps gradually one by one have been replaced back to what they were before because they don't work. In that period so I think it was about three years ago, there were a lot of complaints coming in about [Company M], about the quality of the work and about the quality of the materials. The lack of respect they had for the building and there were big health and safety and fire issues. They were leaving materials in corridors, blocking fire escapes. I mean...in that particular instance, it’s continuous, but since that's been done there are still issues that we've still on the list, but they're now going to do big surveys following Grenfell. But until Grenfell reports are published and the government decides what they're going to say has to be done people are sitting on their hands but I mean things like the doors... We all got new front doors, which are supposed to be fireproof. They were fireproof but they weren't fitting properly.

**Interviewer:** That's not very fireproof.

**Logan:** So now I think we've got the majority of the 144 doors and it we've got about 90 odd doors that have been replaced.

**Amelia:** So about a handful, about ten or fifteen that needed new door work have been properly framed and fitted.

**Interviewer:** So overall, how would you describe the relationship between the TRA and [the ALMO] and the local authority?

**Logan:** Well, I'd like to think it was, well, it depends on the officers. So on the whole, good. I think they show us a bit of respect really now because we've been getting along and we try to be fair. And as I said, we don't shout at them. You know, they are and some of the officers are very good. We get very frustrated when it's very obvious, that someone's not doing their job or not telling us what we need to know. So, on the whole, it's good and the meetings are well attended with officers, but the ongoing issue is communication between us. One example being the surveys and the doors, we've asked to whole series of detailed questions, which they have yet to
answer, and it's been weeks, months it's been ongoing now and because we copied the councillors and the mayor they told them that we've been given detailed responses to and that's what became one issue. Things will go well, but one issue that came up recently was because the doors, and there's so many doors...They decided without telling us they put an X on people's doors for no reason and I mean, why would anyone think that that was a good way to behave? So this was [Company M] again but [the ALMO] have to take some responsibility for that as well. Unless something was said at the meeting. Does that mean that we've been [M]ed for slaughter? [laughter] You know, they keep getting it wrong really, every now and again keep getting it wrong badly.

Amelia: I think they work in their bubble. They forget that they are dealing with people and properties. Those properties are people’s homes. I think some officers just don’t get that.

Logan: But I think we do respect that they are working under more difficult circumstances because of the cuts We are well aware of that and we try to be mindful of that. But all the same it impacts on people, you know, particularly when it comes to things like anti-social behavior and the responses that they're currently, or been given recently, that's been an issue that comes up again and again and again.

Interviewer: You sort of both touched on this a little bit but to what extent do you feel that tenants in the TRA are consulted whenever [the ALMO] attempts to make, I mean you already said this with the door example, but are consulted before decisions are made on the estate?

Amelia: I think we could do a little better actually. Yeah, basically, you know, in their little bubble they decide they're going to refurbish, so they'll be a consultation about, you might get choices about color schemes, but you're not going to be part of the choice about which companies are going to deliver it. So it's minimal. I think it's cosmetic.

Logan: Consultation was a dirty word as far as they are concerned.

Amelia: I think lots of consultation and lots of sorts of satisfaction surveys are skewed anyway. Because they have their answer already.

Interviewer: The way they formed the question. Yeah, okay. Yes, that answers my next two questions...were what types of decisions are tenants always or usually consulted and which ones they are not consulted on and you mentioned consulted on more cosmetic details rather than the companies?

Amelia: We can give a more recent example. I mean there’s, you know, there's more new build around here, so car parking is now an issue, and that tower block there has got a parking scheme. And so the knock-on effect has been that people don’t want to be paying a nominal sum in parking on our side. So we've asked if we can have a consultation, we have to have a consultation, so if people in our block want a parking scheme. That was supposed to go ahead and then suddenly we were told it's not going ahead because we're now in negotiations to have a new contract provider to do the parking enforcement. They don't seem to get it but we can still have our consultation while those negotiations are going on, it doesn’t have to be everything comes to a halt. So we still are pushing for our consultation.
Logan: I mean the big one on consultation was the concierge, we used to have a concierge that worked really well within the building about ten years ago. Yeah, roughly ten years ago they did a consultation and took the concierge away, but we know from council people they'd already made that decision before they did the consultation, and also because we're a tower block and very specific requirements really to other social housing, the concierge was really important, where the survey went to everybody every area within [the borough's] social housing. So people were impacted in different ways really, so and we've asked again, and again to do some kind of comparative study between, you know, the state block and the repairs, pre-imposed to it, but they won't do it. So that's what it's like with consultation, everybody takes a deep intake of breath...I think the other thing worth mentioning is we are kind of mixed block as well because some people have bought so we're not all social housing tenants, we've got some leaseholders.

Amelia: But they're in the minority.

Logan: Yeah, there are about 30 of them.

Interviewer: Does that create issues for getting those people involved in any way?

Amelia: No we are open to that, actually, we work together well.

Logan: We're very much that we represent everybody.

Interviewer: There's not really any conflicting...?

Logan: No. We deal with issues that affect everyone.

Amelia: I mean, I know in some areas, years ago I worked in [region H] and there was some TRAs in [region H] but was adamant that they wouldn't work with leaseholders because they are politically opposed to them having bought social housing. We don't have that in our block.

Interviewer: So if the TRA expresses an issue to [the ALMO] or an individual tenant, by comparison, expresses a concern what type of response would you expect for an individual tenant and for the TRA as a group?

Amelia: Ideally no difference but reality I think is a big difference. A lot of reporting seems to get lost from individuals, unless it's a repair where they get a reference number and somebody comes and does the job. But, anti-social behavior...people gave up reporting and anything because it was going nowhere. Nobody was, apparently, seeming to take action, but if we do it through the TRA, I think we get we get there eventually. We do get responses and get things done and I think people have worked that one out to an extent. Because people come to the TRA meetings, not on a regular basis, but an individual issue, and I think it's kind of a slow evolution really, people get to hear from these people that they were helped, some action was done, something was resolved. So, that kind of plants the seed that if you don't get any joy, come to the TRA.

Logan: It depends who you are, really, you speak to, it can be varying. If you're not, if you don't know to get a job number, if you don't, you know, it's...if you're vulnerable, one of the issues we've raised is that they've done away with all the housing offices. So you have to go to [the borough] Town Hall. So for some people, that's the problem getting on and off 'buses. They say there's also probably a lot of digitally excluded, so they can't, you know, then getting on the
phone is hit or miss really as to what will be dealt with properly or not. So the services are not as inclusive as they were before. I'm trying to work with them to make them realize that and to look for other solutions, really. So, there are some people who, I think you've got to be quite on the ball really, to get a good response and be prepared to go back again, again, ‘till you happy with what you've got. That's where we come in I think, hopefully. There are people who feel that they've completely come [inaudible] and they tend to be a bit [inaudible]

Amelia: Sometimes a bit difficult if English is someone’s second or third language. All communications, all major ones only come out in English. I mean, I accept that, you know within our block there’s lots of different first languages, but there's no attempt to sort of, if it was a major consultation, to put something additional in place to maybe make it a little easier for those people as well.

Logan: And I think it's always the case without, I mean we know often, we know the policy and procedures better than the people with the staff that we're bringing up totally brings up all the lifts, because we're such high tower block. We've only got two lifts, even if one lift breaks down, it's an emergency call out and somebody has to come within four hours because there are a hundred forty four apartments within the building. So, but often you will ring particularly if you do the out-of-hours service, they won’t know that, and they won’t respond because they won’t raise that as an emergency either. Unless you're part of a part of TRA or included, or...

Interviewer: You have a better sense of your rights.

Amelia: Partly the problem there is that because they outsource to call center, they're working from a set script that has no concept of deviation or anything.

Logan: But one of the issues that have been raised again and again is that the corridors are a part of the fire escape and so they need to be kept free. So people who dump rubbish or bikes, there’s an ongoing battle to remove them, and we try and report it and we try to encourage people to report it. Given the place is full of smoke anything can happen, somebody can fall, somebody can fall, twist their ankle and they won’t get out the building. Then we have the caretaker coming to deal with the rubbish that people don't dispose of properly and that takes them away from their jobs that they are supposed to do. We are asking for a reporting mechanism because they are telling us, we have been reporting it, but we've been ignored. They’ve specifically come to us and ask us, can you raise this for us because they are not listening to us.

Amelia: It’s kind of ironic really, that their own staff are working through the TRA. I think part of the problem is they don’t work as a team. They don’t think okay, you know, I am the housing officer, I am the caretaker, and we’re apart of the same team. They are in their own little bubbles. The housing manager is like, it’s just rubbish the caretaker can deal with it, what are the wringing about? When actually their part in it is to identify who is causing the problems and deal with it.

Interviewer: I know the local authority, you mentioned, there have been a lot of cuts and resources have been cut. But I am wondering if there is any funding for the TRA in anyway?
Amelia: Yes, there is.
Logan: Tenant’s fund.
Amelia: It's included in the rent. Something like, maybe ten pence borough-wide maybe go into TRA, goes into tenants association. We’re paying for that association really, that's how they raise the money.
Logan: I think we can draw down a thousand pound per year. It’s not a huge amount of money, but to be honest with you we don’t spend that. They get annoyed with us, we don’t spend that.
Amelia: And it quiet restricted as well, reasonably restricted. You know, you don’t buy alcohol for your meetings and things like that.
Interviewer: As part of your role, more than just individual tenants, have you had an experiences where you felt, I mean we did touch on these experiences, but if you want to elaborate on these experiences, where you felt like you weren't listened to, where no one was taking your opinion seriously even as a TRA member? Not just the local authority but also other tenants possibly, or within meetings, that kind of thing.
Amelia: I'm not so sure about tenants really not taking it seriously, because they are there because they live there so they know what we're talking about. I think we have quite a battle with the so-called antisocial behavior team. I don't think personally that they are terribly fit for purpose. We’ve consistently argued and argued about including reporting and investigating tools that are open to them, and I think they're starting to just get there a bit. The manager I believe has changed, but the manager at a time, came to one of our meetings and was very angry, very patronizing, and very dismissive and actually we knew, we had made it and were able to tell them what they can do. I think that's a different can of worms and it's not limited to us it has been an issue across the borough.
Logan: I think they downgraded, there as being a place, they bring stats where there were two complaints since the last time we met, which we know is ridiculous but we are working on it. The biggest frustration really, has been around the particular refurbishment with the health and safety. We have to report again and again as we were promised that every night they would do checks before they left the building, but again and again, stuff is left that blocked the doorway, blocked the fire escape, blocked the stairways it was an ongoing battle. That was really frustrating and I think it kind of of has it been since Grenfell as well, one thing it has made us aware of how important those exit routes are for every corridor. So it’s quite complex building they're almost like a zed, so your apartment is on three separate floors basically, so your apartment apart apartment either goes up or it goes down.
Amelia: It's a scissor-shape.
Logan: So one of the issues, the first one was around that, but one of the issues is that they didn’t have, and this has been on our agenda for at least fifteen years, they don't have a schematic plan for the building. So when there is a flood because the building is so complex, it takes them weeks to find out where the leak is. By which case, somebody’s flat can be destroyed. People have come to our meeting in tears and in total frustration with them, and they deny that it takes
them weeks when we know, we have got evidence, again and again and. And even then when they find out sometimes when it's a leaseholder in their way, and they can't come. That flooding is the one issue aside from health and safety that really is unresolved. They are now saying that they're going to do a schematic plan because of Grenfell. I think they've embarrassed into the fact that it was publicly said that we have been calling for this for 15 years. We have also been calling for, because we have been re-clad, to see the contract which the officer has lost, for the cladding, so apparently tenants that were here at the time, they clearly remember that part of the contract was that the cladding would be cleaned, which never has been done over the last 20 years or so. So he's been calling for the contractors, obviously, again they’ve lost [the documents]. And we know at the moment our cladding is not the same as Grenfell, which is always tested. Our cladding has never been tested; we just know it's not the same.

**Interviewer:** But that doesn't necessarily mean it's not problematic?

**Logan:** No, but that would be part of the survey that we’re going to do. And this is ongoing with health and safety, the fact that stuff is dumped on the corridors, people coming into the building other contractors who don’t respect or understand that we have to keep things clear is an ongoing issue.

**Interviewer:** Moving away from some of the issues with the local authorities, and with [the ALMO], they are some tenants who not involved, most of them are not involved in their TRA for many different reasons, but those that are not involved, do you feel that they have a voice through the TRA or other ways?

**Amelia:** Well, the TRA is an avenue for them to have a voice, and they certainly know that there's a TRA in the block. I mean, one of the things that we're going to do that we haven't done before is to do an [interview], [inaudible], remind them we exist, of some of the things we try to achieve, and some of the things we're battling for, just to kind of remind people that there are some people in the block who care and that who are doing things and that they have access to.

**Logan:** It can be frustrating because people will say, oh, this is wrong, they'll tell you things that are wrong in the building, because they know you --

**Amelia:** They'll come to us, at the bus stop or in the super[M]et, I'm glad I've seen you, blah, blah, and then you’ve got the caretaker coming and saying, can you report XYZ? We’re starting to think about ways we can get people to be more formal [in how they report] and also to go through the proper channels so there are record keeping and reporting.

**Logan:** There is a set of people who think it's a waste of time, they're not listening to us, that’s kind of changed, also because when I first came, I came in the area about 23-odd years ago, there was a lot more flow, people didn't stay that long but with the housing crisis there is at the moment, people aren't moving about that much, so they're investing more in the building now.

**Amelia:** It is pretty stable, isn’t it?

**Logan:** You used to see change all the time, you don't get that anymore that kind of helps us really.
Amelia: I suppose it’s made a feeling of more community as well, people get to grow, the kids get to grow, the kids know people, families know each other and stuff now in the building.

Interviewer: What are some of the factors that might limit other tenants from being involved, from your perspectives?

Logan: Time, issues with children, other commitments.

Amelia: Work. There are people in the block that who are probably holding down two or three jobs.

Logan: Shift work.

Interviewer: Do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Logan: Not always.

Amelia: There are people who bring their own issues, there are people who need the support of other agencies, and they don’t quite grasp what the TRA is about or how to present issues.

Logan: We try to manage those.

Amelia: We did manage to get some external support for tenants as well.

Logan: And we’ll sign post, where people bring issues, to how we can get extra help for [them], but going back to the issue of people not being inclusive, again, they will quote policies back at us saying that we do home visits for anyone who can't make it to the office, but it's not advertised. I don't know anyone who is accessing it. So we've asked for more details about that, so we can spread the word a bit more.

Interviewer: Couple last questions. I would like to ask because I have interviewed TMO members whose TMO used to be a TRA...Is there any particular reason why you stuck with a TRA structure as opposed to the TMO structure?

Amelia: We don't want to manage the property, and after Grenfell, I don't think anyone wants to be a TMO. I think TMOs, in theory, I can see why in theory they were on the table. Again, it was lobbing quite heavy management issues onto people who aren't qualified necessarily to do it. Even with the best one in the world, TMOs have made a serious mistake, spent money unwisely. I don't think they are on the table much anymore.

Logan: I don't think we have been very clear, there is a lot of work involved, depending on what the issues are. We've been focused, because they are other groups, because of the tenant's participation; there’s a wider group for the ward, then for the borough. Most of us are working or doing full-time jobs. We've been very clear that this comes first and this is our priority. There are loads of other things we can get involved in but we tend to focus on this, because we say, at a 22-tall storey block have got our specific issues that are different from other social housing. It takes up enough time just to do that.

Amelia: Let's just go back to the concept of TMO's, I think sometimes they actually pitted tenants against tenants which I don't think is a very constructive way of going ahead. Tenants and leaseholders need to be united and working together, and also with all the demands that are made on them as managers; most of them ended up spending the money outsourcing to private companies that don't have any investment in the area. There is certainly one TMO I know of in
[region H], they ended outsourcing to a local housing management organization. What is the point of being a TMO?

**Interviewer:** I think I have about two more questions. So, are there any tenants in the neighborhood who are influential in anyway in the community besides from yourselves as Chair and Vice Chair?

**Amelia:** Things kind of...You don’t get big names like celebrities; there are a lot of people working their way at lower levels, like this place. People who are running this are tenants.

**Logan:** Different people bring different expertise. We have people with an engineering background, people with construction background or plumbing, they bring different...We’ve got some heavy hitters, we push them, there is nobody else pushing for us. We did have a brilliant councillor who was amazing and came regularly to our meetings, understood our problems and was very supportive. She took up issues at the council level for us. She then became a local MP and unfortunately not for us. She is now in the mayor's office and leads on transport. She was a heavy hitter as far as we were concerned. So, issues that we raised, we had a fast track, and she does keep in touch, for a long time. Since then we haven't got anybody. Our local MP never comes through. She came around the time of Grenfell to a meeting and said that they will be back and we've never seen them again.

**Amelia:** Their predecessors are pretty much rubbish in that respect as well..

**Logan:** We just have gotten a new set of councillors and we are hopeful they may be better. We are a Labour area, 100 percent Labour, which I don't think is a good thing because there is no opposition.

**Interviewer:** There is no one challenging the status quo ever.. Do either of you have any comments on the future of tenant participation? Or where you see it going?

**Amelia:** No, I think it's a buzz word that local authorities pay a lot of lip service to. They like their satisfaction questionnaires, but actually, they don't want any more participation. It's not going to be truly democratic. I think, you know, the level we've have it at is the level it will always stay at.

**Logan:** I think it’s a part of their service contract, it's a box they have to tick. I think the police are the same. Other than the local police, the neighborhood police are very good but they are completely strung too, I think. And, it's something they have to do, but I think regardless of that and even if they didn't have the tenant's fund, I think we would organize ourselves and do it anyway, although we are officially recognized, I don't that's important. We would try and work with them even if we weren't recognized. And I think people will come together, I think people will realize it more, depending on where the economy goes and where Brexit goes and whatever is coming...I think, I hope if anything else we can make a difference in the building, generally people within the building and outside the building, I think that’s true, although they might say more pain.
Amelia: It’s also this notion of tenant participation aimed at social housing, but you know, for years social policies aim to get rid of social homes. There is no great expectation that homeowners, we would all get together, would have to be consulted and the rest of it.

Logan: I think there was definitely a feeling from some of the officers post-Thatcher’s era, that social housing, if you lived on a council estate people would look at you, you know, certain people will look at you. There was a kind of feeling that, why should you get any better? It's social housing, go and buy a place if you want something better.

Amelia: There seems to be an exception in the UK. Politically it's been motivated by the [inaudible] especially by Thatcher [inaudible]--and Labour, when they were in power, didn’t really try to change that. There has always been this obsession with home ownership that not everybody wants.

Logan: Young people can’t buy and quite soon they won’t be able to rent.

Interviewer: Don’t remind me. [laughter] That’s another problem in the US as well in parts and Canada.

Logan: But when we got our flats, they couldn’t give them away.

Amelia: I got mine through what was then, I moved here, about 40 years ago, and I got mine through what was called a hard-to-let scheme. They were begging people to come live in the places but now people can’t get them to live in.

Logan: I came 21 years later and it was still hard-to-let properties. They are pretty stable. Nothing changed.

Amelia: It's quite interesting because I have a sense that in Germany and Holland renting is far more the norm. I don't know why we don't look to our near neighbors to see what they are doing differently and why we don't do it too.

Interviewer: I think that’s it for my questions. Unless you have any comments or anything else you would like to add.

Logan: It would be nice to see where this goes.

Interviewer: I will definitely send both of you a copy of the final product.

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Appendix 11: TRA Interviewee “Blake” Transcript

Interviewer: Alright, it’s recording. Yeah, feel free to obviously take a break whenever or feel free to skip questions or anything.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned this before we started recording, but could you talk a little bit more about why you joined the TRA or formed it? How did you join? Sort of, if you can go over the story around that...
Interviewee: Yeah, so I’ve been living in my flat for nearly 7 years now and at the beginning of 2017, we got a letter [through], from [the ALMO] to say, “We are going to be doing some major work so it’s going to cost you quite a lot of money.”

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: They said, “We sent you a letter in 2009, 2010.” We moved in in 2011, so this was the first time we got any notification that this was going to be happening so, if we had got it when we first moved in or beforehand, before we bought the place, we would have at least, that [would] have given us some time to save up some money, that was one of the main things I found really aggravating, if it works and looks amazing, you have to pay a bit of extra money, increase the value of the house anyway, so that’s not the deal that [happened], it was a frustrating thing to happen.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: We then had work start which was [...], in 2017 and we had people come around and say oh yeah, you’re going to need new windows, seems like you’re going to need a new roof and then we didn’t get any windows, so we inquired about it, we said, why haven’t we had our windows yet? They said, “Oh, you’re not getting windows.” Why not? You said we were and you can see that there were and we can see that a lot of people had them put in.

Interviewer: Was this correspondence via email or in person or—

Interviewee: By email, yeah, we haven’t done anything over the phone, or in person within [the ALMO], everything I’ve done is by email.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: It’s the only way to get back to us.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: At that point of having this new information that we weren’t getting windows, I started kicking off and said, “No you told us we’re getting windows and from the way our windows look and feel, there’s a draft coming through one of the windows, some of the [unclear audio 02:19], so it’s not energy efficient and we should have some new ones.” Anyway, about 3 months later, a lot of the work has been done and my fiancé has gone back to work for the first time after maternity leave. She comes in through the front door and what happened before is that they started doing some work on the outside of the windows, not replaced the windows but doing some cladding, and then we started having a leak coming through our window and it was heavily raining at the time so it was like a waterfall in our bedroom, so, can’t [...] about that and realized they hadn’t set it up properly, the cladding, so they said sorry and my other half, she came home from her first day of work and they left a little note through the door saying, “Can you give us a call to talk about your ceiling?” So that’s been weird, so she went upstairs and falling through our ceiling, the [...] physically through our ceiling into our bedroom, so there was a big hole in our ceiling and there was loads of debris, all over our bedroom, on our bed, and it scratched our headboard of our bed as well. So that wasn’t good, they then said alright, we’ll fix it, so they did
and it actually took around 7 or 8 months to be redecorated, so amidst all that, we had a roof that was half plastered and half painted, for about 7 months.

**Interviewer:** Did they compensate you at all for the damage or anything?

**Interviewee:** No, no, we didn’t push it that hard to be fair, we just wanted them to get the work done and get out. So they have now repainted the rooms, it looks fine, you can’t see that anything has fallen through the ceiling. We then got a knock on the door from a couple of people that live in the local flats, we’ve never met before and they said we’re starting to think about putting together a TRA, would you be interested? I was like, absolutely. There’s so much stuff that’s gone on, the scaffolding is still up a year after putting it up, we haven’t really got an acknowledgement of when that’s going to happen, although yesterday I spoke to somebody because they came up to the car window, again to see if we need new windows, they had to say we’re going to take the scaffolding down and then we’re going to use a [inaudible], which is like a hydraulic lift, almost. So that’s pretty much the backstory. We, then, myself and my other half and these two people that knocked on our door said let’s do it. So we put together some [unclear audio 05:11] doors and said let’s get this going and the [ALMO] lot said, well, we have to host the first three of them so we’ll and take on responsibility of the first few, this is your contact, we’re also going to put you in touch with some other people who will help you from a finance perspective and also a [ALMO] person that will help to do anything, just to provide [help] as well. So at that point, we've got a few people into a room in one of the local education centers and people said, yeah they’re going to put themselves forward and people voted, fast forward a month, fast forward that now, we’re having our second one on Tuesday.

**Interviewer:** Okay, your second meeting?

**Interviewee:** Second meeting.

**Interviewer:** Wow, okay.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, so our first meeting was the beginning of June.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** This is our second meeting. First meeting that earlier, was more about putting the committee together, and getting an agenda set up for the second one, and we now got an agenda, we got the committee sorted, so we're meeting on Tuesday with the major works team and the estate’s repair team [to] talk about our problems that we've got.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And for the major works team with the ones that did most this work to tell us where they’re at. Recently, the original company that did all of this major work is called the [redacted].

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** And they had untold problems, mainly where our place used to be, but quite a lot of people in the block had issues with their work But I love people in the book had issues with their work. I believe they've been kicked off and there's a new building company who is called [redacted] consultancy, who I think have taken over and they’re now doing the rest of it.
Interviewer: So, would you have joined the TRA, if you had not had all of these problems?
Interviewee: No
Interviewer: No?
Interviewee: No, but I don’t like that there needed to be some kind of catalyst, to get some problems fixed, because I emailed them continually over the last 12 months to say, when’s the scaffolding coming down? We’ve had problems with our roofs, blah, blah, when’s this all being changed or fixed or sorted or amended? And there was precious little response back and there was a situation, where service charges, I didn’t agree with the service charges, I didn't agree with the fact that if we weren’t getting those [repairs], we would have to pay an equal share, even though it's in our lease, so I get that, but I didn't agree if we weren't getting windows, then we shouldn't have to pay the huge amount of money if we weren't seeing the benefits. So if that all hadn't happened, if we didn't have the major works program then we wouldn’t have needed to come together, because the main reason it’s come about is everyone having problems with the major works have been going up.
Interviewer: Right, so are you involved in any other sort of, you’ve mentioned you’ve had a job in in management as well.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: So did those skills transfer over, at all for this type of work for you?
Interviewee: I think if I, because I’ve been a manager now for the last couple of years. I think if I hadn't had been a manager, I probably wouldn't have been as confident to handle meetings, and to make sure that we’re following a the right flow within a meeting because we have had, I’m also a part of what’s known as the [borough] council leaseholders alliance, which is the leaseholders and with people who are trying to get transparency and [accountability] with [the ALMO] as well, because it’s slightly different issues they’ve had, compared to me but they ought to take on a task, where I’m more up and about, making sure that we’re getting treated fairly, and in those meetings, it's just a bunch of people that just keep on talking about their problems, and I'm like, well actually, we need to work out what we're doing it to move forward. So the meetings I've had at work are all about, okay, these are the issues, but when you put a plan of action together, what is our goal, what is our vision what we need to achieve and that is what was I brought to the table, with the alliance, specifically with the TRA. I had a couple meetings outside of the actual meeting so a couple of people met up with us to get some food and they started talking about some stuff as well to make sure we’re on track here, because what I don’t want to do is be there for 3 hours, 5 hours, and we really don’t have anything achieved at the end of it.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Much more about doing an hours’ work without conversation. Getting everything we need to be written down, written down, we know we need to achieve in the next month.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: We know our targets, our objectives and we put them, we attribute them to specific people, say, this is your job, this is your job, and if I had not been in those meetings I wouldn’t have done those, or they wouldn’t have done those.

Interviewer: Right. So, so far I know that joining the TRA is a response to a lot of the problems happening in your flat, but do you enjoy your involvement in the TRA so far?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you know what, it's really strange, I don't know what it's like over in Canada, but in [City X], we keep to ourselves, we don’t really talk to our neighbors that much, unless you’re in [unclear audio 10:49-10:50], you've got quite a lot of kids running around and you just seem to know each other a little bit because of kids. This isn't really like if you're in a flat, you barely see anybody, I only got one or two I consider friends from my block of flats, you don’t really bump into anybody, but this has been really good because I had to go around handing flyers out saying, by the way our meeting is tomorrow night, are you able to attend? I’ve met people I’ve never met before, in the 7 years I’ve been here and we went kind of [to] the bottom of the hill where we live, I’ve never been in there before [in] the 7 years I’ve been here, it looks a little bit rotten on the outside but went in for the first time with them and it was actually a nice place.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, there’s been some benefits to it and just about more knowing people and--

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Say hello to them, if I ever see them, it’s a lot easier, rather than walking past them and not knowing who they are, again a view of what’s going on in the background as well, as part of a TRA, you have a couple of representatives who go to [organization X] meetings, which kind of what it stands for, my fiancé is one of those so she came back the other night and said it was really interesting to see all of the stuff that everyone else has problems with and almost makes it seem like we got it easy, compared to a lot of the other flats [unclear audio 12:13-12:17]

Interviewer: Although the ceiling falling through it, I mean is [that sounds]—

Interviewee: Yeah, it’s annoying.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: But things like that are [unclear audio 12:23-12:25], they have parking issues, they have antisocial behavior issues, which we don't really [struggle] with, because we don’t have any of that.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: We just have delayed works program, which at the moment is a problem.

Interviewer: Right. So, from your perspective, how would you describe the responsibilities of the TRA especially in relation to [the ALMO], and anyone else was involved? I don't know if there's any other teams, or other TMO’s or other.

Interviewee: I think from my perspective, it's just about giving us a voice and having more of a collective, that we can have one voice with a number of people rather than several voices of one
person. The many service [complaints] of [the ALMO], they seem to take a bit more notice when they know there’s a TRA, when they know that there is a number of people under one banner, rather than a lot of single people try shouting for the sake of it, the amount of stuff that we've had not, say in our favor, but change, or we had some response back within the last two months of setting of this TRA compared to the year of me having back and forth with them, it’s been quite shocking really.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** It means that we’re doing something good, it means that everybody else in our block of flats, will also see the benefits, and that'll be quite nice to feel as well that we've done something for the bit of other people, as well as, helping ourselves out, but it's not just we've helped ourselves out, we don't care about anybody else, no, this is, we're helping out everybody. The fact that we might be able to get a little bit of money from [the ALMO] and the council for—I want to say party, but that’s not what I mean.

**Interviewer:** Event?

**Interviewee:** An event where you can get all of your flat, you can get your local flat together and you can celebrate whatever it is.

**Interviewer:** Like a summer party?

**Interviewee:** That sort of thing, party, barbeque, whatever it is, just so we have that sort of unity of a block or flat that is, we don't really talk to each other and we [want] this sort of thing to encourage that.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So this is, from what I can see, only positive things can come of that, rather than sitting and doing nothing, or having nothing changed, it’s the definition of insanity, isn’t it?

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** To do the same thing, week in, week out and expecting a different result, well, we’re trying to make some changes now, in fact, it’s for the benefit of the local flats.

**Interviewer:** So, you mentioned that the first meeting was in June, so are there monthly meetings?

**Interviewee:** First meeting was what?

**Interviewer:** You said the first meeting was in June, right?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, yes.

**Interviewer:** And so they’re monthly meetings every month?

**Interviewee:** There will be, there maybe times where it’s there every 2 months, depending on, well, summer holidays coming up with that we can get all of the committee to be in one place at one time, and it depends on, I guess, because we’re new, we will have to do it on a monthly to begin, we just to get up and run in, so that we've got some clear objective and goals and then [the ALMO] will know what we need from them or expect from them, or at least we told them our problems are and then perhaps when things become a little easier, then we can do it on a quarterly basis.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Because I think that we have to have four meetings a year as a TRA
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Anything above that, great, but anything below that I think goes against the T.R..A regulations or --
Interviewer: Guidelines?
Interviewee: Guidelines.
Interviewer: And so could you tell me a bit about, I guess it's a little bit early to tell, but based off of the meetings you have had, how the meetings function? In terms of, how you go through the agenda? You talked a bit about how at this particular moment there needs to be space for everyone to air their grievances and sort of get grievances out in the open and writing down, moving forward, how do you see that evolving?
Interviewee: Well, a part of the experience that I've had in management is you have to make sure that your agenda is kept safe, because it’s very easy to move on a tangent, then you spend half an hour talking about something that’s completely irrelevant, so what I anticipate happening beforehand, we will have a clear idea of what we want to talk about in that meeting, so, and it is also dependent on the type of team that we have from [the ALMO] coming to meet up with us, if there is one of them. So, this one, for example, we know the major works team are going to be there and the environment, sorry, the estate’s repair team are going to be there, and that's because when we spoke about our grievances to begin with, very briefly in the first meeting, they said, [the ALMO] said all that would sit with major works and that would sit with estate repairs, then prior to the meeting with them, [unclear audio 17:43], back and forth with each other in the TRA, saying what do we want our agenda to look like? And now we've put together a clear agenda which will be specifically around the scaffolding and also the care-taking situation, in fact, [it] doesn't really feel like there’s been a lot of cleaning in our block of flats, we’re paying money for this, so we want to know where the services going. And so, that's an example for the one coming up, perhaps at the end of the next meeting we'll say, what are the main things that people want to talk about this time? Then they will obviously engage with resident team for that particular problem.
Interviewer: Do you expect decision-making to be majority vote or consensus, or how you would decide that?
Interviewee: So, we would have the committee, but we would expect, and we are asking that everybody on the block to turn up, obviously not everybody’s going to turn up, there’ll be some people that are asked to turn up that want to, there’ll be some people that can’t because they don’t want to get involved and so in my opinion what would happen is we would just go with the majority rules, full democracy rather than a committee saying this is what’s going to happen.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Because I think, it’s all very good and well for the committee having the same thought process, mentality, if you got, [unclear audio 19:11-19:15], there’s 2 people living in
each room, 64 people, maybe I think there are 6 people in the committee, so another 58 people have a voice and if we then take that on board then we’re doing the TRA a disservice.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** I mean, you know, a lot of the voting has happened recently, taking breaks here and majority rules, I don’t agree with it but it’s the government, don’t agree with it, but they have to go with the majority.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** I agree with that, but [inaudible audio 19:44-19:48]

**Interviewer:** So how much time do you dedicate to this, position per week or per month? And do you expect that to change? I mean, you mentioned that there might be less of your meetings and stuff.

**Interviewee:** Yeah. So that the last I'd say, a friend of mine with the [...], the leaseholders alliance, and also the TRA, maybe an hour a week, and that’s just responding to emails or creating an email. Next week we've got the TRA meeting and then we've got the day after, we've got the [leaseholders alliance] meeting, so that will be an hour minimum for the TRA, and there’ll probably be a 2 hour meeting with the [leaseholders alliance]. So, for that week three hours plus.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** But the other weeks, I don't anticipate that changing too much, unless we have to do door knocking with people, and ask questions, but we expect that it can be covered in the meetings.

**Interviewer:** So, you mentioned the committee, and I'm just wanted to get an idea of how responsibilities are distributed among the committee?

**Interviewee:** So we have a chairman and I didn't want to be chairman because I know how time consuming some of those things can be and also, I want to have a voice but also not be the person that everyone looks to, to say what we're going to do. So, the chairman is in charge, then I’m the vice chair, we have a secretary who's been a lot more proactive on getting the venue setup, getting flyers put out, getting involved with the engagement with [the ALMO], to ensure that people are turning up to the meetings. We have a secretary who is going to be taking on responsibility for finances, treasurer sorry, we have 2 representatives of the block who get our vote in the R.E.P meetings, resident engagement panel, maybe and then we also have a, I can’t remember what the title was but someone that will, basically everyone knows where they live. If you have any complaint, you post the complaint through the letter box and then that person will collaborate and put them together and bring them to the next meeting.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So what is that? 7 or 8 actually.

**Interviewer:** And could you speak to your role specifically, in terms of how that's different?

**Interviewee:** So the chairman will be in charge of [chairing] the meetings and making sure that the agenda [is] stuck to, my role will be to sit there, have a voice but if the chairman isn't
available for a particular meeting, then I’ll step up and take that on, but also with the
understanding that I will get involved in a lot of stuff, outside of the meeting as well, and panel
because I provide guidance, you know, people walk around the block and ask people to help
where necessary.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So it's a nice position to have because I feel like this is as much responsibility.
There's also some [inaudible] responsibility if I need it.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Cool, so, right, so I'm getting the sense that because you want everyone to
come to these meetings and the approach is more collaborative than it is sort of like having
specific members with solutions, that makes sense?

**Interviewee:** Yes

**Interviewer:** And collaborative would be how you would describe the problem solving approach
or you have other—

**Interviewee:** Again, going back to my work experience is that I think it's very close-minded for
somebody to think that they know all the answers or they know what everybody else is thinking,
or what anybody else wants. So my personal way of managing anything is to ask what the people
think because other people might have better ideas than me.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** I think I’m not a proud person, If anybody comes up with a better idea than me,
that only helps, so just go in and say, this is what we need to be doing. This is how you should
approach the problem, if somebody might go well, what about this? [If] you’re just
close-minded to that, it could slow the process down or the process might not be as efficient, or it
might not be the best way of going about it. So brainstorm as much as you can with other
companies, thinking now is I think as much as you can so that you come up with the right idea,
you can have 20 crap ideas, but you talk for each one, see if it has got any legs, and if it doesn't
have any legs you move on to the next one, and you might have that one idea that comes up, with
the 20 first ideas being faultless, it turns into the killer idea.

**Interviewer:** Right, and I guess this sort of perspective, does it come from your management
experience as well?

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Let’s face it, I have been close-minded in the past, but I've also realized over time
by hearing people's ideas and going, oh you know what, that’s not a bad idea.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Realizing that I'm not the Savior of everything that I touch, so I just have to be
prepared to be open minded.

**Interviewer:** Right. So, do you know if [the ALMO] has any tenants on their board? I’m
actually aware—
Interviewee: I don’t know, as far as I'm aware, and I could be wrong, in the R.E.P, there are a couple of people that are tenants on that board. I could be wrong, I haven't been involved in it that long, to know if it’s definite.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: With regards to [the ALMO]’ board, I haven’t, I don’t know.

Interviewer: Okay, right, and you spoke a bit about how the TRA engages with other tenant groups such as the scrutiny committee or resident engagement panel—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I was wondering if you have anything to add to that or expand on what that entails?

Interviewee: So for the R.E.P, the business is, we’re still quite new to it. I don't know, the few ins and outs, but with the R.E.P, that’s basically a group of all of the TRA that sit in a room together, with some members of the board, which included the C.E.O [unclear audio 26:49-26:53] and they have an agenda, though with the agenda it gave people the option, the time to stand up, ask a question to the CEO and receive an answer, from what I’ve heard from the one that happened recently is that, there were three or four people that were just, they had a real agenda of what they wanted to tackle in that meeting, from the TRA or one of the representatives, [the Chair] said that it almost felt like it was just a conversation between two people at times, where everybody else is sitting around going, this is completely relevant to me.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Or to what we're trying to achieve here as a R.E.P and it's just one person, saying we've got a problem with this, can you sort it out? It didn't really feel like that that was necessary. So, from what I understand about the R.E.P is that people congregate, as representatives from each TRA and come up with a communal answer or vision of what they need to achieve in the next meeting, before the next meeting, and it gives the [ALMO] panel a chance to hear from a collective perspective, rather than just a solely treated TRA

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And again, it comes back to the more people that are involved in something, the more that people have to take notice.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, when they realize there’s a new TRA being formed, they see that as a positive because more people want to get involved in, in a way that [the ALMO] is seen or run and improve, but I'd also be looking at it and saying, if there’s another TRA being formed, that means we’re not doing our job properly.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because if another TRA is being formed, it means that, in my opinion, it means that something’s gone wrong.

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So much so a group of people, want to form something to try and help and try to stop something from happening.

Interviewer: Right. So, I'm just going to go through these questions to see which are relevant to TRA specifically. Right, so what do you expect to happen if there are disagreements? Or has there been any disagreements among tenants in the TRA? about what to do or what to focus on and how is it—

Interviewee: There hasn’t been, well we’ve only had one meeting so far. I'm sure there'll be disagreements, I'm sure there’ll be, everyone seems really nice and friendly, at the moment, and I think we all have the common annoyance of the major work program. Now, when there'll be disagreements, I think, I'm reasonably capable of handling it. I don't know what the chairman's like, but for me it will come down to let’s take a vote, you've obviously got one idea on something, you've got another idea, what does the majority feel? and we can come out again, says something we brainstorm, some ideas and go, we’ve got this idea, we’ve got this idea, we’ve got this idea, you want this, you want this, actually let’ work out what’s the best course of action and then put it to a vote and majority rules, that’s what will be happening, when it actually happens.

Interviewer: As part of your role have you ever had an experience where you felt nobody listened to or cared about your opinion?

Interviewee: In my work or—

Interviewer: In this TRA role, it's too a bit early to tell, but—

Interviewee: Not at the moment, no.

Interviewer: Not at the moment.

Interviewee: I’m, as I said to you earlier, before this was recorded, I’m quite an opinionated person.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And I'm quite outspoken, as well, so if I feel like I'm not being listened to, I'll shout louder.

Interviewer: Right. So, the next couple of questions are going to be a little more about [the ALMO] and also about your local authority.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, have you been in touch with your local authority at all about [the ALMO] and some of the issues?

Interviewee: So, the thing with our local authority is our local authority is [the ALMO] as well.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So—

Interviewer: It’s an A.L.M.O right? Or is a, is [the ALMO] created by the council?

Interviewee: That’s what I’ve been led to believe, so effectively we’re basically going to the same person.

Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: So, my opinion is, it doesn't really matter who we go to, our boat will maybe go to the same people at the end of the day.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Interviewee: So if we had a problem, we’d go to [the borough] council, [the borough] council then just go, here you go [the ALMO], here’s the problem they’ve got, we already know about it, whether that's actually what happens, I don’t know.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I don’t know too much about [the borough] council themselves, it’s always been [the ALMO].

Interviewer: Do you think in some ways that could be beneficial that [the ALMO] is the council in the sense that, if election time comes around, you can sort of fight for some of these issues, in that way?

Interviewee: Yeah, I can see that. Well, we've had a recent election, local council election, I think it was, where our local MP [inaudible audio 31:59], she resigned because she moved up to another position, so they had an election to get her successor in, and there was a huge amount of, what is it, what is it when you can't get votes?

Interviewer: Campaigning?

Interviewee: [inaudible audio 32:20-32:22], huge amount of that going on, they keep saying exactly what you wanted to hear, it was a good chance to say these are my issues, these are my problems, and you could actually see people going, that is an issue, that is a problem. Okay, well if I’m elected, we’ll have a look into that. You don't know how much of that said is ever going to come through, but that would be one moment, where you think they’re going to take notice a little bit more of what's going on and maybe say Yes we have messed up a little bit, we haven't done this properly, we're going to try and change it, especially for labor because they could see that the most we’re going to get kicked out because some stuff that’s happening with [the ALMO]. It absolutely can [have] other benefits as well, but I think that's the kind of stuff that will come through after having been in state for a little bit longer.

Interviewer: Do you think the role of, right, let’s say local politics or council would be different, in terms of what the TRA could do if your social landlord was a housing authority or do you think it would not really matter?

Interviewee: I honestly don't know, I think we've probably got the best. We don’t have the best person in charge, but we’ve got the best scenario in charge where we have to manage services organization in about, does the work maintains our property, we have some money, they make it happen. I honestly, don’t know what the benefits to any of the others would be and obviously the others, ways of doing it are, don’t know.

Interviewer: Well, so this next question will relate to your experience before forming the TRA and also sort of afterwards, but to what extent you feel that tenants of the TRA are consulted before decisions are made by [the ALMO]? I mean clearly, not very well and are you consulted on all decisions or none at all, and also, yeah before forming the TRA and after?
Interviewee: So, well this is why we formed the leaseholders and alliance, if is that if you don’t have a body of people, leaseholders specifically, then basically [the ALMO] would turn around and say, this is who we’re engaging with on a major works program, and they don't have to consult anybody and choosing the brier group is clearly a mistake. They've been kicked off now, they haven't done what they’re supposed to be doing, in my opinion, they've overcharged for a lot of the work that has happened.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: [The ALMO], in some ways, have been duped by them or they've just turned a blind eye to it and didn't care, whichever way it is, it shows negligence or incompetence and so I think with that in mind, if it was formed a little earlier, we would have had a say in which construction company they used.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But we didn't have any consultation or anything to say, who would you like us to have a look at, the windows, that are going in, we didn’t have any consultation on that, these are the things that we need to look at, we don’t look at every single day, is new windows, the windows are fine but I’ve seen better and actually I've seen better for cheaper, but we didn't have any say on that, the color scheme on the outside of our flat, it's fine, but we didn't have any consultation on that. The way the signs look, basically it’s everything that's been implemented.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: The major works program, we have not been consulted about it at all. Now we’ve got a TRA formed and an alliance formed, if something needs to be changed in the future, we have the ability to turn around and say hold on, just calm down a minute.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Tell us what you want to do, we tell you what we think should be done, it just gives you more of a voice in that respect.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But just as a solitary person, I mean, as I said before, we didn't know that this work was being done in September 2009 and October 2010, I think it was, I got letter to the door, but though they gave people a chance to attend an evening session, they had a chance for people to go in and say what they think, nothing really got done by it, they’d listen [unclear audio 37:24-37:38].

Interviewer: So, you mentioned before that you probably would not have become involved in the TRA if you weren't having these very serious problems, but now, so you sound very aware of how things like the paint job, and these sorts of things, were never given to tenant consultation? So, if tomorrow all of those sort major structural issues were somehow magically resolved would you continue to be part of the TRA?

Interviewee: I think it's important to have that because it's formed for a reason of trying to make a difference first and foremost, but then, secondary, after that is once the difference has been made or some difference have been made or we achieve our goal, then is to make sure that—
Interviewer: It continues.
Interviewee: Nothing falls back.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: So it could be that in six months’ time, everything's amazing and we go, okay you know what, we've done what we need to do, let’s pack it and post it down, and then three months later, something else goes wrong, we go oh we need to open this back again, so you might as well just keep it going. If we don’t have that much to talk about in the meeting, it means we're doing our job properly, and [the ALMO] is doing their job properly, if we have continual meetings or the meetings go on for a long time it means we haven’t done our job properly.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: And [the ALMO] haven’t done their job properly, so I think we’ll keep it going.
Interviewer: So, I’d like to talk about the types of decisions that [the ALMO] would consult you about and the ones that they wouldn’t.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Where would you make that distinction?
Interviewee: You know what, I think the distinction is they make the decisions and we don’t at the moment, I would be interested to see what happens the more we get involved as a TRA and the more voice, the bigger voice we’ll have, because we are the first TRA in [the borough] hill, but then there are two other blocks of flats that are on the same road as us and it could be that they want to join us or they want to set their own up or whatever it is, so then there’s even more voice and, so I would hope at that point that they do start going well, we need to ask them.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Whether that happens or not, can’t tell.
Interviewer: Right. So, if a random tenant, who is maybe not a community member of the TRA but expresses an issue to [the ALMO], what type of response would you expect them to receive?
Interviewee: It forward that to the relevant department and then gets a very vague response back from that department.
Interviewer: And if you were to--or chair of the TRA or someone in the committee, if they were sending an email, what type of response would you expect?
Interviewee: I would expect that, possibly somebody that's quite senior in that department, would respond back to them with a reasonably competent or relevant response back.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Again, we haven't done that yet, so I don’t know whether that's likely to happen but that's one that may maybe happen.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: I mean, even part of the matter is we formed this leaseholder’s alliance, two months ago, I think it was and we’ve already had the C.E.O saying let’s meet up or if it was just a solitary person, trying to get in touch with the C.E.O, very confident that that would take
months to get put in, if at all and they proactively got in touch with us, to say let’s make this happen.

**Interviewer:** Right. Alright, so the next couple of questions, nearing the end of this interview, might seem a bit redundant but they’re just to get all the details out. How would you describe the relationship between the TRA and [the ALMO]?

**Interviewee:** So far, It’s positive, the reason I say that is because when we had our first meeting, the liaison officer, she was there and the other representatives, I can’t really remember what her title was and the reason for her being there, I think it was more finance and what we can claim for, what we can’t claim for, they were both there and the way that it was handled, the meeting, all the way through was reasonably, the processes was good, we went through all the steps we needed to [unclear audio 42:11-42:13] and at points they said they’ll be able to shoot, I said okay that’s the local works team, the estate’s team, trying to get us involved and it seemed like they were very confident they were going to be there on Tuesday and they said that they were going to be there and that’s from [the ALMO], lot bit in the background, it’s also an email trail of the liaison officer getting in touch with, [unclear audio 42:34- 42:39], so they’re going to have their way to get people involved in the meetings. So, so far so good, it seems positive, my experience with [the ALMO] sort of a solitary person has been bad, but as a resident TRA that seems a lot more positive. So, they taken our board, a group of people that fought for and see that it’s a lot more and—

**Interviewer:** Right, so you mentioned that you might be able to get a bit in the budget for events, right? Is that the real budget that you’d be able to secure from—

**Interviewee:** So, as far as I’m aware, and this is only through people telling me, rather than me doing too much investigation myself, is that you can go to, I think [unclear audio 43:30] resident’s association or whatever it is and they have a budget that they give to people to help them out with specific things, so notice that we have a [unclear audio 43:44] there’s a tiny problem in your area, where there is, sort of like a triangular route, which is outside of our border walls, which people do leave, [the ALMO] would pick up that we have charged for that in our meetings, so things that might get a grant for require large plans in part, in front of it, so there’s no way for people to get stuff anymore, so that is a bit toast of what we can get to the events, I don’t know if there’s anything else we can get on top of it but, oh even simple things of when we go to meetings, if we have childcare, then we are able to expense that.

**Interviewer:** Right. So you mentioned how you kind of received feedback from other tenants through communicating, so there are meetings and sort of wanting to get the entire building there to main meetings but and tenants mostly email you right?

**Interviewee:** Yep.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, we’ve got so for the [leaseholders alliance] we’ve got an inbox and for the tenant’s resident association, we’ve got an inbox for that as well, email address for both those.

**Interviewer:** Okay and the email addresses are publicized, how?
Interviewee: So at the moment with the TRA it’s just free leaflets.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: So, one of the leaflets we did dropped yesterday, it had the emails and with the [leaseholders alliance]we've got, leaflets and also we’ve got a Facebook group which has the details on there, as well.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: We, at some point, we'll probably form a website, the website together, but we haven’t been that large yet.
Interviewer: Yeah, I tried to look it up, I tried to look up the website, and I was like this is interesting.
Interviewee: Yeah, we’re so new at the moment, that we haven’t gotten to that yet.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: But the meeting that we had, with the [leaseholders alliance] recently, one of the big parts of the agenda was we need to get a logo.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: And that’s one of the things we haven’t done yet, yeah, it’s in the really early stages.
Interviewer: I’ve noticed this is not very fair to you, but I noticed that some TRA’s have like a word press, instead of a website, because it’s free.
Interviewee: Yeah, it will be something like that we do, blog type thing—
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: But we do have [leaseholders alliance], we’ve got somebody that is into digital, he’s in a digital agency I think, so he knows a quite a lot about websites and he’s in the TRA.
Interviewee: Great.
Interviewee: We’ve got quite a few people in [M]eting.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: So, they know about how to put stuff like that together, that’s out of my—I don’t know too much about that, I’ll leave it up to them.
Interviewer: Right. So you mentioned that there will be tenants who just don't show up ever, at anything.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Do you feel that they have a voice when it comes to their homes?
Interviewee: Absolutely, yeah. Some people don't care enough to put a voice in, and that’s fine. Part of me says, if you don’t, it’s much like voting, you know, I did the whole thing with [unclear audio 47:06-47:08], where if you don’t vote you don’t have a voice.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: That’s sort of what I agree with, but I also agree with that we have to think of everybody, so it’s not really me thinking this is how we should do it and everybody follow suit, the actual fact is most people might disagree with me on something and it's better that we go with
the majority rather than self, for the good of the complex, of the people of the flats, but if somebody wasn’t to turn up and they were very passionate about something, we would expect you would be in touch with us by email and say oh, well I can’t be there, this is my thoughts or this is what I’d like to be added to the agenda. If people generally don’t care, then that’s just it, we’ve already have a couple of people said, it’s not really for me, I think it's possibly because they are council tenants and they don’t want to be seen as—

**Interviewer:** Going against?

**Interviewee:** Going against the council.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** Which is fair enough.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** That’s what we’re there for, we’re there to have a voice.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** To make changes.

**Interviewer:** Are there besides the case of council tenants maybe being afraid but do you think there are other factors that could limit tenants from being involved?

**Interviewee:** Language.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** So a couple of people, I didn’t personally knock on their doors but one of the other ladies on the TRA and the secretary, she knocked on some doors and tried to have a conversation with people, and then we would agree this isn’t really, we don’t know what you’re talking about.

**Interviewer:** Is there any, in the future, do you think there might be some kind of effort to reach out to people who have trouble with English in any way, or by translating to English or anything like that?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, yeah, I think that's a valid point and not at the moment, we haven’t spoken about that, but I think, let’s face it, we’re on our phones a lot of moments, Google translate is easy to get, just get and go.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** And the advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence and stuff, you're almost going to be able to do real time translation rather than, say we’re talking into a phone, and what they hear at the other end is the perfect translation, for what you're saying, in a different language. If we’re able to have that, with technology that would be able to do that quite easily, versus when you’re talking to somebody face to face, if you’re talking in a phone.

**Interviewer:** Do you think more tenant participation is always good?

**Interviewee:** Yes, and no, I think, yes, if you're all got the right mentality, that word therefore, I think if some people are there, just to go, to kick off about something, they’re quite closed, they’re not open minded, I think that can be a hindrance, it can have a quite hostile effect on the team.

**Interviewer:** Right.
**Interviewee:** If people are there to put their point forward, also if they realize somebody’s have got a better idea and they’re open to that, then it’s a very powerful thing to have. As far as I’m aware, within our board at the moment, we don’t have anybody that’s so anti, what we’re trying to achieve, that is going to have a negative effect, there have been people that we’ve been speaking to, they haven’t come across in the right way to say, Oh yeah, we’ll make a difference, they just [unclear audio 51:09-51:11], I don’t think that’s quite what a TRA is about. So, if you have for example, I’m talking about the R.E.P meeting, if you have one person standing up and arguing with the C.E.O of [the ALMO], in one particular area that affects them, rather than the first [unclear audio 51:27-51:30], then you waste an hour and a half or two hours of the meeting.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Which could have been valuable, if you spent it elsewhere, trying to get communal stuff and change, so yes, you can absolutely have some negative effects from a TRA, if people, in my opinion aren’t open minded and can only see it for what’s in it for themselves.

**Interviewer:** Right. So, I mean, we already talked about this, but we can sort of expand on, if you have any actual thoughts on how the representatives in your TRA, act as community representatives, do you have any more to add?

**Interviewee:** I think it’s about being more visible, as I said earlier, we have a habit of not being that sociable just because there's so much crime and anti-social behaviors that that goes on around you. You think, do I really want to be putting myself out there and making friends with people, if the people I live next door to are criminals—

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Or just not nice people to hang around with. So I think we have to be a little bit more visible people, to go knock on doors and say, this is who we are, what we're about, what we're doing is what we're trying to achieve and I think if we do that, then it might make the block of flats, feel safer in the environment, I mean, just meeting up with the—and there are 11 other people that showed up to the TRA meeting the last time and just realizing, everyone’s actually a bit like us, they’re professionals, they’re all people that want a better life for themselves, they all work.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** They’re hard workers and nobody is—they’re not nosy people, they’re just people that want to get in, have their food, have a sleep, enjoy their weekends, enjoy life with their family and not have their block of flats turned into a dump. So it’s really reassuring to see that, so if we can be more visible to other people, the people that didn’t come to the meetings recently, hopefully more of those turn up and they can see that everybody that we live with are nice people, that changes the mindset of where we live, you feel more safe in your four walls.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any comments on the future of tenant participation? More generally, not necessarily just your [block].

**Interviewee:** Well, hopefully there’ll be less and less because it means that things are going well.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: I said earlier, If you have loads of people turning up to a meeting and loads of meetings, it's because something's not right.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: So that means that [the ALMO] aren’t taking on board ideas or listening to what we're saying or doing things in the right way. If we have less participation, people turning up less and less is because people are not as passionate about something happening and that means hopefully, that things are being changed in the right way.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So hopefully, that's what will happen, but if things become worse, then hopefully more people would come together and more people turning out to the TRA’s, more people with leaseholders alliance, more people getting involved with the R.E.P, but as I said I hope less and less people get involved, or less and less people are involved.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Because things are going, things are in the right way.
Interviewer: Great, that’s all the questions. Yeah, I’ll pause it.

Appendix 12: TRA Interviewee “Ron” Transcript

[…]  
Interviewer: And these days you like to have a computer program that just, you know, types up the—
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Voice recordings so you don’t have to type it yourself that’s much harder on this.
Interviewee: Yeah, it takes quite a bit of time, for [doing] all of that.
Interviewer: Yeah
Interviewee: Because of my dyslexia so—
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Yeah, but there you go.
Interviewer: So, could you tell me why you decide to join the [TRA] and how you got involved?
Interviewee: It was just, [Name], my predecessor came down to a couple of meetings, I’d […] be with her and then she asked me to chair a couple of meetings, I then, been involved the TRA before that but it’s been quite a few years lapse between the two and then [Name] started saying that she got to go to [the] hospital, possible cancer, this, that, and the other, then it went on and went on and went on until she told me that, she’s actually got full blown cancer and she wasn’t going to survive it and also...[inaudible]...wasn’t anyone else who really wanted to take it on, I’ve been doing it for as long as I can, I’ve been here for 3, 4 years now.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: And it’s got its benefits, in being able to help the community, it’s got its drawbacks, you know, sometimes you’ve got to spend, working things out, looking the best way forward and asking rather than demanding.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because you tend to get more that way, you know, yeah, that’s one of the reasons why I’m still here.

Interviewer: And before you got involved, you were involved in a different type of tenant organization?

Interviewee: Yeah, quite a bit of years ago, I was actually a treasurer for another tenant resident association, still on the same estate but not as widely spread as what we are now.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: But it didn’t really amount to much, but with the guidance of [Name] and another guy that works [in that] that we’ve actually managed to keep it going, we’ve been working on trying to build it up a bit more because you find a lot of tenants residents association that if the estate is quite well run, there’s no major problems, people tend not to come out.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: It’s only when there’s a problem on the estate like major works, their flats being torn apart, their houses being torn apart and being rebuilt, things going wrong, then they’ll look to their TAs for support from there, other than that people are quite stable in their own homes and you know, get on with things.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And this is a problem, because you need your people to come to the meetings, to understand how the estate’s running, what’s going, you can’t second guess it all the time.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yes so, you know, this is why we tried to do a little event, to get people to try and come out a bit more, we’re mainly looking into [some] coach trips, to look at a youth version of a T & R.A.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting, okay.

Interviewee: So that would run hand in hand with the main TRA but you know, something for to try new [inaudible] people from like 18 years of age downwards.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You know, to say that this is our community also, this is our sports facility, this is our sponsors, this is what we’ve got, this is what we ain’t got, this is what we’d like, you know, so to create this, maybe TRA, a TRA within the original.

Interviewer: Yeah like a youth’s TRA, oh that’s cool.

Interviewee: So, will we get anywhere, I don’t know but we’ll try.

Interviewer: Do you enjoy your involvement overall with the [TRA]? You mentioned some challenges that come up—
Interviewee: I think part of the problem for this T&RA is that, most of us are getting on in our years and it’s difficult to get members to go out and do leaflet [info], we’ve got 600 plus properties, 4 tower blocks in the [unclear audio 04:18], its access to, you know, it’s getting to the entire blocks where you feel safe or in some cases where you been in the area you’re in. It’s, you know, that’s one of the drawbacks, it’s about trying, looking at maybe going digital—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: We’re doing a thing with [the ALMO] called digital inclusion, it’s about people using the internet more, paying their bills by the internet more and things like that, my part of this is, I’ve probably been [inaudible], the digital exclusion and that’s for people with disabilities, dyslexia, age can have a lot to do with some people, where they’re a little too old, they just refuse to do it.

Interviewer: My grandma can’t turn on a computer, so, yeah.

Interviewee: Right, so, there’s lots of reasons why sometimes the downfalls can be a bonus because it gives you something to work with and it gives you something to actually help the local authority improve their services in a way, rather than cutting a service that is working well with those that can’t.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So looking to adapt it further or keep some part of their service in place, so that people don’t fall behind on their rent

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Don’t have problems with languages and things like that, and these sort of things get missed quite a lot, you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Everyone that can read and write and do maths and that, fine, they forget the people that can’t.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And they can’t see the problem sometimes and dismiss it, which, it’s got be something that can’t be dismissed, it’s got to be, it’s got to be kept within the program.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: A lot of other things also, estate problems, bushes not being trimmed, or liaising with the local authority to keep the parks tidy, the pavements clear.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: The problem with a lot of TRA’s is they can’t, well they’re not allowed to get involved with personal issues, it normally has to be block and estate issues only, so if you got several tenants with similar problems, then yes you can deal with it, if you’ve only got one tenant with a particular—

Interviewer: One problem
Interviewee: Technically you’re not supposed to get involved, but I don’t care, because when you got someone who’s 74 years old, sleeping under [...] in the winter, just to say because the bedroom is that cold.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: My view as well, and what came from that is the room is thermally insulated, now that lady can sleep in her bed, unbothered in the winter, and have her heater on for a couple of hours, her room stays warm. Seeing a lot of things like that make a big difference to people, you know and that’s what I enjoy doing it.

Interviewer: Would normally the tenant or the local authority be responsible for or [the ALMO], be responsible for an issue like that, like an individual tenant?

Interviewee: [The ALMO], everything individually, like a leaking tap or wall is plastering or heating’s gone wrong is all the individual tenant.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: But when you’ve got a tenant that can’t get out, or can’t get anywhere or got no support network to support them, and this particular lady is on the disabled side as well, it's about, if you know the way forward, then use it, don't just sit there [sorry] over it, it’s an issue you have to take out with the local authority, invite them up here, get in touch with the local authority, [I will follow up], why hasn’t this been done yet, why have you not been around? things like that and this, otherwise it’s just, it’s same old, same old, it’s about, if you got the ability and you can be diverse, use it, but use it in a way that you don’t upset the local authority, that they understand why you’re doing it.

Interviewer: Right. So, could you tell me a little bit more about the organization itself in terms of how meetings function? how often you meet?

Interviewee: We’re only required by [the ALMO] tenants fund to meet 4 times a year

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: And of those will be your A.G.M. We do six, although this year, because I’ve been so knackered with this event, we’re doing five

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: We’re funded through [the ALMO] funds, so we get all our revenue through [the ALMO] tenants fund, we also get an allowance for events and things like that, we got one the other day, normally 700-odd pounds were allowed on events but they are a bit [less] restrictive, so we spent about a thousand this year and it was well worth it, you know, the outcome was really really good, we were a fair share involved, the [ALMO] coordinating group, we had involved and it was about promoting food bank, it is like a food bank, but within, it was, well it’s no money for people, so you know, are you interested, would you like to come and volunteer, the benefits of it and things like that, which is all being run by [the ALMO], and we have normal meetings where people would come along, it’s the general same old, same old, to start with, welcome inductions, guest speakers, missed the last meeting, [letters] arising, then the other business, that’s the same pattern every time we have a meeting, but we can diver[ge], little bit at
times, because at the end of the meeting, if you got a tenant with a particular issue that we can’t
deal with in the meeting, we’ll refer him to the housing officer...

Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: Or the guest speaker at the end of the meeting, you normally find the tenants’
officer, quite put their anger down for a little while, chat with the tenant or tenants and then
they’ll arrange meetings from that or they’ll be able to resolve the issue at that point of time.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, the meetings are of value

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But it’s just, again, it’s when you’ve got an estate which hasn’t got major problems,
you see a reduction in numbers and that doesn’t go well for the TRA.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because they like, you find us, like to see plenty of people attending, a lot of them
coming into the meetings, and it’s just not a good number of people, the only thing I saw, worries
me is that, if you’ve got a meeting, and you get 10 or 12 people come up, it’s comfortable
because everyone gets to say, but when you get these major meetings, you then have to give
someone 3 minutes tops, you know, if you’ve got 40 people at a meeting, you can only spend
like 2 minutes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And you can’t go on from there because you’ve got to say, everyone go for the
chairperson, so it’s very, very informal and it becomes annoying to a lot of the tenants because a
lot of them don’t get a say, or they’ve got more to ask.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I think it’s frustrating, this is why when we have our meetings, with lower
numbers, people can ask a question and they can reply to their answer and then ask another
question on top of it, related, but with larger numbers you cannot control it because there’s one
person that can take the whole meeting up.

Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: With questions, I think our meetings is going quite well, with the numbers we’ve
got, and everyone goes away quite comfortable, in they’ve got answers, or something is going to
be looked into or done about the questions they’ve asked.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And that’s why I like smaller numbers.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Well, there you go.

Interviewer: You get more done in a way

Interviewee: Yeah and I mean, because we have 6 meetings a year, rather than the 4, I mean the
biggest problem is, is that, if you’ve got a reasonable strong TA and you’ve got a good support
group, then normally you can have a once a fortnight surgery.
Interviewer: Yeah
Interviewee: For the tenants or residents to come in and so it keeps your portfolio up, it keeps what you’re doing up to date, and things like that you can better understand, unfortunately because we’re doing quite a lot of this on my own, with a minimal of support, it’s just, if I was to have a surgery every fortnight and then a meeting, because, you know, we have a bimonthly we have the main meeting in the hall and then bimonthly, the months in between, we have a meeting in the office to discuss, who’s been by and things like that, but I’ve got a life outside the TRA
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: You know, and I’ve got family, I’ve got 6 children and 19 grandchildren, plus the wife, plus the dog, plus the cat [unclear audio 13:01-13:04] so, you still got to watch that you don’t overdo it with your voluntary service, you still got to make, you have home life...
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: And you can’t take time off that.
Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Quite easily, it has happened much before and I got to give myself a kick in the back and say I’m doing a little too much here, [by] myself.
Interviewer: So how much time per week, do you dedicate to this position?
Interviewee: I would say, on average, sometimes a day and a half, sometimes half a day, it depends on what’s--
Interviewer: Yeah, okay.
Interviewee: Coming up.
Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It can be more than that, but I try to keep it limited because, again, it’s about, you can’t share yourself between too many parties
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Because then it becomes too much, then it becomes frustrating if you got something to do at home and you can’t do it, because you got to make phone calls, you know you’ve got to make or vice versa, you just really got to try and make it as best as you can
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Yeah, so I do try to stay out of the office as much as possible...
Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewer: Sometimes it’s not possible to walk away or stay away.
Interviewer: I understand the similar sentiment with my work
Interviewee: Let’s give you 3 years to try, what I’m involved in, chair for the local tenants resident’s association, director of [x], which is the tenants fund, the director of the new super TRA, national, [redacted y], I think it was, resident’s scrutiny group member, resident’s engagement panel member, now a member of the [ALMO] CCJ
Interviewer: Oh wow, okay.
**Interviewee:** So, these are all meetings that come up mainly during the course of the year that
**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Maybe in the afternoon, so, I actually cut back from some of the stuff I was doing because you know, going out every evening, again, it’s taking any from your evenings, you can find that every month, you’re doing several meetings in the afternoons, big chunk of your time, so that’s what I’m trying to cut back, and I will be reducing back more and more until I’m back to maybe 2 or 3 meetings a month plus the TA stuff. You got to do it—

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** You get suckered in by the locals saying, oh you’re doing really well on this and blah blah blah we want you on board for this, we want you on board for this and that’s great, I mean I appreciate it, but, if you take yourself, you can be taking away from a normal life would be.

**Interviewer:** Right. So, often times, [the ALMO] will offer you a role in something because of your experience—

**Interviewee:** Yeah, in a way, honestly, we got this fair share thing that I got involved in as well, if I was fully retired and the wife is out doing her knitting and I didn’t have so many grandchildren to run around and worry about then I’d have a lot more time to spend with the T.A so what I have to do, is look at it, as much as possible, realistically.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Where some of the time I can devote to that, and the rest of the time to family and friends, you know, because otherwise you’ll get drawn away from one into the other and then it becomes a lifestyle—

**Interviewer:** Yeah

**Interviewee:** And it can be quite distracting

**Interviewer:** So how big is the committee?

**Interviewee:** Our committee is myself, secretary, vice chair and 1,2,3,4 members

**Interviewer:** 4 members, okay.

**Interviewee:** That’s the committee

**Interviewer:** Okay, and the there are, are there other different groups of tenants that sort of working groups or anything or is it just the 4 of you?

**Interviewer:** No

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** We’ve not gone into, pushing for like, healthy eating groups or healthy well-being groups and all sorts of things like that, because again, for that to happen, I would have to be in attendance of an evening for that group to be able to use the building and I haven’t got that time, so this is why we can’t just intrude, on the well-being of our tenants, within their properties and the estate itself

**Interviewer:** Right
Interviewee: That’s part of it, so if you’re not [having problems with] home, you’re not suffering major repairs or damage or things like that, on your estate, is where you can claim you’re safe, that’s a big part, that’s the forefront for me, about the flats and the base of the bushes looking nice and [...] and things like that, you know, all goes to your own personal well-being, feeling comfortable, the rest of it, [inaudible] mucking about anti-social behaviour and all that. That comes second to it, although [inaudible] can take over at times, based on the level of the issue.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You know, the severity of it, but it only comes up, once in a blue moon.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But to say, this estate is reasonably comfortable.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: There is lots of room for more improvements, but as we go along, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, yeah.

Interviewer: So, among the committee, could you tell me a bit about, how you make decisions together whether they're sort of, you take like let's say it's an annual general meeting and there's some kind of estate level issue is there a vote on what should happen or do you discuss it and come to the more sensible—

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: Sort of decision or

Interviewee: That’s the difficult part because the A. G. M. runs separate to your normal meetings.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, the minutes from the A. G. M. last year will be brought forward this year, but it won’t include, anything from the general minutes during the year.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, if there’s a major issue, it could be included in your A. G. M, we have to keep it reasonably short, because of food and entertainment and things like that, all the important stuff, but then that will be separated from your A. G. M. across to your next meeting as well.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So only the general meetings will [...] follow suit, but your A. G. M., if it isn’t really really important, it won’t be discussed in the A. G. M. but it will be pulled out as a separate block.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: To be discussed at the next meeting, whereas the A. G. M itself, in general will be carried out the following year, for reviewing and any other business around that, so basically, your A. G. M. doesn’t really account for your estate and block issues, it’s about your accounts as members, can you get more people on board, things like that.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: That’s the way I see it and that’s the way it’s always running.
Interviewer: And so, could you talk to me about your role specifically in all of this?
Interviewee: No
Interviewer: Sorry?
Interviewee: No
Interviewer: No?
Interviewee: [laughter] Yeah, of course.
Interviewer: In terms of how your role is different from other committee members and sort of what other community members contribute as well?
Interviewee: Well basically, I’ve been accused of being a loner, and I don’t mind that because too many spokes in the wheel and you get the Chinese whispers... so if you’ve got sent the central hub, which is me, which is taking all the information in and then sharing it out, it always comes to one point, but then it’s worked out, calculated, and put back out to the various members as needed, if members are bringing things in, it’s not member to member, it’s member to hub.

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So they would come to me and say oh, I’ve got this problem on this estate from odd maintenance or that, if they want to talk to our members as well, that’s fine, as long as they include with me, and it’s not being greedy, it’s about and that way I know, so if something gets missed, I can actually put it into the agenda or what when we come up with as a group, different members will bring, well Mrs. Jones, next door a fellow’s been picking on her and this, that or another, what do we do, then we can go back and put in all this information, so we need to get in touch with [x] we need to get in touch with you know, we can find the information out that way, if it’s more like stuff where we’re trying to get the football area out of the way, expanding it and other things done, that’s all the main committee, it all comes up as ideas, it comes to the committee, it gets shared, we look at everything and how we can go forward with it but it always have to come back to the point, to the central
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: I mean, I was always taught, it’s like a wagon wheel, you got all the parts, all the spokes, and the [inaudible]
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: But no matter what’s going on outside, it all has to come back to the hub, so it can be calculated, it can all be worked out and then formed out from different, you know—
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So, it always ties in with the information we’re taking forward, either by myself or I can get one of the members to take their forward, we always know what we are always doing or what our projects are
Interviewer: Right, so it is better from your perspective then to have people come directly to you than pass information on or—
Interviewee: Well, you can pass information on
Interviewer: Yeah
Interviewee: As long as it always come back, but then as the information comes in, a reply must always go out.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: And that reply can be directed, or it can be broadly put out there, depending on what it warrants.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: So the information can always go back out to the person that needs it, plus others if necessary.
Interviewer: So how much of the work that you do is collaborative and how much of it is sort of individual, on your own? and I mean collaborative with other committee members
Interviewee: It’s collaborative with all.

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: If I come up with an idea, I don’t just go ahead with it, if we’ve not got a meeting due, then I’d be in touch with the members, so to get an idea of what you think, and each one will come back with an answer and if we feel it’s worth having a meeting specifically on that idea then we’ll organize an additional meeting for that, depending on the importance of it, something may, an idea may be out a week, you know, 2 months down the road or a month down the road for the two meetings.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Some might be more important and might need addressing quite quickly, so then we use our network to talk to one another, the ideas, and then again, if we feel so that we need to have a board meeting or committee meeting, then we’ll all come together as an additional meeting to discuss it.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So, it’s always about making sure that, although I’ve been accused of being a loner, it’s because I’m the one that sees things going forward but what I always try to explain is that, it’s not just me, this all go through committee anyway.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: They’re respected, you know, you might see me putting the idea forward, you might see me working on it, you might see me chasing down on it, you might hear from me at times, not all the members but the other members, who can participate all the time
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: So, they’ve got their input, they’re respected.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: And that all, all a part of what, the group’s about, that is, that everyone has their input.

Interviewer: Right. So, going back to input, would you say there are any people in the committee or sort of at the general meetings that are more influential than others or have more influential say?

Interviewee: No, I mean there's myself, I mean, I’ve worked in [inaudible], lots of different buildings and all sorts of things, there is one who is the vice chair, now he has been the artist for many many years, he’s quite legally minded as well on legislation and things like that and I do rely on him a lot for keeping us up to date and if we’re both unsure, we’ll research it. So, my vice chair, he will go to meetings I can’t go to or we’ll go to meetings together, 9 times out of 10 you’ll find us sitting at different tables because you get more information that way from when people attend group meetings and things like that. He’ll be picking information up from one subject, I’ll be picking up information from another subject then we bring that together, so we end up finding out that what we got with us is more constructive than the actual meeting itself, with the authority or whatever, so.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I mean, there is only one other person, that is on the forefront actually as well, but this is way more about trying to decide who is for youth tenants’ residents association as well, because they’re going to have the bigger voice at the end of the day and they’re the ones that’s going to be living here—

Interviewer: In the future.

Interviewee: Yeah, or they might move to a different area and say oh, not a lot going on here, maybe I should start looking to form a youth TRA here.

Interviewer: Yeah

Interviewee: And things like that, you’ve got your youth groups and all these others, but by joining these youth groups, you’re already controlled by and you’re run by and you do by, whereas if you’ve got your own committee on the estate and—

Interviewer: You’re taking leadership which is—

Interviewee: Yeah, and you can also take that to a youth group, join the new club or whatever but you still got your own say in your own area about crime even, discussing crime and things like that—

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: It’s about letting them have the opportunity to express themselves.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned, oh, if you need to, okay.

Interviewee: Don’t stop for me, I’ll just [...] it through the window.
Interviewer: So, you mentioned, whoo that interrupted my train of thought here, where was I, oh yeah, you mentioned one of the issues is having people come to meetings or be involved if there's nothing going wrong.

Interviewee: You know, there's always something wrong, there's always something wrong.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: If it’s not a major estate issue or something like that, it may be a caretaker issue, where the stairs are not clean, there’s always an issue.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Brought to the table but it’s not always bad or boring, like having to go to the local authority and saying look, this is really really wrong, some of it is about whether we need the estate services, so we’ve had the complaint from couple tenants that our new cleaners, we’ve got to investigate, they team will go around and investigate it they’ll put what’s right, what’s wrong or what seems to be wrong, if there’s anything wrong and then they’ll feed it back to us.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And a lot of people, they will start screaming out their eyes in the meeting, you know the T.A, they’ll start blaming the T.A, the housing officer, they get to have words with the housing officer [unclear audio 28:40- 28:42], you doing the wrong thing here, get your diary of contacts, you know, estate services, estate management, care taking, road sweeping, or bring the local authority on, may bring [ALMO] in, [the ALMO], it’s get that registered, so if there’s an issue, you can actually go directly to the head of the housing department, we’ve got an issue, could you take it down the chain of command? So they have to feed it back to us, they don’t realize, or they don’t want to, they just want to dump it all in the hands of the housing officer.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And the housing officer hasn’t got enough hands to do it anyway, so you know,

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Sometimes it’s about, letting the housing officer know what you’re going to be doing and you feed back to the housing officer so they will be able to update us, the housing officers now, have to be the lead mediator on any social behaviour.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: What they want to do that for? Half of them are trained in it, and they’re being told to do this, they don’t have any respect for us, the tenants, they don’t need to be sitting there for 2, 3 hours with a tenant, discussing the argument that happened next door and I.S.P got involved, that’s a I.S.P job, they keep the housing officer engaged with it, I understand he might wanting to go in it, just to get some details but I.S.P should be taking the lead on it, as in, before it gets back to the housing officer, you know, but this is the way we do it.

Interviewer: So, my next question relating to the committee and perhaps also the housing officer, how do you deal with disagreements among other committee members or do they arise ever?

Interviewee: What’s the word for it, or words, chair’s discretion.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: If I don’t agree.
Interviewer: Then, okay.
Interviewee: I won’t say no.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: What I’ll do is, I’ll take note of what they wrote about.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: And I won’t say I agree or disagree, but I will look into it and I will come back with the local authority’s opinion and answer and if they don’t like that, then I’ll try and give it to, if it’s unagreeable, I’ll give it to the council’s resolution team and if that doesn’t happen, then I’d have to say, well I’m sorry, you have to deal with the local authority, direct on this, you know, I will do all I can—
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: To get a problem solved and an issue resolved, but again, you want to avoid being over involved because you always, I’ve been asked if I would step up for councillor and I won’t do that, because your neighbour comes up down the line, irrespective of what position you are.
Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: And I feel the position I am in now, I’ve got more leverage to go forward with an issue or complaint or worry, or I can go request the councillor, or if the councillor can’t, there’ll be a request for me.
Interviewer: Right, that’s true.
Interviewee: I’ve got more energy and more force in the position, and better ways forward on a broader spectrum of contacts that I can go to, to try and resolve an issue or to get assistance for, whereas a councillor, they have to go to the committees, the old boy’s group, a bunch of old gigs, no, no, no, we’re not up for that, that crosses out [unclear audio 32: 20-32:22] and then that councillor gets on again and again and again on the same subject, I don’t, I can actually try and deal with it, if I can’t get a resolution, I’ll be honest about it and I’ll tell them I can’t get it solved, this is the way you’ve got to go, I can pass it at the end of the day but not try to do something about it in the first place, if requires. Does that answer your question?
Interviewer: That does, yes. Have you ever had an experience where you felt nobody was listening to you or cared about your opinion?
Interviewee: No, I’ve shared about enough. You’re going to get that, I mean we are people, you get a lot of what I call nodding, you know.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: They’re sitting there and they’re like yeah, yeah, yeah and you can see that they’re bored out of their skulls.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: So you know, I'll try and diverse it a bit, put a little joke in, now when you see people coming back, yeah there are times like that but I don't let it bother me, because it can be about a particular topic and you can see that people are just not listening and not bothered, they don’t have to come away from it thinking why are they not bothered, why are they not interested, what is it about it that they just feels like it isn’t related to them?

Interviewer: Does this issue occur with tenants more so or on the committee or with the local authority or sort of?

Interviewee: I've not really come across it, my main problems is, we've got 1 or 2 tenants that once they get the role of talking, they don't like being cut off.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: But I have to say some like, okay, fair enough, I'll give you a chance to ask one more question, once that question is answered, maybe not the next person, oh, don't care, sorry, sometimes you have to be forceful, because if you don’t, a 2-and-a-half-hour meeting can turn into several hours.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And then you can have everyone walking away with, why did you let him go on with all that talk, talk, talk and then, because everyone else gets bored, because it’s about this particular person’s problem or subject and no one else will get to talk about whatever, once again, that’s another reason people stop listening, so, you have to be aware, you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Of what people are listening to and what they’re not listening to, and again, if you think they’re not listening to, just ask a little question here and there just to keep it not as boring, and a lot more tenants will be honest to say, yeah, it didn’t interest me, because it don’t fit me.

Interviewer: Is it, so, are these sorts of issues, so, for example if you have a couple tenants that talk a lot during the meetings and they have a lot to say and you know they kind of go on a rant basically, and you have to sort of kind of cut them off and say okay, we have to move on. Is that sometimes awkward or uncomfortable or challenging to be living or working here and also sort of, like if there are tenants, that may have complained a lot about a lot of things, does that make sense because—

Interviewee: We don’t have enough people for it to go that way.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: It could though, but at the end of the day, I mean to say, there was one named Peter, he gets to the front and rants on and on and on, and I go Peter and he goes yes, have you finished yet? No, well you have, because we need to move on, okay I’ll give you 2 minutes and that’s it, end of and he will take that because he knows he’s been ranting on, he knows he's taking up a bit of people’s time.
Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: We have one situation, well normally we have an I.S.P, no not I.S.P, a P.C.S.O officer, at my spare meetings, we had one where, we have an P.C.S.O officer come in, the tenant kind of [unclear audio 36:17-36:19], the I.S.P officer was really really calm, cool and collective and you can see we’re under pressure, the tenant was being overbearing and overpowering and I said something, if you carry on like this, you will be asked to leave, and he carried on, so I stood up and I said right, this is enough, at that point, a P.C.S.O stood up, walked over to the guy and said we need a word outside. So now, I think it’s a big value to have a P.C.S.O that works the estate around.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Who, for most tenants and the youngsters, get on with the, the P.C.S.Os.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They’ve known them for years, they can speak to them in confidence, some may have a bit of a bubble with the officer, sometimes the officer can’t answer the question, because they are considered to be asked questions and things like that but, I thought it was always better to have someone from the met around, and also, you find the met come around and say, well oh, I didn’t know that was going on, on the estate and things like that, so they get more information sometimes, by being at T.A meetings than they would talking to the public on their bike. So, it’s about having the rights of people preserved as well, you know—

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Key is someone from the met and key is obviously someone from housing, you know, those are the two key groups, and in the agreement, terms of referencing right now, all the TAs in the area have to have a housing officer present who administrate and conduct, where they need to, certain rules and regulations within the meetings.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so the next set of questions, nearing sort of the end of the interview is about, mostly about the local authority and [the ALMO] and the relationship between the TRA and [council], so to what extent do you feel that tenants, whether in the building, but also people involved in the committee are consulted before decisions are made by [council]?

Interviewee: [The] council, they got a website that you can go on to get any information you want, as to potential builds in the area, so lanes, improvements and we notice that, not many people use it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: [The ALMO] has got the, [the ALMO] magazine or whatever, somewhere, which keeps general information, which is posted out, through to a lot of people, if I get something that turns up to my door, if I see it, I’ll put it to one side and then I might forget it, also, some of the things that are in the magazine, when I look at, it’s coming up on the internet, I’ll have to check
on that, I don’t think that it is trusted information, it’s the part of it, a big part of it, is the way it goes out, the way it’s delivered, either by email, by website or whatever, it’s again, it’s the need to, if it’s not the need to, then you won’t look at what’s going in on the community, you won’t read the paper, you won’t go on the website to find out

Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: You know, there’s a bit of a green space for sale, this tab will tell, well I didn’t know nothing about it, because you didn’t check the website, to see all the buildings—

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You didn’t see the notices and the land parts and that, and that’s what it is, people, they’re are not being complacent, it’s about, today’s society, apart from me, people, they go to work, some earn a pittance, some earn a good wage, but they can’t make it to meetings and what they want to do is sit there and [curtsey] or sip tea and chill out.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Not necessarily in front of the tele or anything like that, just live their lives, without the disruption of who’s building where or what part is going on where

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Or what [...] is going on where, a lot of the times it’s only when there’s an issue or people start looking to the website and to the newspapers, unless you’ve got a strong T.A, if I was up North, if I was a part of the T.A up there, I can guarantee you I would have, culturally, I would the coach party[unclear audio 41:01-41:03], because it’s that type of society, whereas in [City X], it’s slightly different, it’s more of a race—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: We haven’t got time to do that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I don’t know, the youngsters do their thing, the middle age do their thing and the seniors do their thing, so see unless you got [unclear audio 41:26-41:29] culturally, they’re very very close knit, they’re very strong, they do everything as friends and family and there’s always big groups, there’s a thing going on, it’s well attended, whereas with some T.A’s, new T.A’s get good attendance, but then that attendance seem to drop off and then get back up, but again, if the people in the area haven’t got the want or the need to be at a meeting, they won’t be there.

Interviewer: Right. Do you think there might be issues that also prevent people from coming to meetings or being involved besides—

Interviewee: Laziness

Interviewer: Yeah, or, yeah.

Interviewee: I don’t know, we’re [...]going out and talking to people, talking to one of the ladies that works for the T.A, and we’re talking about they’re going to go door knocking, I don’t like doing door knocking, it scares the crap out of me, because you could be asking someone the wrong question, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: So, for me, I’m actually speaking to her now, not this minute, but a little bit later about what do we need to ask, because there’s a right and a wrong way of doing it, don’t be asking [unclear audio 42:54-42:55] and it’s the same with the fair share, you don’t go up and say oh you’re skinny, you want to come and spend 2 pound, 50, and get you shopping.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It’s the wrong way to approach people.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You got to ask questions in the right order and with the right text, because otherwise you could just piss people off royally.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It’s like a door-to-door salesman. so it’s about, maybe going, to get the start in there [unclear audio 43:27- 43:32] you got interest right away, oh we’re doing a thing with the local T.A, wonder if you [have a minute to spare], well we haven’t, well it could be fun, and there could be a ten pound prize if you win, so it’s just a couple of things that you got on an estate, if people are not as interested, try and get their interest, even if I got 50% of them interested, that’s still a lot of people, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: 25%, that’s a whole lot of people, that’s more than enough for me.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: The other thing I am thankful, really thankful for, is that the information that does come into the T.A, comes from around the estate, it’s not just this side, that side, each of the members, live at different parts of the estate, so we do, fortunately we get a broad picture of what’s going on , on the estate and each member will look, a little nit picking of what’s being done properly, so all that information is coming back to, I think in a way we work quite well as a small team, but I still feel I would love to have a lot more people present at the meetings.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: To prove that they’re happy or dis-happy with, you know

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Be able to go to the local authority and say well, I’ve got 5 tenants that are completely [unclear audio 44:49] what we’re going to do about it?

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You know, it just don’t happen like that sometime, some areas are quite nice and subtle and comfortable, okay until anything goes wrong, other areas it’s, our tenants just, always got a problem, always got a problem, they always got a problem there and it’s still ongoing now, 2,3 years down the road. So, yeah, it’s not, it’s just trying to be earlier and cover all the angles and all the questions, sometimes before they get asked, straight cleansing, you know, before a tenant gets charged for that, well why is that being done? If it starts to get done within 10 feet, oh
someone must have said something, because it’s starting to get clean now, but what that does is, it blocks it from going to the T.A and that tenant’s complaining.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You know, so then you’re never sure, whether you’re doing the right thing by pre-empting questions, getting things done, because you’ve had the questions already, so you know the problems, so you see the problems, you’ll get them sorted, is that causing the laziness or not going to the T.A? Because someone has already, obviously, sought it out and get it sorted.

Interviewer: Yeah, interesting.

Interviewee: You know, next.

Interviewer: So, overall how would you describe the relationship between the TRA and [the ALMO]? 

Interviewee: Good.

Interviewer: Good.

Interviewee: Healthy, very healthy.

Interviewer: So, if there were, if they were planning something like for example, building, a tower block on a green space or something as you would say—

Interviewee: They’d have a problem.

Interviewer: Huh?

Interviewee: They’d have a problem.

Interviewer: They’d have a problem. So, is the balance of power more with you in the TRA or with [the ALMO], if there’s something that affects this, particular?

Interviewee: It is.

Interviewer: Estate—

Interviewee: If there is a proposed, say for perhaps we might have built on this park—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Because it is designated green space.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: [The ALMO]. Is where [the ALMO] has a policy not to build on green space, if they build on this green space, they’ve got to replace it, so for instance, cross the other side of the roadway, is a big play area, astro turf, which is actually ruined now and highly fenced, which is [unclear audio 47:15-47:24] so that was left, local authority owned, it was locked up, it was never a open space, it was never a green space, blah blah blah, kids go in there, one of the kids coming out, fell, broke their arm or leg and sued the local authority. So they had to leave it unlocked, so you now got the church using it for events, that are not official, not legal, not risk assessed [unclear audio 47:51-47:54]. Just one minute.

Interviewer: Yeah, no problem.

[phone call interjection]

Interviewer: Yeah, all the time, wait, let me continue—
Interviewee: You could have recorded that if you want
Interviewer: This one might have been, I don’t know—
Interviewee: See, so that’s the sort of question I get--
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Not just because it’s my son, but from other tenants as well, then you have to use the strength of going to C.E.O level.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Not because I know them and they’re like okay, it’s just that, sometimes you find various departments within [the ALMO], or [council], do their own thing and C.E. O’s never get to know.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: And then something like the, this problem with the housing benefit, who to claim from, it’s not just one person, it’s several or more people
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: And what [the ALMO] is doing is they’re writing off that debt, in that case, it was 9 grand, they got the housing benefit, written of, because it was a [ALMO] property, in a different borough.
Interviewer: Okay
Interviewee: Which means the tenant has to pay the council tax to their borough

Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: But the housing benefit has to be claimed from the landlord, which is [the ALMO], although the property is in [a different borough].
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But one borough was saying, no you got to claim it from [our borough], [our borough] was saying, you got to clear it from then, it went on and on and on, until 9 grand was racked up.
Interviewer: Jeez, yeah.
Interviewee: So, because they didn’t want to lose any more revenue it was easier to move that tenant from that borough, [a different borough] back into [our borough] and start afresh, and wipe the 9 grand down, but now they got their tenant back in [our borough], even though the tenant’s got a letter stating that they’re exalt from any responsibility for that lost revenue, they’re now going to take that person to court, to get that 9 grand, even after issuing a letter, so I got a copy of it.
Interviewer: Oh my gosh-
Interviewee: Stating that they were not responsible for that
Interviewer: This poor tenant.
Interviewee: Yeah
Interviewer: Freaking out, probably.
Interviewee: I swear that the departments are not—
Interviewer: Coordinating with each other, they’re not talking
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: And they’re not talking, then the C.E. O’s don’t get to know this, so you have to bring it to their level at some point, because if you don’t, it will never get resolved and [the ALMO] will keep writing money off, after money, after money, which could end up being millions, after a few years.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: Which could have been spent on development within the borough, or place to rent—
Interviewer: Another, yeah.
Interviewee: Or things like that, you know.
Interviewer: So, in your role, do you feel that, do you feel you got a satisfactory response when you go to the social landlord? When you go to [the ALMO] about a problem?
Interviewee: Best part of the time, yes, occasionally no, sometimes, when it’s occasionally no, it’s something that’s going to be ongoing for a while.
Interviewer: Right, okay.

Interviewee: Win or lose, it’s not a challenge, it’s about trying to do the right thing for the tenant.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Not the landlord.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: It’s about making sure our tenants still got a roof over their head, irrespective of their problems with money or whatever.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: It is making sure their children are still getting an education, there is food on the table, things like that you know.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But not living with that person, you can’t guarantee that everything you’re doing is of benefit to that family.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Or that person, so you can only deal with what you see or what you’re told by that person, then you have to try and judge, it’s really difficult sometimes to try and judge when someone’s really being honest with you.
Interviewer: Right.
**Interviewee:** You know, so you have to go, it’s where you have to go unfortunately, you can’t just rush in and go, oh you’re a tenant of [unclear audio 01:00:04] you should be giving this person, it don’t work like that, if you do that you’ll get the cold shoulder.

**Interviewer:** But if there is some sort of larger issue, like the hypothetical example we had, of the tower block on green space, do you believe that the TRA, and also you know with the tenants standing behind it, could get the ideal outcome for them or sort of whose interests—

**Interviewee:** No, these days, no because.

**Interviewer:** These days, no.

**Interviewee:** These days, no, because currently, at the moment, I don’t know if it’s a conspiracy theory, but if you look and just watch what’s going on—

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Social cleansing is happening within [the borough]

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** It’s definitely happening.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Very slowly, as for an issue like [convoys], now they use to start the first build there, and it was private lanes, sold privately, bought privately, being developed privately, but you will still have, access view to the pier and things like that, the first major complaint that’s come up, which is against all [the ALMO] policies, is the children’s play area, children up to the age of 5, I think it is, can play in that area, it will be a locked area, so it was gated, any children over the age of 5, have to find somewhere else to play.

**Interviewer:** That’s quite a small age range.

**Interviewee:** Yeah. So, it’s and I don’t know yet, if it’s only children of the estate that we’ve built, which is a private estate.

**Interviewer:** Oh.

**Interviewee:** If it’s only them that’s allowed to use it or it could be anyone that can use it, up to that age.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** But to set that goal, I can see where it’s coming from because you get groups of teenagers, sitting around in kids parks, not causing havoc or

**Interviewer:** Just sitting and drinking, yeah

**Interviewee:** Even just sitting there chatting, they’re not drinking or smoking or

**Interviewer:** Yeah

**Interviewee:** They’re doing nothing illegal, but it upsets people around

**Interviewer:** Right

**Interviewee:** To see the older kids sitting there, I had a little bit of a laugh, they didn’t know they were kids

**Interviewer:** Yeah.
Interviewee: But there’s no way of controlling who does what, where and why, so if they were on the green on the back, that sort of, be brought out on the back, which they were looking at, they were looking at taking the nursery out and the housing office, but in the new building, right all the way through, there’s a smaller T.A, which would have probably been involved in and socially out, we fought it and they came back with, the footprints too small, but it’s not off the cards

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, we would, they would go to take a vote over the bank, into the smaller housing estate over there, they would come against major opposition.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But at the end of the day, doesn’t matter how big the opposition is or how big the matter is, if the local authority wants it to happen it will happen, same with the space up [F Street], it’s kind of […] and strong now, but the nature area has been developed back and it’s absolutely brilliant, beautiful. The only problem is the group that’s looking on with [the borough] council, I think it is, took it on and signed an agreement, if whenever the local authority want it back to build on, they would take it and that’s what happens, so—

Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: Bringing it into a nature space, for the authority. Sorry. Hello.

[phone call interjection]

See what I mean about problems—

Interviewer: All the time, yeah.

Interviewee: When you get older it gets worse.

Interviewer: Oh no, don’t tell me that.

Interviewee: But if I do something wrong, I say sorry I didn’t see you in the moment and get on with it.

Interviewer: Right, couple of last questions, then we’ll finish up, so, do you receive, you sort of mentioned that there is a tenants fund, did you receive a budget?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Are you satisfied with that budget?

Interviewee: The budget is set on your tenant registration, so basically, your whole area covers six hundred and twenty plus properties.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: From that, you get, the TMO, everyone pays into it, whether they like it or not, it’s like 2 pound 50 a week for a month or fortnight or a month or whatever, 2 for your rent and the rest for the tenants fund, so then you can claim an amount, so if you really got small, 50 properties on your, it’s a small budget, but then that’s topped up, if it’s bigger area, big area like ours, then you get slightly less money because it makes it fair to [unclear audio 01:11:23-01:11:26], so our budget itself is good, I think, since [Name]’s passed, I’ve actually
managed to cut down on our expenditure, which has been great, although that makes it a bit more of a struggle for us who want to do things, but that funding comes from restricted funding.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, we can only spend on the rent, phone and things like that. Our restricted funds come from little bit of fundraising and things like that, we don’t have a great amount from that but we can apply for [unclear audio 01:12:02-01:12:07], which I think is, I think it’s just over a grand, which is split into 2, but if you want to know the ins and outs of it, if you call [the ALMO], [the ALMO] tenants fund website, all the rules and regulations about apply for funding

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** You know, the criteria and that, even if you’re not a T&R.A and you’re just a group of people and you want to apply for funding, you can apply to [the ALMO], you want to have a garden party for the board.

**Interviewer:** Oh, interesting

**Interviewee:** It might not be a tenants resident association but you can--

**Interviewer:** As an individual

**Interviewee:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** If it’s for the--

**Interviewee:** Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Community.

**Interviewee:** You can apply for funding.

**Interviewer:** Oh cool, yeah.

**Interviewee:** Little group of people to meet and get along, which then could lead to other things.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, it’s not restricted just to tenants’, residents’ association, that’s a good site to go and have a good look and see how it’s all put together and how it works.

**Interviewer:** Right

**Interviewee:** To have better insight, as to how we can get money, so [the ALMO] tenants fund.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** You’ll see me on there, not my picture though.

**Interviewer:** So, you mentioned how you communicate or receive feedback from other tenants, sometimes they come to this office or they call you send you an e-mail, the whole sort of, how it works, okay, and do you ever send out any surveys or [the ALMO], do they ever send out surveys or things like that?

**Interviewee:** So, [the ALMO] is, what they’re doing is the food, the fair share.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** To see, to try to reach out to as many people on the estate who’s interested in it and things like that, so I rely on our local authority a lot, if I need to get information out.
Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because we haven’t got a running website yet, or a Facebook, as a sense of, if we develop a site, it’s for us to put stuff out, if people want feedback they can feedback, it doesn’t go directly on to the site it comes into a separate box which is understood, and if it’s not discriminatory or whatever, then it can be posted to the site, but it has to come through us first.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: That’s what I want to try and do, whereas a lot of sites have got Facebook, this is what people will comment on and this one and if it’s a free post, you can end up letting someone on your site that’s going to cause an absolute riot.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: That’s what I’m trying, it’s not being in control, it’s about making sure that if someone wants to post something on your website, that it is—

Interviewer: Appropriate?

Interviewee: Yes, appropriate and legal.

Interviewer: Yeah, because I guess with, if you can be anonymous, people will post all kinds of things.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That’s true.

Interviewee: Yeah, but then you can get them from out there by getting them—

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s true, nothing is totally anonymous, sure. So, do you have any comments on the future of tenants’ participation or involvement in tenant’s association?

Interviewee: It’s mixed, it’s really mixed, it’s how today’s society going forward and how it’s changing, quite quickly, as to whether it’s going to survive or not.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It’s only those that are in the knowledge of how to get funding—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: What money is out there for what projects, they will survive, those, slowly but surely, they will start disappearing, you know, and I think the housing association, someone will embrace them, because they find them useful and others will try to deny them because they can be a problem to the housing association, even as in repairs and things like that. I think tenant’s associations, they’ve got a mixed future.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They’ll be where they need to be, if the knowledge is there, you know, the knowledge is there to for people to pick up on, there is money out there and we can look at projects, we can make improvements and things like that, but if they are not by the people who are in the know, then there has to be a new super TRA, they have to provide the funding, they know what they can get for, section 106 funding, you know, and that is important.

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: You know, I’ll apply to section 106 for the first year, for all the floor, tables, chairs and rent that’s all being put forward and I managed to get the whole ceiling redecorated [unclear audio 01:17:01-01:17:04], at the moment [unclear audio 01:17:07-1:17:22]. I could just say that I want this colour, this colour, little is being done there.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But it’s fair to involve the other groups that’s been within, because they got ideas.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You know, so, as I said, I think the future T.A’s, really depends on, the want to improve or want to keep, to stop everything going private, that’s part of it really.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: You know, to have, I think it’s unfair that, it just seems to me now, the bigger cities, where social cleansing is going on, which we see a lot of people are getting referred up North, places like that, and I think it’s unfair to push these people away, where they got no option, away from their birth areas, their family areas, their friends areas to move [G] and [G] away to put them in deeper poverty.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because I mean, there are areas up in Newcastle, that’s suffering badly and to put more people in those areas, is going to put more of a financial strain on the benefits systems up in that area, when they should be looking to try and improve employment, improve—

Interviewer: Opportunities.

Interviewee: You know, the health and open things up, rather than just pushing things back—

Interviewer: Yeah

Interviewee: It’s wrong, it’s wrong.

Interviewer: So, I guess there’s a bit of a tension with developers, and sort of the private developers that are interested in making changes in this area.

Interviewee: I don’t know, I mean, I get to see a lot of the development with [the ALMO], we needed more development, but I think there has been too much private development, I think that the thing around traffic and parking, is a big border contention, because what the builders and the local authorities say, is that, these properties are being built and sold, but there is no parking, well that does not good look for the person joining, he could have 3 cars, or she could have 3 cars.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And they will find somewhere to park them on another estate or whatever, so I suggest that why don’t we not force the builders—

Interviewer: To build parking—

Interviewee: To put a ground floor or basement level, a parking facility, and that would cove at least 25% of the bill? Oh no, no, no, because they lose money that way, well hang on, how much money are they making for this side of the apartment?
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Don’t tell me that, so you’re saying that if they put a car parking space on the ground floor level, they’ve potentially lost 6 properties, that’s 600 thousand or whatever they’ve lost, they’re not prepared to lose that, so they’re going to put the flats in and say, we’re not taking that loss, yeah again, they’ve made billions or millions, on the properties above, so therefore, you’re forcing people to go into areas that they’re not, I won’t say not welcome, but where people would park reasonably very easily, you know that’s going to cause a major problem and the other thing that really pisses me off, is the fact that they put in all this traffic light in and all these restrictors in, to back traffic up, and what they’re doing with that is saying there’s too many cars on the road, so what they’re doing is, they’re creating the queues, they’re creating traffic jams and---

Interviewer: So people—
Interviewee: There’s too many people on the road—
Interviewer: Ahh, I see.
Interviewee: As a matter of fact, it’s not-
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Because, if you look at the development of the road, it’s narrowing a little, there’s stopping along these bays, putting circle small islands in, where there were 2 lanes of traffic, you now only got one, cross natural backups, and that’s what they’re using to say there’s so many vehicles on the road, there’s been people out there that’s done traffic light control, checking and road structure checking and they know that they can get the traffic to flow a lot easier and a lot quicker and reducing the chance and cut pollution, because it’s moving, it’s not sitting driving, checking away, so it’s all, a little of it is pre planned to get a result that central government or the local authority wants.

Interviewer: Right, and my final question is do you think more tenant participation os always good?
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: Yes, okay.
Interviewee: What I have to say, in other words, less is more and that is what happens in [the borough], because if you do less out, you always end up getting more.
Interviewer: That’s true, okay.
Interviewee: Yes.

Appendix 13: TRA Interviewees “Lisa” and “Mason”

Interviewer: We’re doing this. So why did you decide to join this organization and how did you join?
Lisa: Oh, good story, you first.
Mason: How did I join?
Interviewer: Yes, why and—
Mason: Well why is easy--
Interviewer: How.
Mason: Because I used to live, in a village somewhere and it was three years before I knew anyone. There I felt the only way to do that was to start joining stuff, so when we moved here rather than waiting three years I got involved very quickly.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Mason: And joining, well and it was a very new development and they were looking for people, so I actually joined a management company to start with, in it's chaotic form and then migrated to the new residence associate, which was all one thing at the time and then you have split into two, so I stayed with the relation to both, for a while, and just focus on resident association. Subsequently I was chairman, well I was a as an attendee at first and the chairman left, and I took over and I haven’t been able to get rid of it since.
Lisa: He has tried.
Mason: I have tried.
Interviewer: Is it because there's not enough sort of not enough people willing to?
Mason: Yeah, I mean that's, as everyone knows, we've tried numerous times to get more people to join in [unclear audio 01:29] he's very good at recruiting people for our events but when you say would you like to come along to our meetings, they also vaporize.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: Because no one, very few young people are willing to commit to anything these days.
Lisa: [unclear audio 01:45] people hate meetings, they will do all kinds of things, but they won’t go to meetings.
Mason: We’re talking the W.N.C lot, there’s all kinds of different reasons, but you can talk to them about that.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: So, when did you join and why?
Lisa: Don't you remember? I sent you an email from Canada because –
Mason: That’s right—
Lisa: Somebody, I was moving here from Ottawa and we came and rented the house and then went back to Ottawa to finish up and somebody, who I think has a property on development, brought me a newsletter and said “Oh here you are, here's a newsletter from these guys and they said they were looking for someone to do the newsletter”, so I thought okay, well you know jump in with two feet, same reasons as Mason, if you don't get involved you never get to know anybody.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: And so, I volunteered from Canada, which Mason thought was beyond strange and said Yes Anyway.
Mason: Yeah, you knew you were going to get it.
Interviewer: Great and are you involved in any other type of sort of management related work either, or anything sort of similar in your careers?
Lisa: Yeah, I think I have to say yes. I run a small business.
Interviewer: Okay.
Lisa: Which is spinning out to social enterprise.
Interviewer: Okay, cool.
Lisa: Yeah, and I have volunteers and board members and investors and all of that kind of stuff there too.
Interviewer: And do you find the skills transferable at all for this type of thing?
Lisa: Yes, far too much.
Interviewer: Okay.
Mason: And yes, I'm the chairman of the [S Group].
Interviewer: Okay.
Mason: And run too, my own business.
Interviewer: Okay.

Mason: No employees or anything like that.
Interviewer: Okay.
Mason: I do have to interact with lots of other people, so skills are transferable.
Interviewer: Transferable skills, alright.
Lisa: That means it’s transferring inwards, what we need to do is commit to more people that they can learn skills that they can transfer outwards.
Interviewer: Interesting.
Mason: It’s how to deal with volunteers really, because everyone's a volunteer.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: They will do as much as, I mean some people don't manage volunteers very well because they get upset when the people don't do what they say they will or can do or whatever, but you have to realise that people are volunteering their time, it's not like at work, where they’re being paid to do it. Volunteers are doing it voluntarily, and once you've want to strangle them occasionally but not to get that windy, you can't because if you did, you wouldn’t have any volunteers.
Interviewer: Right. Overall do both you enjoy your involvement in the resident's association?
Lisa: Mostly.
Mason: Sometimes.
Lisa: Sometimes it works and then you think why do I do this? mostly it's fun we have very good parties.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Lisa: We have good parties.
Mason: Yeah.
Lisa: Very big parties that we could never have in our houses.
Interviewer: That sounds good, I’d like to be invited. All right could you tell you a bit about how meetings function and how often they occur?
Lisa: The function is actually what you’re seeing tonight.
Mason: We should have them every month.
Interviewer: Okay, should.
Mason: Should.
Interviewer: But you don’t.
Mason: We’ve had a bit of a break this year because of my, just being too busy really and my lack of ability to organize them every month.
As you’ve seen, we come together we all know what we’re doing for these events, because we’ve been running them for so long. We talk about the finance bit and occasionally something new pops up but that’s about it, with the limited number of people we have we are kind of defined in what we’re trying to achieve.
Interviewer: Right.

Mason: With the limited resources, so we agree that we would just do the newsletter for 2 events, with that we do 3 to 4 events because now because that’s including—
Lisa: Yeah, we do it.
Mason: Breaks and stuff like that.
Lisa: You know, I think the important thing there is that we support other people who are interested in doing something different, so if somebody else comes to us, that’s happened to me this week and I didn’t raise it, he wants to do a taster sessions for a Zumba class or something on the green and said who does she have to ask permission from? I said well nobody can either, nobody can bestow or refuse permission, however we can give you lots of advice on running events on that green. You should get in touch. So, we do--
Mason: Yeah and somebody tried to do a oh, what was it? The window thing.
Lisa: Winter Wonderland, that was quite fun, but she didn't have the drive to push it through, and we have events that go on in our little community room. So, we have total is hopping about on this Friday, Mandarin lessons on a Saturday, we’re about to have a Pilates class.
Mason: Right and psychologists use it a couple times or so a week, as an office, which is very useful.
Lisa: We’ve had people trying to run meditation classes there and --people have ideas for things that like to try, could we do this, and the answer is always yes.
Interviewer: Why not.
Mason: Run to the extent that we can.
Lisa: We did big lunch, didn’t we?
Mason: We did. My wife ran that or tried to run that. Do you know what big lunch is? It's once a year and basically, it's to get neighbours to come out and have lunch together on Sunday.
Interviewer: Big potluck sort of thing, is it?
Mason: Yeah, it's pretty much just long and we sat and chat, we had about 15 people come along, but if you want to get into next year [unclear audio 07:35-07:41] there were 20 kids there or something.
Lisa: It must have been 80 to a hundred this year.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Mason: And it’s been going 4 years so—
Lisa: You have to do things often, for people to remember that they happen.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: And we have quite a transit group of people here of people, so there's a lot of the house lets.
Interviewer: Right, yes.
Mason: Obviously.
Interviewer: Yes, students there as well?
Mason: Yes people who come in.
Lisa: University.
Interviewer: Oh.
Mason: They’ll come in for a year or two or maybe a bit longer and they’ll go.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: So—
Lisa: There’s a lot of B.M.W and [redacted], in the estate.
Interviewer: So how does certain decision making happen during meetings? is it sort of—
Mason: Democratic.
Interviewer: Democratically, okay.
Lisa: Yeah.
Interviewer: Hesitation?
Lisa: People have ideas, some of them are good ideas, some of them are less good ideas. The good ones get picked up and considered.
Mason: That was slapped down pretty fast.
Lisa: Yes, that’s true.
Mason: They’re all good nature in, then back to the thing with volunteers, it has to be good natured.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: We do occasionally have a vote on something we want to vote on. This evening, I insisted that we vote on spending a thousand pounds or so and so we did that, all four of us and we voted, and it will go in the—
Mason: Minutes.
Lisa: Things that pass as minutes.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: Because we are an incorporated company, we have to do certain things.
Interviewer: So how much time do you dedicate to this volunteer work on a weekly or monthly basis, besides meetings?
Mason: I would say not enough.
Lisa: Around a year, I think that we probably do, each of us does 2 solid days for an event.
Mason: Yeah.
Mason: So that’ll be 4 days, 2 events plus probably an hour a month, if that.
Interviewer: Okay.
Mason: In between time because, say we’ve got, we’ve got it running to the point where we just show up [unclear audio 10:06-10:09], can’t complain.
Lisa: We occasionally make decisions by email as well.
Mason: And then, we barely use that, so that’s a bit of a pain.
Lisa: Yeah.
Lisa: Good idea.
Mason: Because it takes time to pull together and distribute.
Interviewer: So—
Mason: But, so yeah. It’s an hour, an hour or two a month.
Interviewer: Okay.
Mason: 2 solid days and 3 events.
Lisa: That’s 4 days plus, 4 days plus 12 hours.
Interviewer: And how do you divide responsibilities among the group? Is it sort of based on skills-- people have or other, or time?
Lisa: It’s often based on contacts.
Interviewer: Okay.
Lisa: Well, you know someone who could help with something.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: Yeah.
Lisa: Do you know so you know do you know the person who provided the grapes last time? Do you know someone who could help us putting that together?
Mason: But in terms of our hierarchy it's just [unclear audio 11:16-11:23], but yeah, I don’t impose decisions on anybody because then you can’t.
Lisa: However, you do, do the annual counts.
Mason: Yes, because I’m responsible for signing off. Alex, actually puts all the numbers together, and he does it very well now and then I put it together, in terms of balance sheet problems also, where I can get to balance the accounts [unclear audio 11:49-11:55], otherwise we get fined.
Lisa: So, it’s a lot of who you know.
Interviewer: Right, and could you speak to your specific roles or specific things that you, you might sort of take on as responsibilities after meetings? For you, that’s obviously, that’s chair, that’s specific but maybe less specific further.
Lisa: At the moment I tend to put the notes together for meetings.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: I used to do the newsletter, I don’t do it anymore, I did it for 3 years, that was long enough.
Interviewer: Okay.
Lisa: And it’s also the same work that I do at work and that makes it a bit humorous.
Mason: That’s possible on all the days.
Lisa: Yes, exactly. And I round up volunteers for the events.
Mason: She’s very good at volunteer grabbing.
Lisa: That’s what I do. Lots of questions.
Mason: Suggestions.
Lisa: Suggestions, yeah. I also, very poorly run a Facebook page.
Interviewer: Okay.
Lisa: That’s about everything, oh when we do, we actually just done a big event where we, it's actually quite technical you know we try to explain, we’re monitoring the noise from the railways.
Interviewer: Okay.
Lisa: There is a new rail line and so we’ve just done a big appeal, where we’ve raised crowd funded money, I did that.
Mason: And we just run it through our bank account, as laundering, that’s a joke by the way.
Interviewer: Okay, don’t worry—
Lisa: The group that does the noise monitoring is even more important than we are, but we do actually have a structure, which means we can run it by count.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: Our service to them is providing the backing.
Interviewer: That makes sense.
Mason: Thank you for clarifying that because we’re being recorded.
Interviewer: Right so, we talked about the problem-solving approach that it sort of people all sort of collaborative people present their ideas then you vote on them. Is there anything else you’d like to add about the problem-solving approach?
Lisa: Well we do have an annual general meeting with some of that problem. That was a serious problem itself that we're talking about the end of the party that people want to come to, make sure every last twenty minutes and this year we're going to have it recorded by video, instead of doing minutes.
Mason: So, in the last twenty minutes.
Lisa: So that we can say that we had no new general meeting.
Mason: The problem when you, so we used to do it officially by having it on a specific night, so we’d send out notice a month or two beforehand and we have to get thirty people there or something of the sort, and if we didn't get that, we have to run again, so we’ve reduced the number, through the A.G.M, we managed to get one and they said we need to reduce the number and the number is dwindling more, so we just then decided, the best way of holding an A.G.M. was actually there, because you've got one hundred, two hundred people there so we just say—

Interviewer: Attract people with the food, kind of thing?

Mason: We initially say yeah.

Lisa: This is the A.G.M.

Mason: This is the A.G.M, we've got money, I'm the Chairman thank you for coming we've got money.

Lisa: Come and talk to us.

Mason: Come and talk to us.

Mason: We need all the help we can get.

Interviewer: Great.

Lisa: The thing about the A.G.M is people bringing us problems that we couldn't solve, because we’re not--

Mason: We’re not the management company.

Lisa: We’re not the management company.

Interviewer: Right.

Lisa: We’re not the organization or the housing association.

Interviewer: Right.

Mason: I still get people emailing me though—

Interviewer: Right.

Mason: With issues and I—

Interviewer: Had to direct them elsewhere?

Mason: Well I have to pass the to a member of the company or—I mean, one I got recently was a lady who got an issue with someone parking in her parking spot. It was from the [Housing Association G] side of things, ie social housing and I said the only thing you could do there is talk to the [Housing Association G], if you can, or phone the police and she spoke to the police because the [Housing Association G] didn’t respond until 4 days later or it was probably so, because the person had been parking there for a week, come in and move their car.

Interviewer: Right.

Mason: But it was interesting to get her feedback because then when someone else asks me, I can say these are your rights, essentially. Yeah and the other thing, somebody knocked on her door, having been scanned as a potential tenant.

Lisa: Oh, my bad, the relation story, yes.

Mason: So, this was somebody—

Lisa: So, we do get these stories—
Mason: Somebody who had gone online, rented a room, paid money.
Interviewer: Really? And showed up?
Mason: And showed up to a room he thought he rented.
Interviewer: Oh oh.
Mason: And it didn’t exist.
Interviewer: The room didn't exist?
Mason: The room, well the housing existed, and the girl was there but she was renting a room—
Interviewer: A flat.
Mason: So somebody—
Interviewer: Had scammed.
Mason: Con this poor person into spending money online for a room that didn’t exist.
Interviewer: And now this person had to find another place to stay as well, right?
Mason: Yeah.
Lisa: Wow, that’s so—
Mason: Had paid deposits and everything else.
Lisa: So, we do try to spread those stories around.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Lisa: In order to help people, avoid the same problem again.
Interviewer: Right. So—

Mason: We deal with things like people’s door handles breaking.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: Is this a common thing across the development, yes or no? And in the early days it was.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: People get trapped in their bathrooms and things like this, so we’re able to communicate
Mason: that around, so take your mobile phone to the toilet.
Interviewer: So, you guys are a little bit wrapped up, sort of in the everyday thing as well, even
though that’s not what you’re sort of intended to do.
Mason: Yeah.
Interviewer: So, you mentioned that there are also social housing residents and also lease
holders, there's a lot of different people and could you talk about the relationships between these
different groups in terms of, are all these groups involved in this organization? this is a resident
association or are there different groups that are more involved in?
Mason: Well in our particular committee, it’s all private house owners.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: It hasn’t always been we have had [Housing Association G].
Mason: We have had [Housing Association G] social housing—
Lisa: Co- owners.
Mason: Or co-owners.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: Yeah, we still have people we can call on—
Mason: And it's a shame that they dropped out because actually, I think I've said this before, I think the people in social housing are by far away the most social people.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: Yeah.
Mason: And [unclear audio 19:17- 19:25], and again it's an evolution thing, so the younger the people, are with young kids, they tend to help out, and as the kids get older, they tend to move away from it. Yeah, I mean the whole thing really, from a housing point, if you got kicked off because there was a, what was it called, [Organisation S], there was an organization called [Organisation S].
Lisa: Oh yes that was brilliant, yeah.
Mason: Who paid for somebody to come on to the development for two days a week, to work with the kids of all types in the garden and social housing but mainly on the social housing side of it.
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: And [B] was the one that insisted we have the party, the summer party and then the whole crew came too.
Lisa: That was not, that was with [J], that was the second one, not the first one, so the church, up the road there--
Mason: Baptist church -
Lisa: Baptist church, saw all these houses being built and said “They're going to need to turn that into a community aren’t they, what can we do to help?”, there were some people living in the church and they had an organization funding youth workers and they said these guys need a youth worker and someone along and it was brilliant.
Mason: It was good.
Lisa: And it really helped to sort of, get a lot of things started. It was a really difficult job for the people concerned but—
Mason: They did a great job.
Lisa: They did a great job and helped things get started and it’s kept going.
Interviewer: Right, great. You mentioned are-- going off of also there being a lot of different groups in this in this neighbourhood, and also you know you have a committee of a certain size and you have people come to events of a much larger size. Do you think there are any obstacles in the community for which stops people from getting involved with the resident’s association? I mean obviously there's obvious ones I know—
Lisa: Sometimes—
Mason: [...] is not very unique.
Lisa: Yeah there's that also, I'd sometimes think that the fact that we're doing things already, almost prevents other people from doing all, getting involved because we're already doing it and
they feel like they would be approaching an existing group of people. I don’t know if that’s true or not. We get an awful lot of people saying it would be nice to do this and I’d like to do that and whatever. We have to say well, we can only do as much as we've got people to do but we'll help you.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Lisa:** With anything you know, but I do wonder if the fact that we're already there, if we stopped being there, would someone else reinvent us?

**Mason:** I don't, they'll find out soon.

**Interviewer:** Do you think--Are there any obstacles that might be specific to whether someone is in social housing or a homeowner or renter or a certain age groups or other sort of factors?

**Lisa:** I think renters are surprised that we exist at all.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Lisa:** When the newsletter comes through their letter box, they automatically assume that it's somehow not for them. I think the housing association tenants and co-owners, we’ve tried very hard to make sure they know it's for them, we actually have at the top of the newsletter, we have the logo of the association there, because that used to give us some kind of help. They have given us some type of help in the past.

**Mason:** They still do.

**Lisa:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Like financial?

**Mason:** Yeah financial help.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Lisa:** To make sure that that community knows that it is it is about them.

**Mason:** Or stocks people.

**Lisa:** I think people are very very busy, this is a very expensive place to live, most families have two incomes.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** And then once people are retired they don't like meetings or want to go.

**Mason:** Enjoy their retirement.

**Interviewer:** Are there in your opinion so this is a difficult task for those two people but are there any sort of influential figures in the association, people who use expertise are sort of is the most trusted are people whose voice is sort of a bit stronger because of their background or anything?

**Lisa:** Oh, Mason definitely because he has the experience of running these events for so very long.

**Mason:** And Lisa, because she’s good at grabbing people.

**Lisa:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** Because I run the newsletter for so long as well, there are other people around. A couple turns to be people who have been on the estate from the beginning, they bought a house at the
beginning because they have sort of institutional memory, along the process similarly. they sort of know what's going on and know people. [D] is very influential in different ways, not all known about, but she is, you know there is a--

**Mason:** She talks quite you know to a lot of people and then she's very discreet, when she wants to be.

**Lisa:** There's another group that run a plot of what used to be wasteland and just below here which is a conservation area, and the people who are involved in that know a lot of what's going on, and there are people again who will come out for activities and there’s another whole bunch of stuff that goes on around wildlife and keeping our wildlife corridor functional, and that attracts a different crowd. So, there’s some people involved in that who are again very influential. The other big factor on the estate is the parent teacher association for the local junior school. The P.T.A yes.

**Mason:** Is it on here?

**Lisa:** Yeah.

**Mason:** Alright, maybe it passed me by when my kids were there.

**Lisa:** Now, that’s a big factor, that’s how people know each other and know what’s going on.

**Mason:** Probably we should get involved in that.

**Lisa:** Oh no, please.

**Mason:** I don’t mean get involved, just somehow communicate with them so we spread the word.

**Lisa:** Yes we should.

**Lisa:** But I am so far past P.T.A.

**Mason:** Oh absolutely.

**Lisa:** Oh please, never again.

**Interviewer:** Great -

**Mason:** Does that help? -

**Interviewer:** Great, I guess that is helpful, yeah just to get a sense of the different roles people have and the skills they bring.

**Mason:** Even when you talk to [A], that’s a different sort of influence altogether.

**Lisa:** Because that’s actually a very actively managed company, it has to be.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Mason:** I mean, there is 12 on the committee.

**Lisa:** I think so yeah.

**Mason:** And they manage a budget which is interconnected, because you have all the apartment blocks, but it’s very different, it’s very much more serious.

**Interviewer:** So how is the agenda determined?

**Mason:** It was fixed many years ago.

**Interviewer:** Sure it was.

**Mason:** It was.
Lisa: It was.
Lisa: It’s written down.
Lisa: Same every time.
Interviewer: Oh, interesting, ok. That’s different.
Mason: We go through it every time, diligently.
Interviewer: But people—
Lisa: And then we add things.
Interviewer: Add things, okay.
Mason: Basically it covers -
Interviewer: Oh, I understand.
Mason: The official statements of the book, but the key things we cover are finance and the
events and then later, anything else. And the community room.
Interviewer: And then sort of everyone, who has extra things to add, will add on at the end.
Mason: Yeah.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewer: Have you, as part of your roles and your involvement, have you had an experience
where you felt you weren’t being listened to? Not necessarily on the committee, among the
committee but in the community or—
Lisa: Oh constantly, yeah.
Mason: Yeah.
Lisa: Because everybody says how wonderful these events are and how wonderful it is that ...
Lisa: … happens, and you say well that's great come along and be involved, and they say, yeah yeah I should do that—
Interviewer: And then they never do.
Lisa: Yeah.
Mason: And people even give you their email addresses and phone numbers and you email them
and phone them and they don’t show up.
Interviewer: I’ve had this problem too with research as I said.
Interviewer: Yes.
Mason: Yes and obviously too you know being able to cut a hole in there so you can actually see
the link.
Lisa: But it’s alright to cut down all the trees out there.
Mason: Oh yeah.
Lisa: It’s those kinds of issues, there’s also parking so if you really want to start a fight anyway.
Mason: How long do you want to be here?
Lisa: Well this is [borough] parking it’s the issue, it’s empty I think, so it’s not going to [M]et.
Interviewer: My next questions are about the local authority, so how would you describe the
relationship between the people that live here and your sort of, residents association and the local
council? Is there any relationship?
Lisa: Very strong with the councillors.
Interviewer: Okay.
Mason: Yeah, so they rented our room - I don't know if they do it anymore.
Lisa: Especially on Saturdays -
Mason: They rent the room to have a sort of, what the call it? -
Mason & Lisa: Surgeries! -
Mason: Once every two months.
Interviewer: Okay, that’s interesting.
Mason: I don’t think they get many people, but they feel obliged to do it.
Lisa: No, but they have, they meet with each other there as well.
Mason: Right -
Lisa: It works for them.
Mason: And they do help out with parking issues and they’ve provided funding -
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: For different things.
Mason: So, there’s a good relationship and when we’ve had problems, we use the [29:30-29:32] by the lake and they would come on a Sunday morning and met with the police and us and stuff like that so, I would say it’s good.
Lisa: It’s very good and I—
Mason: It has been and as people retire they have—
Lisa: Yeah introduced you to new people -
Mason: They’ve passed on the relationship -
Interviewer: Right.
Mason: We even had our own, our local M.P who lived on the development at one point.
Lisa: That didn’t make-
Mason: Didn’t help much -
Lisa: For much since she didn’t come to any events. That woman. She’s no longer -
Mason: She did before she was an M.P.
Lisa: Did she?
Mason: Yeah. She came to one of the events in March.
Lisa: I mean I just felt that—
Mason: She’s more visible than the current one, anyway, moving on.
Interviewer: Do you think that residents in the housing association or renters have a similar relationship with the local council or would it be in terms of looking at it positively or would it be different you think?
Lisa: People have such mixed views on local council generally, elective counsellors have a completely impossible job.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Lisa: I don’t think many people understand that and so there’s this constant frustration when really the council is interested in the species of us.

Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: Same age, lives in the same place, some house is a little bit bigger or a bit smaller.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Mason: I mean, I don’t know if they have any relationship there, or the opportunity to, for the same reasons we all do.
Lisa: They have, they are very responsible.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: We had a youngster 3 doors away who wasn’t in school, I was actually livid, and the council body solved it in 2 days.
Mason: Why wasn’t he in school?
Lisa: Because [unclear audio 31:17] hasn’t gotten around to doing their list and these parents haven’t, the guy was 10, it wasn’t like they were trying to get someone into reception.
Mason: And the parents hadn’t called about it?
Lisa: The parents hadn’t, the school board called in, they just kind of oh we’ll get to it, 2 weeks the kid still wasn’t in school, anyways housing started that out.
Interviewer: So, if there’s some kind of council related issue, whether it was like trash or roads or something, what type of issues? So I guess this is not actions, these questions might not be very relevant for but I’ll ask them anyways, what kind of decisions do they consult residents on and what types of decisions they do not consult residents on?
Mason: Well, they’re consulted on parking, which they’re still being consulted on.
Lisa: Consulted on graffiti.
Mason: Graffiti, they are very good at.
Lisa: They will actually consult on anything they’re prepared to spend time on—
Mason: They’re involved with the whole railroad noise issue. The good thing is, again, people who have the influence like Adrian, he’s got the contacts and he’s very diligent and he just does it.
Lisa: He does it, it’s pretty much a full-time job, even though it’s volunteer work.
Interviewer: So, if you or another resident express an issue to the council, what type of response do you expect and how quick?
Lisa: Oh, you will get a response from one of our councillors within two days.
Interviewer: Okay.
Lisa: Assuming that you can get the right email address.
Interviewer: Great.
Lisa: You would definitely get some kind of response within a couple days.
Interviewer: Great.
Lisa: Doesn’t mean they can actually make anything happen.
Interviewer: Yes, they’ll just respond to you.
Lisa: They will respond.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewer: I have a couple of questions on. I have like the same piece of paper under time, okay, right. So currently could you describe your financial situation as an organization how you fund yourself and the other? It's a positive situation or a precarious one?

Mason: It’s been precarious in the past and we applied for grants in the community and things like that, it was sort of a precarious period. It’s less precarious at the moment, because we have been renting a room in the community, we have very good tenants, as I’ve mentioned before and that’s supposed to be in the lot, which means we can afford to buy things and so on, and just a little bit more than we would do otherwise at the events, in terms of giving stuff away because we don’t actually charge for anything, we just ask for donations.

Interviewer: Right.

Mason: So, you can go and have a burger free if they really can't afford it to, no drink or whatever, we provide the [band] and council, everything is for free, because it's their money essentially. If they choose to donate, I mean the first one we ran that was any size people were coming along saying where do we pay? We haven’t got anything you know we have no buckets.

Interviewer: Right.

Mason: So eventually we found it, people put money in a tin we thought of well most of just encourage people to put donations in, that’s what we do—

Lisa: So, do you—

Mason: It minimizes the cost.

Lisa: Almost.

Lisa: Yeah, we have an income stream, which is great. The local councillors give us money for special things when we need help, the management committee gives us money.

Mason: When we applied for it?

Lisa: Yeah, when we applied for it.

Lisa: Because we run the newsletter and we run a website—

Interviewer: Those are [the] cost[s]?

Lisa: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lisa: And other people have given us money for specific things from time to time.

Mason: And we have anonymous donations.

Lisa: We get anonymous donations, very generous donations.

Interviewer: Great.

Mason: So financially, at the moment we’re doing fine.

Interviewer: Good. How do you communicate with a receive feedback from other residents?

Lisa: Very well.

Interviewer: Feel free to give obvious answers like email, as well.

Lisa: No, we talk to them on the street corner.
Mason: We send out a newsletter, there’s the website, and people—
Lisa: They get stuff through Facebook.
Mason: I get emails from people, as I said before, so many emails, maybe every 6 months to say the planters are at it again.
Lisa: Yeah.
Mason: In terms of people dumping furniture, it’s amazing how much furniture people can produce from a small house and they just dump it on the side of the road.
Lisa: My neighbour had just done it.
Mason: So, email.
Interviewer: Do you think more resident participation is always good?
Mason: Yes.
Lisa: Yeah.
Mason: Is that a leading question?
Interviewer: I mean...
Lisa: I mean it would lead to a fight, but I think that may be a good thing.
Mason: In what way?
Lisa: I mean we have had committee members who have left.
Mason: That's true. You reminded me.
Interviewer: Just because of, because of fights or business or?

Lisa: No, because of differences over strategy.
Interviewer: Okay. Feel free to elaborate.
Mason: He thought we should shut down.
Lisa: Yeah.
Mason: We didn’t agree with him and he was a very miserable individual.
Lisa: And so, we kind of felt, well if you keep wanting to come to these meetings in order to tell us we should shut down you know you should shut down.
Interviewer: Because he didn’t like the parties or didn't want the money from the room to go - I don’t know.
Mason: I think that he felt that we should be just a sub-committee to the management company.
Interviewer: Oh, interesting, okay.
Lisa: Nobody else at the management company thinks that.
Mason: Yes, nobody else thinks that, but he did.
Lisa: So, we checked, we asked and checked whether there was a problem, whether we were doing anything wrong and everyone kind of went—
Mason: It's just extremely depressing when you go to a meeting and you be happy, and you come out depressed, it was just that simple if you continue on.
Lisa: Interesting.
Mason: Wasn’t it?
Lisa: I think so, yeah.
Mason: We used to make very good meeting agendas, we’d make notes, brilliant notes of the meeting, we can give him that but—
Lisa: We’ve had people who said they would like to be involved and then stopped being involved and usually, it's either because we've asked them to do too much once they were told and they got scared, or their situation has changed very quickly, and they found they couldn’t do what they thought they could do.
Interviewer: Right.
Lisa: There was a lady called [S].
Mason: Yeah, she came along, yeah and she went through a difficult time.
Lisa: Exactly, and [D], the same, and so people, we catch people on the up and down, family situations and work situations change.
Mason: [C] came, along for a bit didn’t she?
Lisa: Yes, and went back to Seattle.
Mason: And then, she got a job on the other side of the country, so it feels like she was never around. So, it’s a shame and they were very helpful at the events.
Lisa: They were very good.
Mason: Anyways, so yes more participation would be good, even if it causes for a concerned view, it’s voluntary at the end of the day.
Interviewer: Should we comment on the future of resident participation in the community or in society?
Mason: Well, I do worry about it. In society in general because I think everybody is, and as I said chairman of the scouts and we struggle to find new people to help run the different age groups of scouts [unclear audio 39:38-39:44] in the same, if we all decided we’ve had enough of running these events, I don’t think it would happen again, if we all start disappearing, other people would certainly go and do that now.
Lisa: Yeah.
Mason: And the only way of finding out is to test it.
Lisa: Yeah.
Mason: You know, I always think I’m 22, but my body tells me otherwise and my back even more.
Lisa: I mean, actually if we do one of these events, a day after one of these events is not a good time to ask us about it. We have fun, we party, but we tend to overdo it.
Mason: Yes, the body is working a lot. When I was younger I did do a triathlon the day after an event, and that was my fastest one ever.
Lisa: There you go, see.
Mason: A few years ago.
Lisa: Amazing what adrenaline would do for you.
Mason: Yeah. Couldn’t do it now.
Lisa: No.
Interviewer: Yeah, that’s it, last time I checked I am 22 but—
Lisa: Let me ask though, what are you doing on September the 8th?
Mason: Yes.
Interviewer: I’m back in the United States.
[unclear audio 40:44- 40:48]
Interviewer: First day of classes are the 4th.
Lisa: You can come and see resident’s participation in full swing.
Interviewer: I don’t want the local council coming and asking me why I’m not in school. Right, yeah I would love to come to the party but it’s a little bit of a distance, but I live just on [B] road, [redacted]. Do you have any comments or anything you’d like to add or questions?
Mason: What are you going to do with all this?
Interviewer: Well, I’m going to first anonymise you and not name the association and then I’m going to write a comparative paper. Let me pause this.
——
Mason: Again.
Lisa: Start again.
Interviewer: Sir could you talk about this big society and
Lisa: Big society.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Mason: Was that Cameron?
Lisa: Yes, that was Cameron, that was David Cameron. We were going to have a big society and people are going to be involved and there was me, sat on this plastic chair in the middle of the day, to meet these two people who clearly thought I was, sort of somewhere above onsite in their view of the world. I'm sitting there, very uncomfortable drinking instant coffee, I'm coming from work thinking where are the bankers? Now it's not entirely fair, so we do have a banker with us tonight. I didn’t tell him that particularly today, I’m thinking where are all the people from the financial industry and the rest of the big society that was going to take on all of this stuff? They weren't there at [inaudible] with me that particular evening, nor a few evenings later when we had the annual general meeting or something like that. So yes, I—these things come and go of their own accord, I don't think they can be legislated, though there is enabling legislation on. C.S [unclear audio 01:11]
Mason: I think, I mean the one thing that sort of keeps us going is that every time we do an event, somebody comes up and says that was great, and it's not just [D], because she says it's great every time, but the band, I remember last summer, the band –
Lisa: They had a great time.
Mason: The band had a good time and they came out, and they actually said it without prompting, they said, you are a great [unclear audio 01:34] because no one else they know does
this, and they said to us afterwards, quick you should do it here, it really is good to us and the Christmas event too, people come up and say thank you for doing that for the kids and so on.

Lisa: Because some do arrive on canal boat, with music.

Interviewer: Sounds fun.

Lisa: And then the people who email you and say is it okay if my children still come along for the Easter Bunny? They’re ten now but they do enjoy it.

Mason: Yeah, that’s what it’s about and people go away thinking they’re enjoying their days, because we have these things engraved. It still needs more people to take over.

Interviewer: Right, that’s a common problem everywhere.

Mason: Yeah.

Interviewer: Alright, I’ll pause it now, again yes okay. Wait, before you leave, I have a couple of—Darn, I shouldn’t do this upside down.

Appendix 14: TMO Interviewee “Joan” Transcript

Interviewer: Okay. So, it’s running and we can begin. So, when did you decide to get involved with the TMO and how did you get involved?

Interviewee: I’ve lived here for 52 years. So, about 21 years ago, of course, it’ll be a little bit longer than that, I [saw] that the estate was deteriorating, council didn’t want to come out and do anything and then, people started talking about going on training […] to become a TMO. So, I got involved in it that way because I thought, “let me go and find out what it is and see whether we can do anything ourselves for our estate instead of waiting for the council to do it for us.” Because we’re really [00:51] and the council were just sort of like, they don’t need anything, they don’t complain, they’re fine but it was just going downhill all the time so, a few of us then went on a 3-year course and then we became a TMO.

Interviewer: And would you have gotten involved with starting a TMO or all these if the estate was not in decline at the time?

Interviewee: Possibly.

Interviewer: Possibly?

Interviewee: Yeah. Because like I said, I’ve lived here all my life so, I saw it was no different with the things that was happening around here and, you know, not just because I spoke [01:32-34] or saying that, you know, “no, it don’t matter,” but with you’re giving them money to come and do work on our estate which they seem to be doing everywhere else but not on here. So, then it became obvious that once we went and became a TMO, the council would have to give us our money so we’d have more money to spend on our estate.

Interviewer: That makes sense. And do you have experience with the types of like with management or sort or organizing before you got involved with the TMO or was it sort of a completely new thing?
Interviewer: Yeah. And over the years, have you enjoyed your involvement into TMO?
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Yeah? Can you tell a bit about how often meetings occur and how they function?
Interviewee: Yeah. We have meetings every 6 weeks and depending on what we’ve got to talk about, some of them only take about an hour, some of them can take up to two. I’ve been Chair a couple of times. I was the very first Chair when we became TMO and I had meetings with [02:58] because I will know we won’t need to talk about everything and try and get it that way. Now, they’re not so bad because we’ve been a TMO for 18, 17-19 years. I’m on the Chair as well now and then, like you said, you know, if you don’t want to be here all night, don’t talk to anybody else while you’re in it, let’s just get on with the meeting and get out of there.

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: You know? But, obviously, if there’s some bits that we’ve got to grab on, it gets a little bit mouthy but at least, you can listen to everybody’s opinion then.

Interviewer: Right. So, how are decisions made during meetings? Is it sort of like you vote on issues or everyone has to agree?
Interviewee: Yeah. We have a vote.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Not everybody has to vote but we do it at least 6 or 7 of us agree to do something and then, go that way.

Interviewer: And how large is the TMO? How many people?
Interviewee: 12.

Interviewer: 12, okay. It makes sense. And so, how much time do you [give] to the TMO work per week or per month besides meetings?
Interviewee: Loads.

Interviewer: Loads?

Interviewee: Yeah. Because [04:18].

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, I help out with looking after the gardens and that. But recently, I don’t have to get involved so much in the TMO itself, not with the manager unless we’ve got problems. And then, I will. So, I don’t know. Obviously, during the summer, I’m out practically everyday. Well, I am out everyday actually because I water a lot of gardens because we’ve got quite big spaces and I water quite a few of the gardens so sometimes, I could be out 3-4 hours a day doing bits.

Interviewer: And within the TMO, how are responsibilities distributed sort of who does what type of thing? That makes sense?

Interviewee: Yeah. The…. Obviously, the managers has quite all of it, I suppose, most of it.

Interviewer: Yeah.
**Interviewee:** Chair, I do bits [05:21], people might come and talk to me and then, I’ll come to [the manager] and then, we try and solve problems out if there is any that way. We’ve got a secretary who has to write approval, minutes and things like that and he’ll get involved if we’ve got a bigger problem and we’ve also got a treasurer, they don’t do that much and then, I’m going to call it a normal committee but, do you know what I mean? Like they’re the rest of the committee, they will help if we need help. You know, we can call on them even though some, I’ve got quite a few of them who are at work but not everybody has got their own lives to get on with. If we have got a problem, we would certainly divide it amongst ourselves. If we want to do a fun day or something like that, we do it amongst us.

**Interviewer:** That makes sense. And how has your role changed over time? Or the things that you’ve done?

**Interviewee:** From the beginning… when we first started, because it was unknown and that it wasn’t too bad and it was getting the right manager come handy person in, that didn’t actually work out right and then, we had to look for another manager but I suppose over the 17 years, we have actually [07:00]. So, I don’t think we’ve done too bad.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. That makes sense. So, could you talk about the problem solving approach in the TMO? So, what happens when there are problems or disagreements either within the group or with the local council?

**Interviewee:** We will have… we’ve had a… actually, it concerns me as well. Me and one of the other managers that was here. We had a difference of opinion and he took it quite bad that it wasn’t a difference of opinion and I went to him, “I don’t understand why you can’t just take it as a difference of opinion. I’ve got a different opinion to what you’ve got and that’s it.” And he kind of get on and on and on that we have to go to a mediator to try and solve the problem and I just went, “But I still don’t understand that there’s a problem. It’s a difference of opinion, I can’t say that there’s a problem.” But obviously, I went to that and then, it sort of calmed down a little bit. We have had a tenant that ended up taking the TMO and the council to court so that was a [08:37]. We had to get together with the council and do that. But if we can do things on our own, then we’ll rather do them on our own than get the council involved. Obviously, there is things that you’ve got to get the council involved with.

**Interviewer:** Right. And is the mediator service within the TMO or is it sort of, do you go outside of the TMO?

**Interviewee:** We go outside.

**Interviewer:** Yeah?

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** That makes sense. And within the committee, are there certain people who are more influential because of certain skills that they have or experience they have or is everyone sort of equally…?

**Interviewee:** No, we’re all equal, it’s just that sometimes, people have got loud voices but that’s the thing, yeah. But I try and keep that down and let everybody, every single committee member have a say in what we’re doing, not just like, “Okay, you’ve got a loud voice,” but it doesn’t mean that the person sitting next to you hasn’t got an opinion as well so, I let them have their opinions at the same time. So, I try and keep a balance on that.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: And I think quite a few of the other chairs have done the same.

Interviewer: That makes sense. As part of your role, have you had an experience where you felt that nobody was listening to you whether that’s with the TMO and the council or the TMO and other tenants or within the TMO?

Interviewee: Yeah. Again, we do have a manager.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That experience. Is that kind of a rare event or…?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Right. So, the next questions that I have… right. So, we talked about what happens when there’s disagreement usually because there’s a vote. If there’s disagreement, that’s fine because it’s the majority…

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: … but on very rare occasions, it might go to a mediator or something else. So, these questions I have are related to the local authority. So, do you feel that tenants in the TMO and in the rest of the building are consulted by local authority about things that are happening in the neighborhood or on the estate?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: No?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: So, how would you describe the relationship between the local council and the TMO?

Interviewee: Oh, it’s hard. We’d like to know what’s going on on the estate and they don’t always tell us. They don’t tell us about new tenants that are coming in which I think is…

Interviewer: Oh really? That’s surprising.

Interviewee: Yeah. But that’s an ongoing thing and I just go, “Oh, does it really matter?” Well, yeah, it does matter because we’d like to know who’s moving in. I’m not saying why the other person moved out because that has got nothing to do with us but if we’re getting new tenants, we’d like to know about it not all of a sudden have a void and then, and then we can’t do the void because the council thinks it’s far too much money for us to do [11:48]. And then, if we have a void where [11:53] 2-3 weeks to get it sold but if the council has it, they can take up to 6.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah. But we’re still going to do the same work that they’re going to do.

Interviewer: But in less time.

Interviewee: In less time, yeah. So, now, when there’s a void, we just go, “No, you do it.”

Interviewer: And what will be the consequence if you weren’t to do it in time? If you…?
**Interviewee:** I suppose they will make a complaint about us but we can’t make the complaint about them.

**Interviewer:** About them, yes. Interesting. Yeah. So, that sounds quite one-sided.

**Interviewer:** Are there types of decisions which they do consult the TMO about and types so, there are types that they definitely do not and types that they do possibly but is there something they would consult you about?

**Interviewee:** They don’t actually… when they have to come and do the maintenance on the estate, they might tell us when they’re coming but they wouldn’t actually come in and say well, “this is what we’re going to do,” as far as I know anyway. “This is what we’re going to do on the estate, scaffolding is going up…” and then it just happens and we think, “Well, actually, we don’t need to complain at the moment, we don’t want all that scaffolding up,” but we can’t say that they can’t put it up.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah. And so, when you have disagreements with the local authority as a TMO, they always sort of win out in the end. Is that…?

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yeah?

**Interviewee:** Yeah. They do it. Yeah. If there’s anything on that… I’ve always had it in my head, if they want to do something and they’re not going to tell you about it, they do it anyway.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, they want to build on the estate at the moment. So, they invited us to a meeting to come and have a discussion about it but they’ve got all these drawings, so they’ve involved architects, they’ve spent a lot of money on it and then they go, “This is what we’re going to do,” and we go, “Actually, we don’t want you to do that.” And then, it’s, “you’ve got to understand that we’re all doing it,” and then, you know, you know that it’s going to go ahead because they’ve spent X amount of money on this but then they try and keep it quiet so that we don’t know about it to stop us making a complaint and going, “Sorry, we don’t want this.” And then, everything happens at the last minute, if you know what I mean.

**Interviewer:** Right. Yeah. That makes sense. And has the relationship been like this since the beginning or has…?

**Interviewee:** No.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So, then, would you describe it as a negative relationship or one that is sometimes positive, sometimes negative?

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yeah?

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** So, if you or another tenant expresses an issue to the local authority, just as tenants, what kind of response would you expect?

**Interviewee:** To the council?
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: See, I haven’t gotten any real dealings with them anymore now, not from my
[15:03].
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Other than that, they don’t. If I need any repairs, I come straight to the TMO office
and they do it.
Interviewer: Right. And that makes sense. Okay. So, you mentioned that you do, that the TMO
receives a budget from the council. Are you satisfied with that budget? Is it big enough?
Interviewee: At the moment, yeah. I think we’re coping with it.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: The only reason why it goes down is because more people become leaseholders.
So, we’ve only got the money for the tenants.
Interviewer: Interesting. But you take care of the communal spaces that leaseholders will also
use, right?
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Right. Okay.
Interviewee: And then, they get charged.
Interviewer: Okay. Oh, they get charged separately…
Interviewee: By the council.
Interviewer: … by the council.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Not this, the TMO doesn’t receive any…?
Interviewee: I don’t know. Hmm… that’s a [16:03] question. I’m not sure of that one.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: I think we must.
Interviewer: Okay. Is there ever any sort of difficulty or tension between leaseholders and
tenants in terms of them having maybe having different interests about like large scale repairs or
things like that?
Interviewee: I think when it comes to that, tenants are really concerned because we pay
differently. Leaseholders are off because they get charged in one lump sum and then, sometimes,
lease holders go but we have to pay for it and I go “yup, but so do tenants,” but tenants pay for it
over a weekly, over the week, if you know what I mean, like every week, it gets put on our rent
but if you have to pay for it in a lump sum, that’s not our fault you became a leaseholder.
Interviewer: Hmm.
Interviewee: So, there’s… sometimes, there’s a little bit of tension there. So, the more money
the TMO wants to spend on the estate once you to come out and you do the communals, that’s
when the lease holders get charged as well.
Interviewer: Right. Makes sense. And so, you’ve lived here for a very long time. Has the neighborhood changed in anyway?

Interviewee: Oh, absolutely.

Interviewer: Has that affected your experience in your TMO work in any way as well?

Interviewee: We’re not as much as a community as we was before because now, we don’t know who’s moving in and who’s going, and things like that as well. That makes it change so now, the building work has made everything change as well.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Interviewee: And there’s just buildings everywhere.

Interviewer: Yeah. Is there a lot of turnover then? Kind of people who don’t put roots?

Interviewee: There wasn’t at one time and up until a little while ago, maybe about 10 years and then you go… you know, some of us have been here for maybe 50 years and a few of them have now gone. But, you know, they’ve died and then, you get other people coming in but you don’t know them like you did before…

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Like when I first moved around here, I sort of knew everyone and everyone knew who I was and if we were playing up and, you know, and you throw back and that but you don’t… I mean, even I don’t know everybody that lives in here anymore like I used to.

Interviewer: Does that affect like events that the TMO does? Fund days or sort of…

Interviewee: Yeah. They don’t want to come out.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: People just… I want to join in.

Interviewer: So, is it a greater struggle overall to get more people involved in the TMO or younger people or certain groups of people…?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Right. So, do you feel that tenants who are not involved in the TMO have a voice when it comes to their flats?

Interviewee: I hope so. Yeah. I’d like to think they have. Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think there might be some factors that limit these sort of new tenants or even older tenants that are here from getting involved in any way?

Interviewee: No. We’ve asked tenants to get involved. Some of them just don’t bother, some of them have got really busy lives…

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Some of them actually, some of the new one, new people, that come in might want to come down and have a see at what it is but we might only meet them once a year at the AGM or summit like that. They might be interested in it then. We would like to find out how we can get them more involved but other than keep putting newsletters in their door knots and, you
know, a couple of weeks ago, we had a day trip but to be honest with you, there was only like 6…

Interviewer: People?

Interviewee: 6 tenants that wanted to come. So, we ended up taking up the two lots of families.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: You know? Because we ordered this coach and now, we didn’t want it to join in.

Interviewer: Join in, yeah.

Interviewee: Which is a shame, you know, because we had a lovely day. But in the end, I just said that, you know, if you’ve got this big coach in there, can we just fill it up? So, we just invited outsiders to come along as well because people didn’t want to get involved in it.

Interviewer: And that’s changed over time? Like maybe 10 years ago, it would have been filled up?

Interviewee: Yeah. It would have been different, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. And… Okay. So, do you think that more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee: Yeah. Even leaseholders. Anybody that lives here like residents.

Interviewer: In general, yeah.

Interviewee: I’d love for every single flat that we’ve got here to have at least one person come out of that flat to the AGM or come out and let us know what’s happening. Don’t sit in your house and keep things bottled up. Come and tell us what needs to be done and I think that way, it’s a lot easier rather than wait for it to become this massive big problem because then, when you’ve got this big problem, you get upset, you get really upset about it and then, it just becomes one big thing that’s going to get blown out of proportion whereas if you can come out before that, you know, even if they didn’t like us, I don’t think, you know, we don’t know what you’re doing, come and tell us and let us know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: You know? Don’t just sit behind closed door and not let us know because if we don’t know that we’re upsetting you, there’s nothing that we can do about it.

Interviewer: Hmm. And you mentioned—so, at the general meet, Annual General Meeting, roughly, what percentage of fraction of tenants and residents or lease holders show up?

Interviewee: They could be… some, I think the latest one, we had about 20.

Interviewer: And how many in total?

Interviewee: Well, no, that’s it.

Interviewer: Oh, I mean how many residents?

Interviewee: Oh, we’ve got 76 flats so, 1-60 are big family flats and they’ve want to sort of [22:36]. So… but we’ve got like 60 flats down there that’s all families that could have up to 7 people living in there.
Interviewer: Right. And so, the 20 people that showed up, is that including the committee members?
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: Okay. Okay.
Interviewee: So, you might have 10 committee members or 12 committee members and then, just like…
Interviewer: Just 8 other… Yeah. That makes sense. So, you mentioned that the TMO is in a good financial situation. Has that always been the case or has that cha—?
Interviewee: Yeah. We always have been, yeah.
Interviewer: Okay. Always been strong. How do you receive feedback from other tenants or communicate with them?
Interviewee: We send out newsletters and every five years, we have to send out a survey to ask them whether or not they like what we’re doing, dislike what we’re doing. So, after five years, we do it because you have to. It’s in the rules, you have to do that. But every now and again, we might, say, “Oh, should we do our own one and go around and find out or do a part, a secret ballot or whatever,” to try and find out.
Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense as well. And do you have any comments on the future of tenant participation or resident participation more generally? Or where you see it going forward?
Interviewee: I’m hoping that we will, I think quite a few of the people in [24:12] because there’s quite a few TMOs in [24:14].
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: I don’t think they will give up that easily so, I’m hoping that it won’t.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: But then, on the other side, you’ve got the [24:25] bit but to me, that wasn’t a proper TMO.
Interviewer: As [24:30] is not one of the…
Interviewee: The fire, you know the big fire?
Interviewee: To me, that wasn’t a proper TMO, if you know…
Interviewer: It wasn’t actually.
Interviewee: No.
Interviewer: It had the name but it was at arms length.
Interviewee: And I think that’s why people might think, “Oh, you’re a TMO, oh, you’re not going to listen to it.” Now, actually, they want…
Interviewer: They want a TMO.
Interviewee: Yeah. It was too many of the councils that were involved in it. Which I think is a bit sad because it gives TMOs…
Interviewer: TMOs a bad name?
Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I mean, yeah, I know that TMO Kensington and Chelsea TMO was actually only [...], so, it was not a by TMO structure and it also managed, I think, like ten times as many people] as TMOs, yeah. But I definitely have talked to other people who can’t make that or don’t make that distinction or don’t know that, which is unfortunate. So, you’ve lived in this housing for a very long time. Do you have any comments as well on sort is the future of social housing as where you see it going, where you see tenant involvement going in general rather than just for…?

Interviewee: I do. Me and my son are living in the free bedroom and I took that over from my mom in ’87 but now, he can’t get anywhere to live that he could afford so, he’s living with me. So, the next thing, I don’t want to leave my house but if they do build on here, I’m going to then give them back my free bedroom only if they will give me and my son one each so he’s got somewhere to live if anything happens to me because at the moment he’s got… If I was to go tomorrow, he’s got nowhere to live.

Interviewer: Because he’s not… he doesn’t have it under his name? That kind of thing.
Interviewee: Yeah and I can’t put it in his name.
Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And so, I’ve got to leave a flat that I’ve lived in 50 years just so my boy could get somewhere at a rent that he could afford.

Interviewer: That is very difficult. I know.

Interviewee: It is. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Especially since a lot of so many neighborhoods in [the city] have changed so much over the last decade or two. It’s much more expensive.

Interviewee: Yeah. And maybe because I don’t want to live [on] the estate neither.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: But also if they don’t do work, if I know that they’re not going to do the work by next year, then I’m going to have to go somewhere else because it’s not going to be fair on him to have nowhere to live. The last bet is to not… I don’t want my dying wishes to turn over and say to him, “I’m really sorry that you couldn’t get somewhere to live.” You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I don’t want that on my conscience. So. But as I said, I also don’t want to move but as long as I build on him and I can get one of those then, I’d say, I don’t want to move on, I want one of those,” because I think the newer flats that they’re building now are tiny boxes.

Interviewer: Yeah. Much smaller.

Interviewee: They’re a lot smaller because they’ve got to cram in a lot…

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: … and they’d be paper thin. I’m with bricks and wall [27:57] bricks and wall by then whereas my son probably would be alright with the new build, you know, because I wouldn’t.

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense. Do you have any comments or questions for me or anything else you want to add or elaborate on?

Interviewee: No, I don’t actually. No.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee: Mhmm-mmm.

Interviewer: Okay. Great. That’s it.

——

Interviewee: [Could you] say that again

Interviewer: Yes so as you've mentioned before I’ll repeat that so I haven't recorded that TMOs are taken more seriously by the council.

Interviewee: TRAs.

Interviewer: TRAs are taken more seriously.

Interviewee: In my opinion TRAs are taken more.

Interviewer: Seriously?

Interviewee: Seriously, more than the TMOs.

Interviewer: Even though the TMOs have more money and.

Interviewee: Because the TRAs are hanging on to the council if you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. Yeah the remind them.

Interviewee: They are the council's pillow yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, that's really interesting. Okay

Interviewee: Yeah so TRA people would also get a lot more information.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting okay.

Interviewee: Yeah okay. I need to bring this up into meetings.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And I know that because

Interviewer: Yeah I imagine. Okay, great...

--

Interviewer: Is there a particular reason why a TMO was more effective for what, for the estate than a TRA in your opinion?

Interviewee: Yeah because we get the income as a TMO and as a TRA you just get like a little bit of pocket money so to say.

Interviewer: Yeah for events or something—
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: Yes, that makes sense. Okay that was it.
Interviewee: Okay.
Interviewer: This was.

Appendix 15: TMO Interviewee “Wendy” Transcript

Interviewer: How did you get involved with the TMO and when did you decide to get involved?
Wendy: I’ve lived here for about 17 years.
Interviewer: Okay.
Wendy: And when I moved, there was already the TMO, previous to [that] I lived in a council flat, that was run by the council, I knew straight away that I wanted to help the environment that I lived in and I wanted to make things better for people,
Interviewer: Right.
Wendy: And for myself. I’m a leaseholder.
Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.
Wendy: So, everything that we spend on there, I have to pay a share of.
Interviewer: Yes.
Wendy: And I think that puts a lot of people off, but I was interested, I like being in a community, I like the idea of us running our own estate.
Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.
Wendy: I think we can do it cheaper and I think we can do it better.
Interviewer: Than the council can.
Wendy: Than the council can do it, yeah.
Interviewer: Have you--Were you involved in any type of organizing or management before?
Wendy: Yeah, I am originally from [Country M] and I’m with a charity called [Country M Organization] and I’ve been the chair for about, on and off, 20 odd years, and that again was integrating my culture with where I live now and having an understanding of how I lived and how I live now. So I was really interested, and about, I’m very English, my parents are both from [Country M] and they’re very fair minded, they’re like okay, we live in England so we need to speak English, this is where your life’s going to be, you need to help yourself, but also they always gave us a form of identifying ourselves, we’re [from Country M], but we live in Britain, we’ve got two cultures that we’ve embraced but doesn’t mean everybody else does.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Wendy: So that’s what I’ve done for many years and I’m still doing that now.
Interviewer: And overall do you enjoy your involvement in the TMO are there some challenges as well?
Wendy: Lots of challenges but I love it. I love the idea of the community helping each other and also the challenges that come along, it’s easy to pass on to the council because you don’t want to deal with it, but I think we’re more personal. You know, if a neighbour has got a problem we generally want to help or if someone is hindering other people, we generally want to say, okay hold on, let’s talk about this, let’s see how we can make it better. I think I’ve always been a child like that and as I’ve grown up, I know everybody.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: Because I, I don’t, I want to say look I’m about, I’m friendly, you can say hello, I can help you or you can help me, so yeah, I love every minute of it.

Interviewer: That’s great, can you tell me a bit about the TMO in terms of how meetings function, how often they occur, how decisions are made?

Wendy: Okay.

Interviewer: In general.

Wendy: So, it’s a committee of a people, a body of people. Every 6 weeks we have meetings, we have agendas of what’s going on and what we need to do and any problems that there is, or maybe not problems or making it nicer, and everything we do has to be agreed by the board.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: So not one person can say, okay we’ll do this. Recently I wanted a shed, because I wanted to cultivate, I wanted to do seeds and not keep buying plants, and helping other estates, but I knew I had to go through the board and I had to tell them why I needed that, so, and I love that idea that we’re all together and we’re all helping each other. So generally, that’s how it happens, we’ve got unpaid staff, or two actually, which is our manager [G], fantastic guy.

Interviewer: He is.

Wendy: He’s worked for the council, so he knows lots of what’s going on, where maybe we don’t know the ins and outs of it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: So yeah and there is [N] that works around the estate, he’s self employed actually, we don’t employ him, and we have one cleaner. But it’s a brilliant way to live, if you live on an estate, because what happens is, instead of being isolated, if you have friendly face like in the committee--

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: And it doesn’t matter if I’ve never seen you, but if you’re walking around I will say hello, my name is Wendy, I’m on the committee, we’re having a meeting, not everyone comes but they know there’s somewhere to go if they need something.

Interviewer: Yes.

Wendy: So that’s generally how it works.

Interviewer: That makes sense and how does decision making happen in the TMO, is it like a majority vote, consensus based or?
Wendy: It’s always a majority vote but if there is a problem we try to sort it out as quickly as we can but that doesn’t mean it’s going to happen in one meeting, there’s a lot of discussion about how we should deal with the situation, if we’re dealing with it correctly. So, generally, if something is, say for example we want a cheaper gardener, just say we have gardeners that do come in the area, not everyone will agree because not everyone is dealing with the garden.

Interviewer: Yes.

Wendy: Not everyone knows about plants, so there’s always a long discussion if it’s not important and then we come to a decision and that’s voted, so you have to make the case really clear to the other board members, what you’re saying and why you think it would be good or bad or

Interviewer: Right.

Wendy: So, generally it’s by voting.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: After discussion.

Interviewer: And when you have disagreements, would you then sort of keep discussing it or working on it until you come to a compromise or—what happens when there are disagreements?

Wendy: Well, in my time, I’ve been on the board, there has been lots of disagreements and what we tend to do is talk about it for as long as it takes for everyone to understand what is really happening, because people have preconceptions of what’s happening.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: And when you do that, it gets very awkward, but generally we keep talking until we come to some agreement and if we don’t, then we take the majority of people because otherwise you’d never get to the end of it and would just carry on and that’s worked really well for us.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense, and could you tell me a bit about your specific role on, or what you have done in particular over your time—

Wendy: Okay, so I’ve been the chair and I’ve been the secretary and I’ve been the treasurer, so I’ve been a few things, but mostly the chair. I’ve done things like, we’ve got an upcycling room, it was a room that I thought was being misused, and we’ve, this day and time, and recycling. I thought you know what, there’s lots of people, we don’t have money, we shouldn’t be throwing things but what if we could upcycle them.

Interviewer: That would be cool.

Wendy: So, we did that, one of my first role as a chair, was a really big dramatic argument between the leaseholder and the committee and a council tenants who all lived, one and two, they’re not there anymore, and it was about them using the communal space as their own space, as their own private space.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: And no one used it, because everyone thought it belonged to these two occupants, they put decking up there, without our permission, and it was just horrendous, and I think living in the city, you need to have as much space as you can, for everyone.
Interviewer: Yes.
Wendy: Not the few, so some of the garden runs at the back of flats, but they're still communal areas.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Wendy: So, one of my things was, it was horrendous, so I became the chair and we got involved with this. One was a leaseholder, and one was a council tenant, we had many meetings. It went to court at the end because the guy didn't agree that, you know, everyone should use it and for some reason, oh, what happen is we put a partition between the barbecue area, thinking that we were going to give him some privacy and he hated it and said okay, you can’t do that, this went on for about 2 years, so that was a really intensive—and because he wouldn’t agree with the council or us, it eventually went to court and he’d lost, and he’d lost because part of the land was communal land, and that was horrendous, and the council tenants no longer lives here. I think because, most of the tenant didn't know this part of land was a communal land, she then used it as her private garden, and it was huge, so she had chairs, she had rocking things and she landscaped the garden. So, people would go around there and go oh, well, that's not communal. So that was really upsetting, not for us, for her because she had spent so much money.
Interviewer: Time, yeah.
Wendy: And time, but I still thought it was wrong.
Interviewer: Yeah
Wendy: And only if she had said to the council, no one is doing this bit of gardening, then she would have had some type of right about doing the garden, but she had taken it upon herself and then spent a lot of money and then she was getting annoyed because it was like, okay but this is communal land.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Wendy: Things that you've done, you shouldn't be like. So that was really horrendous and then you’re sort of in the middle because you’re thinking, look this is a lovely space. Look what they've done, but then you're looking at the other tenants that should have been able to use that, for years and years and we’re talking about 8, 9 years people thought these were gardens of these tenants, so that was a really—and that went on for a long time, so that was horrendous when I first—I try and find out what people want from this estate.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Wendy: You know, we’ve got allotment for the first couple of years, it wasn't working properly and then I started speaking to people individually, and saying, look, we've got this this amazing land, why don't you try it? And then, I grew lots of things and then gave it to people and said—
Interviewer: Yeah.
Wendy: And they go yeah, I grew that, I grew that myself, so there's lots of things, but I always try and do it for the community, I always try and do it.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Wendy: Not for everyone, and I try and get the word out, so that's my involvement in it and I'm still doing that now.

Interviewer: Alright, I'll ask two more quick questions.

Wendy: Yeah.

Interviewer: The first one is, how would you describe the relationship between the TMO and the local council?

Wendy: I would--Well, I think it's as good as it could get.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: I don't think they do things that they should be doing, I don't think we get the support that we should be doing. I don't think, I just don't think, I just think they’re horrendous to be honest.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: I just think, oh my God, first of all, I think they’re far too expensive for what they do, and we don't have any say in it and when they do it, it’s rubbish.

Interviewer: They don't, do they consult about things that they do?

Wendy: Not really.

Interviewer: Not really?

Wendy: I think when there is big, major project they do, but you already know that's in the pipeline. Well, I do because every consulting thing that I've been to, they’re like oh no, no, no, we're just talking to you then two years down the line, they're doing it, so I'm very negative about them and I think they waste a lot of money where I think the TMO, because you've got a set budget, not that the council haven’t.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: But we have a set budget.

Interviewer: The chair you know and—

Wendy: Yeah and we use it very well and compared to what their prices and what our price is, it’s just horrendous, no I don’t really think they’re—

Interviewer: Effective.

Wendy: No.

Interviewer: And my last question was, do you have any comments on the future of resident participation in this estate, and also in general?

Wendy: I think I would say 89% of people here are really happy with the TMO., I think the rest don't understand how the TMO works or for some reason they've not been able to get what they wanted from the TMO and then there's a bit of grief. How would It run? Well, here it’s 50% leaseholders.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: Which is horrendous, as we don't have enough space, and I'm guilty, because I'm a [leaseholder] and I didn't have a pension, so I bought my flat, and I say “oh I’m this Labour girl”, but really, I feel a bit embarrassed about that but I did buy it, I think in the future, I don’t know
what the future—The problem is, the younger generation, whether they don’t want to do it,
because they’re scared, they're worried, because you know, you've got to make an important
decision, whether they don't want to do it, whether they don't have time to do it, they're not
taking part and that worries me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: What I think will happen is lease holders will take over.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: Most of the lease holders, now they are people that never lived on the estate, but they've
moved on the estate, either from foreign land or they have money because there’s no way they
can buy this flat, unless like, and I think they will then deal with it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: I don't think it will be the council tenant. I don't think they're interested, because of
whatever reason.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: And I think that's probably, and that's really a sad thing to say, because we keep trying
to get young people and we do, but not enough. We do, and mostly we get people, leaseholders
that have moved in, Americans with other American, we’ve had Spanish, we’ve had French.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: They’re all here and they’re like okay, you’re spending my money, I’m going to come
and see what you’re doing and they’re really happy.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: What you’re doing, but then they’re not neighbourly like me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: And they’ve got other agendas.

Interviewer: With their flat and—

Wendy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Wendy: Hopefully, I don’t know, I don’t see the TMO going on unless something drastic change.
We go on training and I’m always trying to find a way of getting youngs to, you know young
people., I’m talking young, I’m talking 14 to 16.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Wendy: come in, they say they want to do something, I want to know how you want to do it, I
want to know how much it is and I want you to do it and I think that is the sort of training point
that they need to start and realize hold on.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Wendy: So, we want to go to the seaside, we need a quote, we need that day, we need, do you
know what I mean? It needs to be something simple that they can start and finish and realize,
well actually it's not that hard, so I don't know, but I don't really see, I think once the old tenants
go, I don't really see a future for the TMO, which is really upsetting.
Interviewer: Right. Okay, that's it for our –
Wendy: Is it [unclear audio 17:37]
Interviewer: Yeah, do you have any comments or anything else you want to add to the—
Wendy: Not really, I think I've just about said all because I just, I am upset to see what I just said, how the TMO would exist because I think they’re the most innovated things going on now.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Wendy: And I think they genuinely help.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Wendy: You know, we used to have things called voids, where we would nominate someone on the council list.
Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.
Wendy: Well they stop that because they don’t need to do it, so I don’t know, yeah.
Interviewer: Great.
Interviewee: Cool.

Appendix 16: TMO Interviewee “Felix” Transcript

Interviewer: So, could you tell me why you decided to join the TMO and how you got involved?
Interviewee: So, we originally setup, sorry, we originally joined the TRA, Tenant-Residents Association, when we moved to the estate in 2006. I think we joined in 2007, maybe, and we got involved because we wanted to find out more about where we lived and meet some of the neighbors…
Interviewer: Cool.
Interviewee: … and when we joined, the chair of the TRA had been there for many many years, an elderly pensioner, and he moved off the estate within about 18 months…
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: … but he, he worked really hard but he basically did everything and he was quite controlling. And I think over many years, he probably put people off trying to be involved. So, when he left, it was quite a good thing in a way because then, around the time when we moved on to the estate, a number of other people had moved on and they also joined the TRA wanting to get involved, find out about their community. And, yeah. I think back then, led to a few years, maybe 2007-2010, when we were doing the TRA, doing fun days but we were also… and we got to know all the council quite well so, the council was quite supportive but there was a lot of concern on the estate about the poor quality of the repairs and particularly, the response, it was all dealt with by a call center and they were very unhappy, a lot of residents were unhappy with that and I think we were talking to the council around that time and they said, “Have you thought about how you could change that?” And we said, “No, what are the options?” And we talked about service level agreements and we talked about TMOs and after probably about a year or
two, we eventually, 2012, started with TMO. But before we did that, we did—we knocked on every door on the estate, that’s 360 properties to find out, did a questionnaire, to find out what the concerns were of the residents from the TRA. So, the TRA collated all these information and around the same time that the council helped us get funding, I think from DCLG, it’s for an independent tenant liaison adviser. So, we worked with them and then, that then led to us looking at options and then, that led to the TMO, creating a TMO. So, it was about, I don’t know, it was active board of about 10 or 12 people on the TRA at the time and yeah, we looked at all the options and we decided TMO was the way to do it. So, I mean, I could go on. Do you want me to go on?

**Interviewer**: You can go on, yes. And I can ask you more questions as they come up but all this is useful so, if you have… yeah.

**Interviewee**: So, why we got involved was because we wanted to find out about all of the committee and that then led to that process, really. And I’ve been Chair of the TMO since it set up in 2012 until autumn 2017, I stepped down and there’s, I’m now the vice chair and I’m hoping to step down fully this year from the board because I don’t want to be there forever.

**Interviewer**: Right. So, you mentioned that there was like a call Centre or sort of like if a tenant had a complaint, they’d call someone and it was sort of lost in that way. Was that the main factor for converting the TRA into TMO or sort of moving towards the TMO agreement?

**Interviewee**: I think that was a big part of it. General dissatisfaction that residents weren’t being listened to and I probably didn’t personally have it so bad as others because I’m a leaseholder.

**Interviewer**: Right. Yeah.

**Interviewee**: So, I do occasionally require the council to fix something, maybe the heating system, because that’s common for everybody but generally speaking, if there’s a repair in my property, I’d like to sort it out myself. But for a lot of residents, you know, it’s not the case.

**Interviewer**: Right. Great, I have to remember. So, are you involved with any other types of organizing or management work whether in your normal working life or outside the chair?

**Interviewee**: Yeah. Managing, I mean, I suppose I’m a managing director of an architectural business so, yeah, in that sense, yeah. What else? I suppose I… I don’t manage anything else… I’m involved in other things but I don’t manage other things. Yep.

**Interviewer**: Overall, have you enjoyed your involvement in the TMO and before that, the TRA or…?

**Interviewee**: Yeah. I have. It’s been challenging at times. I think the difficulties have been mostly to do with some of the personalities, not just on the board but also staff. Now, we employ people. We had quite a traumatic process of, after we went live, we started the TMO in 2012, we went live in 2015 and we had to suspend our manager within a year.

**Interviewer**: Oh goodness!

**Interviewee**: And carry out official investigation with independent body and in the end, he resigned and we’ve now got an excellent manager and no problems.

**Interviewer**: Okay, that’s great.
Interviewee: No major problems but yeah.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate a bit on what the issue was generally, if you’re comfortable sharing?

Interviewee: Of that particular issue…

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I think it was just the manager was not really up to the job.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: And we, through it, a proper process for interviewing with the selection process, interviewed—advertised them interviewed. The whole thing was scrutinized by the council but ultimately, the person we employed was… he didn’t work as a team. He didn’t work well with the council, to put it mildly, and he didn’t lead his team very well and he didn’t really have to right skills. So, you know these things are hindsight.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, we could talk a little bit more about the TMO itself and its structure. I was wondering how meetings function and how often they occur?

Interviewee: Our meetings are monthly…

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: … of the board, the full board, and then, we have some committee meetings as well. So, we have the finance subcommittee, HR subcommittee, Repairs & Maintenance subcommittee. They’re the three main ones and then, we had other ones that we setup on an ad hoc basis or ones that are a little bit less formal. So, we have a garden subcommittee because of what we call the [Garden Committee], which is managed by residents, we fundraise for that, so we typically get maybe five or ten thousand pounds a year, we get community gardeners to help us with that, which we employ part-time. We managed to get money, we got about £30,000 funding to create a community room on the estate, it was derelict space on the estate so, we’ve got that now. So, we have a committee that manages that. So, they have lots of activities that we had lots of refunding so, they do yoga and women’s events, men’s events, Zumba, that sort of thing. All sorts of activities. IT classes, and then something called [Advising City X], which is like Citizens’ Advice Bureau. So, they come in and help people on monthly basis with their issues. So, yeah. They’re the committees. So, the committees meet, the main board meets monthly and the subcommittees meet, some of them meet monthly, some of them meet maybe quarterly.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. And could you tell me a bit about how decisions are made at board meetings and also committee meetings? In the sense of is it sort of like if someone presents an issue or an idea, is it a majority vote or is it consensus or…?

Interviewee: It’s a majority vote and the chair has the casting vote. So, we have articles, associations or a community, community interest company. So, we have a proper structure and
numerous policies and procedures that we have to follow but yeah, it’s majority vote. So, 15 members, maximum of 15 members on the board at any one time and at the moment, I think we have about 13 on the board.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: So. And they are a mix of tenants and leaseholders, probably more lease holders than I would like personally because the mix of residents on the estate is about two-thirds tenants, one-third lease holder.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: And actually, it’s the board, it’s probably in reverse of that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: But what we’ve always tried to do is to make sure people see themselves as residents first and foremost. So, it’s not the, you know… Some, I think some TMOs in the past have, or even now, probably, I think, become dominated by leaseholders then they have their own interests sometimes, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They just want to keep their service charge low sometimes, you know, and that sort of thing whereas, we’re interested in helping the state of services on the estate as well. So.

Interviewer: Right. Do you think there’s any particular reason why tenants are less involved than leaseholders? Renting tenants?

Interviewee: Why they’re less involved...I think probably we shouldn’t underestimate how many skills are involved in being on the board and also the confidence of people. So… and also, many of the tenants on the estates, they have families and are not able to attend meetings in the evening so, we recognize that but I think probably, the biggest issue is confidence and we always try to encourage tenants particularly to get involved and we’ve had some success recently but… and we need to have a mentoring scheme so when new members on the board come on the board, then we’ll partner them with somebody who’s been on the board for a few years and they’ll get an induction when they join but, yeah. I think that’s probably the biggest barrier.

Interviewer: Right. So, how much time do you personally dedicate to this position within a week or a month or a year?

Interviewee: It varies enormously. Basically, when we had to suspend that manager, the first manager we had, I was using a huge amount of my time. I had to take time off work to do it, I had to spend a lot of time off-seat when initially recruiting the original manager and then, advertising again and recruiting the new manager, holding the interviews. So, at that time, I was probably spending two days a week for a couple of months dealing with the fall out of all of that because I’m the, at the time, I was the chair and I was the line manager of the manager, TMO manager, and I did appraisals, the whole thing. And when, the whistle blowing, we had a whistle blowing event basically with one of the officers, employees, who raised concerns and he came to me and then, that led to the investigation. So, at the time, it was probably two days a week. Right
now, we’ve got very good manager, I’m probably spending about an hour a week, almost. You know?

**Interviewer:** Right. Yeah.

**Interviewee:** So, it varies enormously depending on the situation.

**Interviewer:** So, you mentioned that sometimes, the interests of tenants and leaseholders are different. Could you elaborate a bit on that?

**Interviewee:** I think, I mean, traditionally, I guess, lease holders might be mainly concerned about their service charge but I think we try to play that down, to be honest, and we try not to see a difference but, I think there’s… how can you say it? I don’t think there’s a huge difference on our estate, to be honest, because we really try and prevent that happening but I suppose the financial aspect is the main thing. We’ve never had, in the 10-12 years that I’ve lived on the estate, any major works carried out…

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** … really major works. We’ve had some fire safety works but nothing much. And I think we probably will have some major works in the next 5 years and that will be a good test because, although the TMO don’t carry out, the council will be carrying it out, we will be the statutory consultee and I think, obviously, lease holders will be concerned about it much more so than tenants. So, yeah. It comes down to the money really. It’s the main thing. Yeah. I think education is the big background difference, to be honest, with some of the lease holders. You’ve got very… because of where we are, you know, Zone II in [City X], it’s a lot of people on the border, graduates and lease holders typically. Oh, they’re not all, the tenants as well, but typically the lease holders are graduates, maybe.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. That makes sense. So, you mentioned there was 13 people on the board right?

**Interviewee:** Mhmm. Roughly. Not exactly.

**Interviewer:** Could you talk about, without going into too much detail, just sort of what the different responsibilities of people are?

**Interviewee:** Yeah. So, we have the officer roles, sort of the Chair, the Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, they are the ones we have to have. We’ve actually split the secretary role into the minute secretary and the membership secretary. We also have a Vice Treasurer as well and then, we have people who have agreed to be a Chair of the subcommittees. So, we have HR subcommittee, the Chair of that subcommittee, [16:04], he’s very experienced in HR and he’s lived on the estate many years. We’ve got somebody who’s Chair of the Garden subcommittee, yeah. So, the treasurer tends to be the Chair of the finance subcommittee and the Repairs & Maintenance has its Chair of that committee as well. So, yeah. And they basically produce notes, brief minutes of their meetings and they get reported at every board meeting if there’s any issue that the board needs to decide on. So, yeah.
Interviewer: That makes sense. And did you want to go into detail about your specific role? In terms of, you mentioned you had a lot of responsibilities when there was a lot of issues with this manager but if you want to elaborate a little bit on that…

Interviewer: So, I’m the… well, when I was the Chair, and even now as the Vice Chair, sort of the new Chair, I’m helping sort of mentor him a little bit as I hand over so, I will step down at the end of this year, whatever happens. But when I was the Chair, I was officially the Line Manager for the estate manager. So, the estate manager is responsible for 6 members of staff. He has a housing officer, Repairs & Maintenance Officer, a finance officer and a senior caretaker and then, two caretakers. So, that’s 6. And so, he’s responsible for them. He line manages them and then, I line manage him or I did. And so, I have an appraisal a year, one appraisal a year with a 6-months interim appraisal and then one-to-one meetings in between if there’s any issues.

When we had the first manager, I had lots of meetings because of lots of issues now, much less so. Now, it’s usually just the appraisals and I capture with them occasionally and he tends to come to me or the Chair for key decisions that can be dealt with as a delegated matter that doesn’t need to go to the board.

Interviewer: Right. Right. So, did you— did someone invite you to apply for this or to volunteer for this role or did you sort of volunteer yourself?

Interviewee: I can’t remember, to be honest. It was a long time ago. I was on the TRA, I wasn’t the Chair of the TRA but the people, there was two joint chairs of the TRA at the time and they wanted to step down or do different roles and I sort of, I think people volunteered me and I said, “Okay, I’ll do it.” And that was it. Yeah. It was probably about 3 or 4 key people at the time helping set up the TMO so, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Now, when you’re all together and, as a committee and you’re sort of making decisions about problems that are coming up, you mentioned it was a majority vote on some of the issues. But I’m just wondering how you come up with the solutions during those meetings whether that’s collaborative or is it sort of people with the expertise come up with the solutions and then, people vote on it or…?

Interviewee: Well, I suppose we’re led by, none of us are housing professionals.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, we are led by the guidance from our estate manager and his team for housing matters but not all the decisions that get dealt with by the board are housing matters so, obviously, there’s confidentiality. On the housing matters, we wouldn’t know, for instance, about individual details or individual tenants, that’s not our responsibility. But yeah. For housing matters, we get led by them and their guidance but always. And then, for other things, say events we’re organizing, then it’s collaborative really and it’s very rare that we have to have a majority decision that’s close. I think we’ve had one or two that recently have been close but mostly, it’s pretty obvious that everyone usually agrees if it’s a clear solution, you know. We just do it.

Interviewer: And what happens when there are disagreements among members in the committee? If that happens.
Interviewee: There have been one or two disagreements where… one in particular where it was quite personal attacks and I had to stop the meeting. This was about 2 years ago and it was at the time that we had, we were all without a manager, we’d suspended the manager, it was quite frilled and I had to suspend the meeting at that point and ask those two people just to stop talking, shouting really, and then, I decided to speak to them separately later, which I did. Within a week, I went to see them and they later apologized to each other. So, that was, I dealt with. That was a personal sort of situation. Where sometimes people disagree—people accept the majority vote, you know, and so, I can’t think of one recently. We’re setting up a DIY class for residents on the estate so, we’ve got some spare garages, we’ve raised some money, we’ve got these garages set aside and one of its our caretakers, caretakers doing the DIY classes and there was a bit of disagreement as to whether or not we should pay somebody to do this separately or we should use the caretaker and in the end, we decided we could use the caretaker and it was a— Yeah. The people who got outvoted accepted it. It was, I don’t know what their decision was, maybe it was 5 votes to 7 or something like that. It was close ish but it wasn’t… it was a decision.

Interviewer: Right. Great. So, are there people who are more influential in the committee or, I was going to ask this as well, do you have general meetings where tenants are invited?

Interviewee: Yeah. We’re obliged to have 3 general meetings a year. One of which could be AGM. So, we generally hold the AGM in October, September-October time, and then a general meeting usually in February and then one in June or July.

Interviewer: Okay. And in sort of your history being involved with the TRA and then later, the TMO, you mentioned there was a Chair that was sort of kind of influential in a way that was off-putting…

Interviewee: Yeah. When I first joined…

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: … to be honest. And he left within 18 months of me moving into the estate. So, I think I’m sort of giving this a little bit secondhand, to be honest.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: But people who lived on the estate longer than me said that he was a nice guy but he was very much of the view that it was his way or no way, you know?

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So.

Interviewer: And have there been whether at general meetings among tenants or lease holders that are to the committee or within the committee sort of like very dominant personalities or sort of more influential people who sort of what they say has more weight or kind of thing?

Interviewee: I think the board meeting, the board members generally, at a general meeting, we might have typically say 30 people at General Meeting and we offer, you know, we have food, we have offer crèche facilities or pay for child. So, we really try to encourage people who are, wouldn’t normally make it to a meeting to come. So, we get about 30 people or so. And
occasionally, if there’s a real big issue on the estate that people are concerned about then, it can become a bit heated. So, maybe a couple of years ago, we had a lot of rough sleeping on the estate, we had drug use, we still have drug use but particularly bad rough sleeping issues and antisocial behavior and people, the residents who are most affected by it were quite vocal about it. And from that, we set up a subcommittee looking at security on the estate so, we now have the police coming in on a regular basis. They’re safe and they’re both teams so, we meet with them, the subcommittee meets with them and we’re looking at options for improving security at parts of the estate. But yeah, it was difficult to those particular meeting because, you know, one or two people try to dominate the meeting and you just got to try and stop them dominating and do whatever. Leave answers as much as you can there and then and then sort of say, “I can get out of that conversation with you out of the meeting,” but that’s quite hard to handle and those sorts of skills, I suppose, I’ve benefited from being a Chair of it but also, you know, being a director of the business, I have to deal with different opinions but actually, this isn’t more challenging than being a director of the business because as a director of a business, all my colleagues are graduates and they’re all professional, they’re on the same page and they don’t take it so personally whereas this is actually more challenging. It’s a real skill to be able to have had to develop sort of and not with any training. And for anyone setting up a TMO or doing a TRA, it’s probably one of the hardest things to learn and I’ve kind of learnt it as I went along then. I’ve not always done it properly well but yeah, you get better at it.

Interviewer: And is it a bit of a challenge, I guess then, to be living with the same people that are coming with their issues to you and may disagree with how you handle them?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah. But I generally try to get on with everybody and I don’t pretend and I don’t want to be dealing with the individual housing issues because it’s not my job, I’m—I have a resident like them and I always remind them of that. In fact, the first few years, because even now to be honest, when we do like fun days, we tell people. Well, the first few years, we did it. People couldn’t understand why we were doing it and they assumed that we worked for the council and yeah, that was quite funny. And when you said, “[27:45] resident, I live there. Where do you live?” You know, and that was quite a strange concept of some people. Nowadays actually, we have to wear T-shirts, we’ve got a TMO T-shirt that we all, all volunteers wear and there’s lots of them. So, it shows people that we’re, you know?

Interviewer: Residents.

Interviewee: We’re residents but also, we are part of a committee when sort of—it help, it actually helps, I didn’t think it would when we first got these T-shirts, I thought people might think we were from the council but actually, it’s not. It works about well.

Interviewer: So, as part of your role, have you ever had an experience where you felt someone wasn’t listening to you or someone wasn’t really taking your opinion seriously? Whether that’s within the committee but also with respect to your role in the committee and the local council for example.
Interviewee: Yeah. I don’t have a problem with the committee, I think we all take each other’s opinion seriously and the council, some of them are great. I think some of them, there is an attitude in housing that I think is interesting because I see it in my day job. Actually, as an architect, I design affordable housing so, most of my clients are the same people who I meet. Not the same physical people but the same types of people. And there is an attitude that, you know, residents on the council estate and tenants particularly, don’t know what they’re talking about and housing professionals and, of course, they will disagree with that in public. I think there is an attitude that, you know, residents on council estates, you can often pull a wall over their eyes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And I’ve had situations where I’ve been talking to people and I’ve not introduced myself as the Chair of the TMO, I just said I’m a resident at council estate and I listen to them for a while and then, I come back with a few comments and they say, “You’re remarkably well informed,” and, you know, it’s… they just try, if they can, to bluff their way through it sometimes. Not all of them by any means but I think there is an attitude that they can maybe get away with things sometimes.

Interviewer: This is not related to my questions but that reminds me a bit of sort of a lot of the language that happened before Grenfell Tower around the cladding and sort of like, Oh no! We know what’s best like it’s fine kind of...

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee: Yeah. I know, I see it and it’s true.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, how would you describe overall, the relationship between the local council and the committee, the team committee?

Interviewee: At the moment, very good.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee: Yeah. We have...[a council scrutiny officer], she’s invited to every meeting, in fact, all the councils are invited to every meeting but we have to have a scrutiny officer [31:22] but it’s basically, a scrutiny officer from the council and she attends maybe one meeting in three. I think she’s supposed to attend every one but I think she has some health issue recently but... and they’re a bit stretched. The council’s had a lot cooked as well so, they’ve got a lot of TMOs to manage with very few people now so, they don’t attend as many meetings but whenever she does, she’s very supportive and I think they’re just relieved that we got a new manager because they hated our first manager. And I could understand why, to be honest. You know, they’ve not been perfect by any means, they could have provide better scrutiny and helped us a bit more in the process of dealing with the first manager but anyway, that’s all water under the bridge so.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But it’s good relationship now.
Interviewer: Okay. So, if there’s sort of like, let’s say like a construction project going on in the community or in the estate or anything like that, what type of decisions would the local council consult the TMO committee on and what kinds of decisions will they not consult people on?

Interviewee: So, they would have to consult us on any major works. There’s a process for leaseholders called Section 20, you might know about already, for statutory notification of leaseholders of the financial cost, etc. but we are statutory consultee for any major works and they’ve not always been very good at that to be fair. We had an issue years ago where they put a planning application in and then, the start for a window replacement then they started consultation process. So, we got them to withdraw the planning application and then do the consultation process and then yeah. They’ve stopped, we’ve stopped the major works because there’s some technical issues that they need to deal with before they can do major works. But yeah, I mean, if there was works going on in the wider area, then we will just be informed of it as you would but in any planning committee. I suppose the big thing in recent years has been the conversion of the sheltered housing block on the estate. So, there’s a block that the ground floor of is our TMO office and around the time we were setting up the TMO, they wanted to put us in the garages on the estate because that’s why typically happens, they convert the garages into TMO offices. This is standard size of a TMO office and they’re often quite grotty but we spotted that this facility is really nice facility. was being, was desolate, the managers scoped, the charity scoped the building out and the freehold was with the council and we said to the council and the leasehold, “Can we use the ground floor for TMO?” And they said, “Well, we’re also thinking about turning the rest of the block into emergency housing.”

Interviewer: Okay, yeah.

Interviewee: So, there was a lot of… [34:57] position in the neighboring street to this because they felt that it would attract antisocial behavior and we had a public meeting on the estate and we invited councilors and planning officers and residents from the wider area and residents from the estate and we stood up and actually defended the decision to provide emergency housing, there’s a desperate need for emergency housing in the borough and this was one of three in the borough that we were creating and there was somebody, I remember, on the, one of the neighboring streets who was trying to stop it and in the end, the votes was unanimous both strongly in favor of sheltered housing scheme, alleged housing, sorry, on the estate and the councilors, the planning officers and the council generally were very happy with our support for that.

Interviewer: That’s great.

Interviewee: So, yeah. We work with them closely on things like that. And yeah, that was it.

Interviewer: You mentioned that there was an incident where they wanted to replace windows and they put in the planning application and then started the consultation process.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: At that point, you were a TMO, right? Rather than a TRA?
Interviewee: Yes, we were. I don’t think we’d gone live. It took three years or maybe three years, three and a half years, to go from setting up a company, the community and trust company, to going live. So, there’s a process, a statutory process we had to follow that I think the DCLG set up and we had to train, the board had to be fully trained to do it so, we had, you know, lots and lots of sessions with housing professionals looking at things like finance, procurement, loads of...

Interviewer: Things.

Interviewee: … sessions, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think if you weren’t set up as a CIC or weren’t sort of a strong TRA moving towards TMO, that just sort of a group of tenants on the estate without any sort of formal structure, would have been able to resist that planning application?

Interviewee: Unlikely, to be honest. I think it was a combination of the TMO itself and some very active residents, one of whom was on the TMO anyway, one wasn’t, who were ever strong in Twitter and social media and they really bombarded the council. So, yeah, they really—we had to try to find a line because we wanted to work with council but we just saw that they were doing it all wrong and we, TMO, had to remain officially neutral but we were very supportive of the residents who were fighting them on social media.

Interviewer: That’s great. That’s… yeah. That’s also something really interesting to think about as social media is like a tool in that way.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, if you or another tenant expresses an issue to the local council, what type of response would you expect normally?

Interviewee: You mean councilors? If we go to councilors or we go to the council?

Interviewer: I would say go to the council about a housing related issue.

Interviewee: A housing related issue?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Well, I suppose we would normally start, unless it’s something that we don’t have control over, like the heating system, for instance. So, we have a common heating system on the estate, we didn’t take it on because it’s a bit of a mess and it needs millions of pounds of investment in it and the TMO couldn’t afford to do that and we decided very earlier on that we weren’t going to do it ourselves so, we just lobbied the council on that one. But generally, for all the housing issues, we go first to TMO and if the TMO don’t get any satisfaction, they say, “Can you raise this with the council and councilors?” But yeah, I suppose the council with the housing heating system issue. We’ve had mixed success with that, to be honest, if I’m honest. Again, I think they are a bit under resourced to be honest. Some of the people that they’ve had in the past who knew what they were doing don’t do that anymore and for instance, the councillor had a duty to provide, it’s in the national legislation, to provide individual sub-metering on heating systems as of, I think it was June this year and they’ve sort of been denying this. They’re saying
that it’s not true and it’s true. So, they kind of… I think they’re fighting it because they can’t afford to do it. Yeah. So, it’s kind of, it’s mixed really.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So, are you overall satisfied with, or could you speak to the, I want to say allowances—yeah, I guess maybe allowance is the right word—the financial provision that the council gives the TMO?

**Interviewee:** That’s a good point. I mean, they are slowly reducing the allowance they give us.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And that is an issue that if it carried on, we would have to seriously think about our options because, you know, if it carries on more than a year or two, we could come to the point where it’s not financially viable for us to run a TMO. They’re making a 5% cut this year in our allowance and we’ll have to make some savings but we’ve also raised money, we’ve raised £50,000 of external funding last year and I think this year, we’ve raised £20,000 already. So, you know, we’re doing that just things like that, have lottery funding and all that pots of money to make ourselves viable but if it continues that they’re basic allowance keeps dropping, then we would have to look up other options as self-financing option, which AGMB, I don’t know if you’ve heard about that?

**Interviewee:** Yeah. I’ve heard about that.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. They’re the only ones in the country that are self-financing. So, we could do that but they’re much bigger TMO than we are. Five times bigger. So, that’s an option. And then, I suppose ultimately, if it really went pear shaped that the council decided to, you know, really cut our funding, we would have to look at options to go to the housing association, maybe. But, you know, I mean, we’ve got the vote coming in, we’ve got continuation vote in 2020 and if residents think that they want to go back to being in the council. Again, we’d have to scrap the TMO. I can’t see that happening but it could happen.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** So, we just, actually funny enough, just launching across next week for residents. It’s the first satisfaction survey of the TMO since we went live in September 2015. So, we’ll get the results of that by the end of August. So, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Besides the survey, what are the different ways that tenants or lease holders can get in touch with you about issues or with the other committee members?

**Interviewee:** So, we have the website. So, there’s our details on the website and …

**Interviewer:** Probably where I got them from.

**Interviewee:** Yeah. Probably. Well, that gmail account is monitored by the estate manager.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** So, any complaints, we have official complaints procedure, for instance. That would go to him and he would log that and we have [KPIs] that he’ll report every board meetings and things like that. But if it’s a contact, you know, someone who wants to get involved in the TMO, usually the estate manager then puts them in touch with me or the secretary, membership secretary, and we invite them to a meeting or go around to see them and have a chat. The big
events like the fun day, we’ve got an event, fun day in the middle of August. Every year, we have summer fun day and then we have trips and the other events, they’re advertised. We have a coffee morning every Wednesday so, it’s about 10 or 15 people go to that every single week. So, that’s a good touch point for people to go to and that’s in the community room on the estate. So, that’s like a sandwich board outside the estate office. The estate office is right in the middle of the estate, you can’t miss it.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Great. So, you mentioned earlier that there was more leaseholders involved than tenants and that part of the issue right is just like where you’re at in life in terms of whether that’s financially or your educational background but overall, do you think there are any other factors that might limit either tenants or lease holders from participating in general meetings or in the committee?

**Interviewee:** I think— we try to— the meetings last about 2 hours, 7 o’clock till 9 o’clock on the second Monday of the month, I think, yeah. And we try to make them flexible and open as much as possible so, we have had people who’ve paid for signers to attend those meetings. I think the biggest barrier is probably, as I said, confidence. If you know somebody who goes to that meeting, then you’d probably come along because they’ll encourage you. If you don’t know anybody, you probably won’t and that’s… word of mouth is the best way to get to people and that’s why, you know, when we do the door knock or this questionnaire that’s coming up next month, that will be a big opportunity to meet people we don’t know. I think that’s the biggest barrier and I think, confidence, probably. And then, sometimes, we try to make sure meetings don’t have too much jogging in them so, any acronyms, we get people to spell out what that means. Yeah, we try to make it as straightforward as possible and make sure people don’t… some people know a lot, you know, and if you let those people dominate, then you could switch other people off. So, you’ve got to try to keep it, quite I think to keep intention.

**Interviewer:** Right. Do you think more resident participation is always good?

**Interviewee:** Yeah. Yeah. To be honest, it is. Yeah. I think that would be better really. I think the fun days are really good because that involves a lot of people. The social committee’s often a good way to get people involved so, we’ve had people on the social committee who then have been doing that for maybe a year or two, gives them back confidence and then they go to on to the board.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Because social committee do fun stuff really. They plan the fun day, they plan the trip, the pantomime, the Halloween event, the women’s event, the men’s event, whatever it is. And that’s, you know, that’s a bit more fun. The board is a bit dry, to be honest and yeah, it’s a good way of getting people involved, encouraging people and some people will never be on the board and that’s fine. You know?
Interviewer: Right. Do you have any comments on the future of resident participation? You mentioned some financial challenge what if you have...

Interviewee: I think the biggest challenge is the government pulled funding for all the sort of participation and enabling works that we did on our estates, you know, 7/8 years ago, the capacity building, really, to give the people the trainings, support, confidence to do this and being a TMO involves a lot of factors coming together. We need a critical mass of people who are capable of doing this, are community minded enough to want to do it and are supported by a council, a lot of councils don’t provide support, you know, they’re not prefect but they are one of the better councils out there on supporting TMOs and you need those factors the come together. So, you need the support of the local authority, you need the right mix of residence and you need the financial capacity building support as well of government and yeah. It’s worth doing but it’s not easy.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But it’s worth doing.

Interviewer: Do you have any comments or anything else you’d like to add?

Interviewee: I suppose that the only thing is that you need, I’m sure you know this anyway but there are some TMOs that have gone very badly wrong and you just need to make sure, whoever is setting this TMOs up, they’ve got the checks and balances in place to stop the Chair dominating them or the manager embezzling the money or the council is providing the right scrutiny and you’ve got an effective board that can thread the fine line that knows it’s place in terms of scrutiny but doesn’t try and run the estate.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You know? So, we don’t try and tell the manager what to do on a day to day basis but we can step in when things go really wrong and we can be that sounding board of a trust effective, that’s what we are, we’re trustees and, you know, that’s what we need to do. But there are cases where TMOs have gone very wrong.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, but it’s still worth doing, I think. Yeah.

Interviewer: Cool. That’s all for… in terms of… Let me pause this thing…

Appendix 17: TMO Interviewee “Jane” Transcript

Interviewer: So, could you tell me about why you decided involved with the TMO and how you got involved?

Interviewee: I got involved because I wasn’t really happy about what was going on with the estate so, I decided to. And the manager invited me to join the board. So, I said, “Okay, let me see what it’s about.” That’s why I joined. Yeah.

Interviewer: What was sort of the things happening on the estate that at the time were difficult?

Interviewee: The lack of repairs.
Interviewer: The lack of repairs?
Interviewee: Yeah. Everybody… it’s like if the manager likes you, you get your repairs. If she doesn’t like you, you don’t get repairs. So, that was the whole thing why I started in the first place.
Interviewer: Right. And so, are you involved or have you been involved with this type of thing before?
Interviewee: No, it was my first time.
Interviewer: Right. Or any sort of management or that kind of stuff?
Interviewee: No.
Interviewer: And so, this is up to you to elaborate on some of the issues going on but did you enjoy your involvement?
Interviewee: I did. I did because I was helping residents until they stopped me, until they saw that I was working more for the residents and not really trying to cover up what they were doing wrong. So, that’s the main reason why they got me off.
Interviewer: And so that was obviously like a turning point in your experience that became negative after that?
Interviewee: Yeah. Because they didn’t follow the rules, they removed me from the board without following the rules and they came up saying that I was involved in a violent attack when I was not even there. I was like—the fight was here and I was like all the way over there so, they were saying that I was involved and I was just a witness.
Interviewee: Yeah. Wow. Could you tell me a bit about how the organization functions? Like how meetings functioned, how often they happened, that kind of stuff…?
Interviewee: The meetings happened every 8 weeks.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: So, the staff like the manager, the repair manager, the housing office, they all send in reports to the board. So, the board reads it and then they go through it in meetings. But the problem is that if anybody talks out about the manager or about the staff, you would get attacked. So, they would come out and say that you’re being unreasonable or you’re putting the organization in disrepute. So, the only board members that they like is the one that don’t ask questions.
Interviewer: Wow. How much—so, how was decision making happening during meetings? Was it like one person had control over what the decision would be, was it like a majority vote?
Interviewee: It was supposed to be the majority votes but the manager always used to speak, she used to have her ‘Yes’ people so, she used to go there before and tell them what they had to vote. What they had to… they had to say yes or no. So, it was never anyone voting how they believed, no. She told them what to do and what to say.
Interviewer: It’s like a political party [whip] or something.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Like everyone has to vote.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Wow. And how much time were you dedicating to this work in like a week or month? How much of a commitment was it?
Interviewee: Because I was also the treasurer so, it was kind of like 3 times a week and plus with meetings. So, I used to take like, they used to take like half of my week away and plus three hours of board meetings every 8 weeks and plus we used to have like subcommittee meetings. So, it was like… they were over, they controlled everything. So, if you’re walking round the estate, you have the staff watching you to see who you were talking to and why you were talking to them.
Interviewer: Wow. So, how are the responsibilities distributed among the participants? So, you mentioned you were treasurer but sort of, how are those different roles decided and what types of things do different people do? If that makes sense.
Interviewee: The roles are decided by the manager. Because I was a finan… I was the treasurer and I was seeing transactions being very suspicious. So, I said, “I’m not going to be signing these checks without knowing.” So, I start taking pictures. So, when the finance manager found out that I was taking pictures of the check without signing, they stopped me from signing the checks.
Interviewer: Oh, that’s frustrating.
Interviewee: So, like one day, I found out that a decorator and between 8 weeks, she got around £11,000. Now, tell me what decorator…
Interviewer: I’d like to make that much in a year.
Interviewee: Exactly. That’s what I was finding out very suspicious. In 8 weeks, he made up to around, almost £11,000.
Interviewer: Wow.
Interviewee: And then, their excuse was saying that he was doing, painting for elderly, because it has the… elderly has one room painted for them per year. So, that’s what he was getting the £11,000 for and I’m like, “No way.”
Interviewer: There’s no way.
Interviewee: No way.
Interviewer: Wow. So, right. So, you mentioned— so, your role as treasurer and you had another role as well which was?
Interviewee: I was also the Repair manager Chair of the subcommittee.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So, when I asked the repair manager… Okay, he’s connected to the… he’s kind of like a nephew to the manager, the housing manager. So, when I asked a couple of questions that the repair manager did not like, that was when they started this campaign against me. Because he was saying that one of the locksmith had a certificate to be a locksmith. So, I asked for that. I asked for where was his certificate? Was he trained? And a couple of other things. I did not get a response, none of the board asked and it was just a hush hush, wipe under the carpet. So, I never found out if the man had a certificate or not. And also, I was asking why didn’t they have police
checks? Because if you’re going into people’s homes, especially elderly and vulnerable and disabled people, you should have a police check. None of that happened and none of that was going on. So, one of those questions I was asking, they just shut me down.

**Interviewer:** So, people would kind of not follow protocol at all…

**Interviewee:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** … they would kind of skip through rules and they wouldn’t want to be questioned about it.

**Interviewee:** Yep.

**Interviewer:** So, what was the approach to problem solving in the organization when you were with it? How would you describe it?

**Interviewee:** Ignore things. Like if let’s say… we had a food farm that was closed down in 2015. Instead of trying to find a solution, no, they just ignored it. So, when residents came up, “Oh, we will deal with it. We will deal with it.” And they haven’t dealt with it. So, that’s how they deal with this and now just push it away, “Oh, we’re not going to deal with this right now because we got to deal with that,” and that problem never is dealt with again.

**Interviewer:** Mhmm. So, in your opinion, you mentioned this earlier, but who do you feel are the most influential people in the board?

**Interviewee:** The manager.

**Interviewer:** The manager. Right. And how much influence do other people on the board or other tenants rather in the building…

**Interviewee:** Nothing.

**Interviewer:** Nothing.

**Interviewee:** Nothing.

**Interviewer:** So, but if they have like something they want to put on the agenda, would it get on the agenda?

**Interviewee:** Only if she wants to.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So, it’s at the discretion of the manager.

**Interviewee:** Mhmm-mmm.

**Interviewer:** And so, decision making is the same way? It’s at her discretion. What happens when there are disagreements?

**Interviewee:** You’re off the board.

**Interviewer:** You’re off the board. And the next question is very obvious, that I have here, it says, “As part of your role, have you had experience where you felt nobody listened to you or cared about your opinion?” But…

**Interviewee:** Oh yeah. That happened all the time.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** I was considered as the trouble maker, as putting the organization in disrepute. That’s their favorite word.

**Interviewer:** And the way that they dealt with that was to sort of force you off?
Interviewee: Yeah. They came out with a foul saying that I did this, I did that. And then, the people, her witness that said that I did all that, now, they’re on the board.

Interviewer: Mhmm. So, I want to ask a bit about the relationship between the TMO and the local authority as well.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: So, how would you describe that relationship?

Interviewee: A joke.

Interviewer: A joke. Okay. And could you elaborate on that?

Interviewee: Because they give the TMO too much power. They don’t have no… like the TMO is not following their rules, they have a management agreement. This management agreement allows the TMO to take over where [10:36] is to take over but because like the housing manager can do whatever she wants, so she can put whatever rules she wants. And the [10:48] doesn’t have any power over her to say to say, “Oh, you’re doing this, you’re doing that wrong,” because they gave them the full power to do whatever they want. So, I believe the only way that TMO can work if they change the rules and put more like, be more strict with TMOs.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: “If they don’t do this, we cut your allowance or something.” Because right now, TMOs can do whatever they want and they can cover it up. Because that, the repair manager, she works together with the finance manager. So, any money that disappears there, she can cover it up because she’s working with him.

Interviewer: Right. That makes sense.

Speaker 3: Can I interrupt a bit? From the point of view of the local authority, they don’t want to be involved in day-to-day, in managing estates. So, if they [11:45] hand out to a TMO and wash their hands of it, it is exactly what they want to do.

Interviewer: Right. Yes.

Speaker 3: And…

Interviewee: It’s easier for them. It gets rid of the problem. One problem less for them to deal with it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, they will say, “Oh, it’s the TMO.” Like if anything, if you complain about a repair, “Oh, you’re on the TMO, you gotta go there.” But they kind of like blacklist you. So, if you’re on blacklist, you don’t get repairs, you don’t get parking permit, you don’t get nothing because the repair manager won’t let you have it.

Interviewer: So, let’s say— so, if the local authority basically has some changes it wants to do in the neighborhood, like let’s say it wants to put in a bike lane or do some other stuff around the estate or that affects the estate, do they consult the TMO about stuff they do? Is there a dialogue?

Interviewee: It depends because they’re like the TMO, up to £5,000, they’re the one that has to pay for it.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So, £5,000 up is [12:56]. So like we had our kitchens and bathrooms done last year and that was all done from the [13:03]. So, the [13:03] does get in contact with the TMO, tells the TMO, “We’re going to do this project,” and the TMO has to allow it to happen.

Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: They cannot stop it.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But they manager will also choose what persons, what residents she wants to get services first.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: So, it’s all depending if you’re on her list.
Interviewer: Oh… I see.
Interviewee: So, some people— like in a normal theme, they will say, “Who is the worst? Who needs the repairs first?”
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: It works with her friends, her family or...
Interviewer: Yeah. Right. So, often times, even though the local authority doesn’t consult, there’s still power for the TMO to decide kind of how things are done or what’s done first?
Interviewee: Yeah. Like what’s done in a daily like the maintenance, the repairs, the chase up of rent, you know, rent arrears, that’s all their job.
Interviewer: So, if you or another tenant expresses a concern to the local authority about your flat or about the TMO, what kind of response do you expect from them?
Interviewee: If you get the councilor involved, you might get a little bit lucky. But other than that, the only way you’ll get anything done is going through the solicitors. Suing them. That’s what I’m doing now.
Interviewer: So, you were treasurer for a while.
Interviewee: For two years.
Interviewer: For two years. So, was the TMO in a good financial state, would you say? Or was it struggling?
Interviewee: No. it wasn’t deteriorating. Their surplus was around £400,000. So, it was quite good.
Interviewer: And do you know what they did with the surplus?
Interviewee: They saved it. What they were deciding before I left was to put parks, playgrounds, around the estate. Fix the playgrounds. They did fix it but you can see the material's rubbish, it’s poor quality. So, fixing it or not fixing it was the same thing.
Interviewer: So, is there a way in which members of the TMO represent other tenants or not at all? Do other tenants have any say or any involvement?
Interviewee: They don’t listen to what the tenants say. They say that they go around doing surveys and everything. They got a reward saying that they did extensive surveys around the estate and I live on the estate and I asked a couple of other residents, nobody got the survey and they still got a reward of good governance. And I’m like, “I never saw that in my life.” The same—Parker, that was one of the worst TMOs in [16:23], they also got the same reward so that doesn’t mean nothing to me.

Interviewer: Doesn’t mean anything.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, what kind of financial—so, we already actually talked about the financial support from the local authority. Will the local authority often do those sort of large scale repairs or are those like a rare thing like...?

Interviewee: No, that’s the norm. That’s the norm. Up to five thousand is the TMO. Above, like 4,999. After that, it goes straight to [16:54].

Interviewer: But how often will they do repairs of that scale?

Interviewee: It depends. It really depends on the state of the flat when they receive it or it depends on if it was a big damage. It really depends on what happened.

Interviewer: Right. But do you know how frequently they would, the council will be involved in that? Like per year, how many times they would kind of look at flats. Every month or couple of months...?

Interviewee: It depends on when did they have a vote. So, let’s say every four or five months.

Interviewer: Four or five months? Okay. That’s nice. So, when you were treasurer, how did you communicate with or receive feedback from other tenants? When you were treasurer and also in your other role in Repairs Committee.

Interviewee: People used to come scared. They were always scared to even say something. And the ones that did say something, they got bad feedback from the managers. So, like kind of like if they complain to me about something and I came and I brought it up, she will go to the resident and say, “Why did you do this, why you didn’t go through that way?” So, she would try to stop residents from talking again.

Interviewer: Interesting. Unless it’s like through the specific way they want it done.

Interviewee: Right. I had a [18:21] of finding out how the finance was. It had a repair guy that used to work in [18:31]. And the Chair, the Chairperson at the time told him that he had to pump up the prices because how was everybody going to get their cuts? So, that shows you something that...

Interviewer: Right. And you mentioned you were part of the committee. So, was the committee a different group of people or was it totally the same?

Interviewee: No. It was—she always has her one person like we call her The Spy because she’s in every committee but that is just the feedback to the manager.

Interviewer: Right. That makes sense. And how large was that committee that you were involved with?
Interviewee: It was like 4 or 5 members at the time, yeah.
Interviewer: And how large was the board in total?
Interviewee: It should be 15.
Interviewer: 15. That’s a big board. And would you say that everyone or not everyone but like the vast majority of people were siding with her or were there a couple of people with you on sort of…?
Interviewee: I had 4 people that was against her on the board and she managed to get all four of us off.
Interviewer: Wow. That’s a bit undemocratic.
Interviewee: Yup.
Interviewer: Yikes. Wow. So, there are tenants— this question seems very self explanatory now but I had a question about tenants in the building who are not in the organization and how… the question was do you think that they feel that they have a voice when it comes to their house?
Interviewee: No.
Interviewer: No. And… so, big obstacle to that is that the TMO is not their friend.
Interviewee: The TMO is only run by the manager. So, whatever you say bad about the manager, like I did a campaign, a NO campaign. Today, I don’t get no newsletter from the TMO, I don’t get no information from the TMO, I don’t get nothing. They robbed me like I’m not a resident anymore. And that was just because I was telling people to say NO.
Interviewer: Wow. So, do you think there might be other factors that limit tenants from getting involved besides the TMO as well?
Interviewee: They don’t… because they don’t trust the TMO anymore and that’s why they’re not getting involved for like you can see the TMO does fun days, they do trips, it’s never packed.
Interviewer: Never packed because no one else trusts…
Interviewee: Nobody trusts.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Well, they usually would go there, get food and come back. And that’s not a fun day, you know? It’s more like a food day.
Interviewer: And you mentioned that one of the possible, one of the main solution would be to more council oversight and more checks and balances and that kind of stuff. Do you think it would also be good to get tenants involved who are a bit afraid or to sort of… has there been any…?
Interviewee: I don’t think they would even step up because they know how it is. They know if they speak out, they will get punished. So, they won’t speak out. And the only ones that will speak out, like I told you, the votes was 631.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: 321 Yes’ and 50 No’s. 53 No’s.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: So, you can see and out of a 100, 49% did not vote. So, she’s only getting that from 51%. 51%, 321 votes? That’s kind of hard to believe.

Interviewer: No kidding.

Speaker 3: The problem of getting the tenants involved is that a group of people will take against the manager,…

Interviewer: Yes.

Speaker 3: … start to organize, get nowhere and they think, “Oh, [22:42].” And another group will take it on and then another group. But because they are small groups all having a goal and then getting disappointed, they don’t ever manage to make a really effective campaign against the manager.

Interviewer: Right. That makes sense. So…

Interviewee: And she buys people off as well.

Interviewer: Mhmm. It’s crazy there’s a lot of funding available for that so.

Interviewee: Right. Don’t forget they have £800,000 available for her. And she has like £10,000 that she doesn’t need to ask the board’s permission to spend.

Interviewer: Right.

Speaker 3: And she doesn’t present accounts.

Interviewee: Yeah. She presents account to the board but nobody has finance experience. So, you won’t know.

Interviewer: You can’t read in unless you have experience Yeah.

Interviewee: So, when the treasurer was a finance manager and I was the Vice Treasurer and he was the Treasurer, she got rid of him in a year. So, that shows that she just wants people stupid, dumb, that doesn’t understand anything and do everything that she says. That’s the way she wants it. So, can you believe these people are running an estate of 550 flats? That’s kind of hard to believe.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And you gotta see how she treats the elderly because [24:22] RMO is the estate and then a little bit ahead, we have like a old folks home. And that has 45 flats there.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: And you gotta see the way she treats them.

Interviewer: That’s very sad.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you got involved with, so how did you two meet? Through [Housing Activist Organization]? Through other…?

Interviewee: Yeah. From other friends that we were getting contact. Yeah.

Speaker 3: In any effect, it was through the the councilor and he…

Interviewer: Galloped.

Speaker 3: … galloped. It was, on the estate but he’s prepared never to take a lead.

Interviewer: Mhmm-mmm.
Interviewee: Because I think as a councilor, you gotta show that you’re neutral so, she doesn’t really want to show that she’s pushing that [...] and they’re already saying that she’s already, she received a letter saying that she’s putting the organization disrepute.

Interviewer: Oh-oh.

Interviewee: That’s what the manager likes to…

Interviewer: Say.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Wow. And so, are you involved now in alternative sort of housing adequacy or…?

Interviewee: At the moment, no. At the moment, I’m just into, because my children are disabled, so right now, I’m just in the special needs [25:50].

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It’s taking all my time right now. So, that’s where I am at the moment. So, I’m doing more special needs and disabled.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. So, you don’t live in this estate? Did you live here before?

Speaker 3: No.

Interviewer: But you live in the neighborhood kind of thing?

Speaker 3: Yes. I live about half a mile in that direction. The estate is about half a mile in that direction.

Interviewer: Right. So, my other questions are possibly for both of you. Do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: It doesn’t really matter because if the manager’s not going to allow you to participate, you can try but she’s going to block you.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, the more people comes up, it doesn’t really matter.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: What matters right now is that the council gotta change the way TMO runs. They gotta manage to find a way to punish the TMOs when they’re wrong and not just leave them to do whatever they want. Look what they’re doing with tenancy right now. They say, in reports, they write, “Oh, the tenancy is in the heart of all our decisions,” that’s a lie. It’s in the heart of the manager’s decision and if she thinks that she likes it, she will let it go. If she doesn’t, she’ll stop it. And that’s how it is.

Interviewer: And your thoughts on the question on do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: No, I think it’s about them because why—you see, in the extraordinary that you should spend your time running the estates whereas in fact, the local authorities should be running you estate. There is a rule for a TRA, a tenancy resident association, to supervise the council but I think that at the TMO, invariably, in the long run, is a bad idea. The only possible exception that’s possible is the Leather[M]et TMO in [28:12].

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: But we don’t know what it’s going to be like in 20 years time.
Interviewer: Right. Yes. I’ve had other people mention that once. Maybe I should actually client call them or something to interlude them on is there kind of a case exception in [28:30]? Yeah.
Speaker 3: At the moment, that’s the [28:37] TMO. And they have some people in charge that are doing it in the right way.
Interviewer: Right.
Speaker 3: But whether that will happen in 10 or 20 years time, I very much doubt it.
Interviewer: Mhmm. I understand. So, do either of you have any comments on the future of tenant involvement on what you think that would like in the next 10 years or in the future?
Interviewee: There’s not going to be any more tenants involvement because it’s not having any right now. The TMO is a fake. Whenever they say that TMO works, that the tenants are the one that’s running the TMO, that is lying. Who runs it? It’s the manager. You can see in every TMO, the manager that makes the decision, the manager that decides what’s going to go on in them, the manager decides who’s going to get repairs or not. It has nothing to do with the tenants. If you have a strong chairperson that is willing to fight back the manager, you might get lucky but no one does it because she doesn’t keep them that long.
Interviewer: Mhmm. That’s interesting. Let’s see, do I have anything else?
Speaker 3: And wait. And she’s actually got to the time resident participation organizations and so on that will take up the complaints that she makes in order to discipline the board. So, there is a, you know, there is a professional apparatus that she has, that supports her and keeps her in position.
Interviewee: Yeah. It’s the consultants. 8 consultants that she goes there, tells them what they need to say to the board and then they go ahead and tell them. So, it’s everything planned before. Like now, it’s a different chair but, the previous chair, she used to get the chair in like an hour before the meetings to tell her everything that she had to say to the board.
Interviewer: And so, her position is a paid position right?
Interviewee: She gets £70,000 a year to do nothing.
Interviewer: Yeah. That’s a lot of money. I don’t… I think most professors at Oxford university don’t make that much.
Interviewee: And it’s for you to have idea, a councilor, the council spends out of that £800,000. More than almost three-quarters of that goes to salary.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: So, they’re spending around about four hundred/five hundred thousand pounds for salaries the whole year.
Interviewer: Right. So like the repair, the decorator…
Interviewee: And the repair is only one quarter of everything else. So, that’s why they’re and nobody would speak out because it has a caretaker that doesn’t have no training. Why does he work there? Because he covers up her mistakes because she protected him when he had immigration problems because he wasn’t allowed to work there. So, she got his visa. So, what
does that mean? He owes her a favor. He owes her his job so he won’t speak out. And then the other guy that did find out that one of the caretakers didn’t have training, he spoke out and he was almost risking losing his job.

Interviewer: Wow. And the other position on the board are volunteer positions?

Interviewee: All of them are volunteer positions.

Interviewer: Okay. So, it’s only that one. Okay.

Speaker 3: So far as we know.

Interviewer: Okay. So far as we know but there might be other money involvement.

Speaker 3: There might be backhanders involved, we don’t know that.

Interviewer: Do either of you have any comments or anything else you want to add about tenant participation or about the TMO?

Interviewee: I think that they should ban TMOs. In my experience, it does not work and it shouldn’t be around. Because what they’re doing is just abusing disable, the elderly, the young and just abusing people. You know, if they don’t like you, you will get abused. If I show you some of the letters I received from the manager, why’s she calling people low intelligence, low morals and not going nowhere in life? That’s a manager that gets £70,000 a year. To bully people.

Interviewer: Yikes.

Speaker 3: And she’s not only bullying, she’s homophobic and a racist. So, how can you work when you have all those three best qualities?

Interviewer: Yeah. So, people don’t really feel safe or ?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Well, that’s all of those main questions.

Speaker 3: The other thing, I think it’s, on the whole, councilors are extremely naïve. They don’t know what goes on in the TMOs.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Speaker 3: They don’t really want to know.

Interviewer: I’ve heard that one of the struggles is that they often, often times, the council representatives are supposed to go to certain TMO meetings right? To go and supervise but they don’t have enough resources or they’re not putting enough resources to actually check in.

Interviewee: It’s not even that. No. I saw the guy coming in . It’s called the [Clienting], it’s the [Clienting] TMOs. What they do, they go them every 8 weeks and watch their meetings, check the reports and everything. That doesn’t matter. You know why? Because the TMO manager with the [Clienting] team worker, they get along and they get to give us, “Oh, you gotta fix your report because the council’s not going to accept that.” And they go and change it. So, it has nothing to do with the [35:06] coming in because the [35:07] person is the one that’s telling the manager what they need to be fixed for [35:11] to accept it.

Interviewer: That is very frustrating. Alright. Well, thank you. That’s… I’m going to pause it.
Interviewee: I find that it’s Leather[M]et, that’s the only one that anyone says that’s working a little bit properly because anywhere else you go, it’s not… none of them around the [35:36]. And [35:38] is the worst one as MP told me. [35:42] is the worst one in [35:43]

Interviewer: Alright. I’ll pause this...

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Appendix 18: TMO Interviewee “Bailey” Transcript

Interviewee: You want to shut that door because we have ambulances coming here.

Interviewer: Okay, yes, great. That would be big help.

Interviewee: Because we’re right next to the ambulance station [inaudible]

Interviewer: Thank you, yeah that’s fine, yes. A little bit of sound is, I’ve done an interview in a café before, so some sound is fine.

Interviewee: Oh good, it’s not [...] when you have an ambulance going by.

Interviewer: Alright, so why did you decide to join the T.MO and how did you join?

Interviewee: I'm just trying to think, it's a group thing, the lot of us, the neighbours are very good together and a couple of very strong, bold people wanted to do, I would have never thought of it, or wanted to have done it but they said, you’re good at doing this, you’re good to being a secretary Bailey? You can do this and I kept feeling a bit special because it coincided with me having retired so.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So they were very forceful neighbours. [laughter]

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Mind you the one who’s started it has now moved off, she doesn’t have any worries anyway.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: She just left with it.

Interviewer: I see.

Interviewee: So that basically sums up, just I wanted to try to help with whatever I can anyway.

Interviewer: Right. So you were invited to join by your neighbours and this was once you’ve retired?

Interviewee: Yes it was.

Interviewer: Okay, how recently was that or—

Interviewee: Oh I’ve been retired for 11 years now, since ‘07.

Interviewer: You’ve been involved with the TMO for since 07’, wow.

Interviewee: Yeah, It’s been 11 years.
Interviewer: Amazing. Alright, so are you involved with any other types of organizing or management or have you had, you said you had experiences as a secretary?

Interviewee: I was at [T] hospital, I worked there for many years.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I was a ward manager.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: And I did a lot of, not secretary work but done lots of paperwork and...what else? Oh, I have done the ballot papers, you know, when they have voting, there’s a lot of paper involved in that as you can imagine, oh I just always have been mixed up with papers.

Interviewer: Yeah, me too.

Interviewee: Oh, you’ve got some more years ahead of you, it never [unclear audio 02:39- :41]

Interviewer: Yeah, it’s true.

Interviewee: Yeah. Oh, did I answer your question?

Interviewer: It was just your experience in organizing or management or—

Interviewee: So, I’ve since been mixed up with little things like that for quite a while—

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Even the association, with the improvement of maternity services, that aims for sure, which I don’t think they need anymore because maternity services are perhaps as good as they can get. I’ve probably forgot a lot, because my mind isn’t as good now.

Interviewer: So do you enjoy your involvement in the TMO?

Interviewee: Yes, because they, it clouds me being older and my mind going, I don’t, they kept trying to get me to be secretary and a lot of things, but I’ve got arthritis in my hands.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I can’t keep up and my mind won’t keep up with the de de de de da, especially with the [Y] ladies.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: They do know how to talk and it’s quite fun to be there at the general meeting, I enjoy that one committee meeting, and I’m also with health and safety, but I’m the worst person to do it, because the very first health and safety inspection, I bent down to look at the date on the fire extinguisher, stood up and crushed my head on the fire extinguisher. [laughter]

Interviewer: Oh no.

Interviewee: You could see it bleeding.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness.

Interviewee: So much for health and safety! I can’t quite remember.... the HR committee, Human Resources, it’s just 3 of us, manager [L], another [L], another one of the ladies that works a lot so she has to take a time off work, so we have it, when she can make it, so that’s a quite a bit of that, that’s interesting. I don’t do anything boring like finances, apart from the bank, because we’ve got to take cheques to the bank and, when the signature is, because I’m always around so I can sign cheques, just do that and run to the bank for them.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Yeah
Interviewer: And could you give me a sense of how large the TMO is and sort of, some of the other members, how old they are, whether they’re retired as well?
Interviewee: Oh, [if they’re] really going to tell me. We’ve just got one lady who’s retired, I think she's, but she self-employees like us, she’s like a therapist, it all sounds a bit mysterious, she’s an Austrian lady and she’s very tied up, now with the garden and the treasurer, that’s [U], if you want names, she’s lived over here for many years now. We’ve got [P] who is French, a lovely international lot —
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: [P] is the manager, not the manager of the TMO, anyways he’s in charge, see
the—
Interviewer: The chair or something?
Interviewee: The chair, sorry, he must be 50-something, but he, he is very good, when he started, he started, he started off depressed and he was not a happy bunny, but since lately we’ve started off this move, he’s completely different, he loves helping, he’s out in the garden all times and who is his partner, he’s got a partner who also helps as well, [they] will not join the TMO though, just happy to help with the gardening.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: And practical things, yes that’s really it, there’s [B] who’s great, he’s very funny, he lives in the little […] down there, he’s in his 50’s as well, he hasn’t got a job, he was an artist, I think [P] used to be a waiter in England, when he come over here, because I think his parents are in France, it is very easy to get there nowadays.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: [Unclear audio 07:22-07:32] we have got [T], from Lithuania, Lithuanian lady.
Interviewer: Very international bunch.
Interviewee: Yeah, you can see that she’s very funny, [B] is as well, but he tries to hide it, yeah, that’s it, but can I say, this is really lovely and [Y] who is the […] lady, what’s her job now, it’s not treasurer, oh yeah she's fingering lots of pies but she is a full time worker.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: She’s very bright, she struts herself at council with working with the homeless and—
Interviewer: Oh wow.
Interviewee: Getting the avocations and she’s to use it herself, she won’t book any arguments.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: When [Y]’s in the room, you really can’t get your words in edgewise but we’ve got [F], [Z] must be in the 50’s as well, [F]’s very sweet, she’s very timid lady, she just retired so she’s in her 60’s. She’s also herself an employed artist, they’re some artsy people living here.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: There’s [M], he is, he must be 60 but he is a tenant, I wouldn’t say tenant, he owns 3 of the flats here. He’s often right hitting the money.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: There’s a lofty house, right around the corner, he just doesn’t live there, but he is on the TMO so he can keep an eye out for what’s going on with his tenants, I suppose.

Interviewer: Right, yeah. That makes sense.

Interviewee: Yes, a housing collection, it was fun.

Interviewer: Yeah, so how do meetings function and how often do they happen?

Interviewee: Well we have a general one, once a month, we had to cancel this one because [P] might be away and there’s no point having it without him and [L]. The, I’m sorry I’m getting this all mixed up, she is our manager, she should come along in the evening as well, so she’s very good, she’s very organized. Well she obviously doesn’t live here, she’s employed.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: From outside, which is a travel ticket, so very gratefully, we do have a gentleman before Richard, but unfortunately his wife is very very old and not with us, so he couldn’t spend any time doing the work he was mounting up, and in the end we feel really but we’re grateful, he had to resign.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And then [B] came along and she’s happier home, anyways, in between that we had sub committees meetings once a month as well, she had once a fortnight or some type of meeting.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And a talk on cheques as well.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: That’s it.

Interviewer: And how is, how does decision making happen, is it sort of, if you have an issue is it majority vote, is it a consensus vote type of thing?

Interviewee: Yes, it’s consensus really.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I really usually agree with everybody because that makes more sense, I can’t think of things out my own head anyways.

Interviewer: Yeah

Interviewee: So yeah, I agree with you.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: It’s never come to fight, let’s say, they are all very sensible, just talk it through and there’s no problem.

Interviewer: Right, right and kind of come to compromises on the issues—

Interviewee: Yes, just so much to do with stuff and security, anyways, yes and the next question.
Interviewer: Right, so how much time do you dedicate to this position with meeting and sort of signing cheques and –

Interviewee: I don’t sign it every time because [P] thought it would be nice to have some sort of recognition in the hours we put in and I haven’t done it since February, because it’s [been] insane, because we had to cancel meetings and we’ve have it a few days later and going to the banks as well, going to the banks are like an hour of my day, but doesn’t matter, if something happens I’ll just go shopping, and come back again, so it’s impossible to tell the time and cheques probably couple of times a week have to go in, to sign is no problem, just have a quick talk to anyone down there and so it’s a little social occasion, and the other meetings, TMO, the actual committee meetings, 2 hours up until night and then the other one safety is only every few months and that's quite a quickie, it’s always end up banging the head on another.

Interviewer: Right, yeah.

Interviewee: And there was a walk around, we take in turns to have a walk around the estate, and see if they are any urgent repairs that needing doing.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: And everybody else is the same, really. They fit them in when they can, but it's exactly like that, meeting once a month, apart for [P] not making it, we do it once a month, it’s part of the operations, or he can’t be able to make it yes.

Interviewer: Right, so you talked a bit about the different roles that different people have, but can you talk a little bit more about, maybe how responsibilities are distributed among other members?

Interviewee: We have a AGM and we have a voting chair for each other. We ask for anybody to volunteer and not give it to an outside stranger, very, very rarely. And so we just sort of vote for whoever who would be happy to do it, and as we very grateful to somebody’s offering, even if it is not much, that’s usually the—

Interviewer: Right, yeah.

Interviewee: We were really shocked when [M] offered to join, hit was one of those weekends when he really not here and he offered [....], that’s the only time ever turned up at the meeting, he didn’t know what he was supposed to be doing, we had to say yes, we had to give him our blessing because we encourage everybody—

Interviewee: To join.

Interviewer: Yeah, right.

Interviewee: So then we had, underneath me a gentleman, who’s almost completely deaf and if he doesn’t put his hearing aids in he can’t hear a thing, in which we had a meeting, he heard that and shout out in the meeting—

Interviewer: Oh no

Interviewee: But luckily, more hands went up in the air, after having a paid, all expenses paid trip--

Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: For a weekend. Sort of training with the other TMO’s and he kind of sort of left after that.

Interviewer: Really?

Interviewee: We thought I’ll get a holiday after this if nothing else, but that was a nice place to go to.

Interviewer: Oh I think you dropped a CD

Interviewee: Oh yes, thank you very much.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yes, so we have training, anyone who wants to train, we don’t need it but they’ll pay for it.

Interviewer: Right. Is it a challenge, so it’s a challenge to find volunteers usually?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you—

Interviewee: So we’ve got the ones who, because trouble is, we’ve got, on our floor, we’ve got 4 flats, and 4 of them are people who weren’t brought up here, they’re working in [the area] in finances and end up paying over [3]000 a month for flats here and they don’t want to be bothered with, the day to day, now do they?

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And so, even when we have our open day, It’s very unusual to see anybody come to, because they’ve got the sports covers they want to go to and we’re offering them to help work

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But that’s not the reason we just wanted to be on this nice occasion.

Interviewer: Right. So next questions, so I want to talk a bit about the problem solving approach in the TMO, so do specific members come with problems and solutions or is it sort of we all collaborate around solutions and problems?

Interviewee: I wish I could... but we've got a chance at the beginning to come up with, so to... Oh yes, so it must be very old, oh it just says December the 10th, it could be a couple of years or for one. We have that to go through, please keep it...

Interviewee: Oh yeah, yeah, I also I think the year is on the—

Interviewer: That's fine, it's more just an example of, it’s 2016, it says on this one and this is 2015, okay.

Interviewee: I’m hardly going to need them again, am I? [laughter]

Interviewer: Great.

Interviewee: Health and safety committee, that’s the one I want. 2015 this is, it’s not that bad, even if it is that old----

Interviewer: Right, so are there sort of specific members who are more engaged with the coming up with solutions or sort of running the meeting, or people who sort of take charge and people who sort of take orders, that kind of thing?
**Interviewee:** It is supposed to be [P] who's in charge, but he's very good but he's very sweet. And so it gets in all the time, the [Region Y] lady.

**Interviewer:** Right, right, so you have someone who is meant to be a leader, but other people who –

**Interviewee:** He does, but she’s a bit naughty, why you had to repeat that though, because if you had asked me, so sorry.

**Interviewer:** No, this is still very useful to me.

**Interviewee:** Good.

**Interviewer:** So I wanted to ask, so then, yes my next question was who are the most influential people, which we’ve already talked about with the [Region Y] lady.

**Interviewee:** [Z].

**Interviewer:** Yes, so from your perspective, what are some of the limitations for tenants with regards to managing the affairs of styles house?

**Interviewee:** My limitations, I can’t speak out loud and they’ll say Bailey you haven’t said anything, I can’t get a word in edgewise, if I wanted to.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** They just talk out, merry, merry.

**Interviewer:** Right, yeah.

**Interviewee:** It doesn’t worry me obviously, because I learn a lot and learn what’s going on here and I may just ignore it otherwise because the sub committees then they’ll keep it to themselves and things like that, I wouldn’t mind bringing on the gardening sub-committee, but I’m not very active in that now.

**Interviewer:** Right, yeah.

**Interviewee:** Did you see our allotment? We’ve got an allotment on our grounds. Interviewer I have not but I will take a look after that.

**Interviewee:** it’s quite--

**Interviewer:** Yes, I’d love to see it. Right, so who writes up these sort of task lists?

**Interviewee:** We see [L], as funny here. Now, I mention it, yes, if anything you want actually mentioned or [Z] or [P], they put it down to be talked about in the next discussion, I actually have one more.

**Interviewer:** I have an agenda.

**Interviewee:** Okay, let me put it on the agenda.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Up to the last moment, if there’s anything else I can think of then, yes.

**Interviewer:** Right. So what happens when there are disagreements among members in the TMO?

**Interviewee:** There tend to be not actually, it’s really good natured, everybody is for a benefit, it’s just not like that, I think we need some horrible old men in it, not that that may change a thing.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Because the order of it, just the order of it. We just have the same kind of mindset, so I think we’re quite unusual, that’s why we come out with our thing.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: You see when [R] was here, we used to be so pleased with leaving. [R] wanted, she was a really good gardener though and she used to be a teacher.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But then my daughter is a teacher and she doesn’t act like that, that’s no excuse.
Interviewer: So, would she sort of talk over people or would it be sort of her way or the highway kind of thing?
Interviewee: Yes and she is also [Region Y], so she and [Y], even though we found out they came from the same town, had nothing in common.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: A small town in [Region Y], that’s a strange occurrence.
Interviewer: Strange, yes it is.

Interviewee: Maybe that is why they were rivals at school.
Interviewer: Maybe, that’s funny. So do you have any sort of story you could share maybe about this person, this woman where you felt that nobody was listening to you or sort of ignoring you in the meeting?
Interviewee: It’s maybe because I have a very quiet fine voice and I can’t, the [Region Y] ladies, they really talk loudly and fast and you can’t get often, it’s often [U], the Austrian lady that says Bailey is trying to speak, listen to Bailey, Bailey what you’ve got to say?
Interviewer: Right, right.
Interviewee: I do feel like they don’t listen to me much but I don’t really have anything to add, nothing really, it’s evident anyway, and I’m not there to [unclear audio 23:19-23:24] just doing what I’m happy with really. Yeah, we haven’t got that big of problems here.
Interviewer: That’s good.
Interviewee: Yeah, the only thing, oh you may ask HR about problems but what’s going on, on and on is security gates, if you’ve noticed, we’ve got gates.
Interviewer; Yes.
Interviewee: But they don’t actually lock.
Interviewer: No?
Interviewee: And we get a few people who are not wanted here, because of, they kind of wander in and we’ve had a few drug problems in the garden. In fact, all of them disappeared because we found out what was happening and strange enough, the neighbours with dogs decided that they’re going to take their walk with their dogs around there, so which led them being chased off.
Interviewer: Ohh.
Interviewee: But It shouldn’t be, decide to be up to them.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: We decided the gates were a big problem going on for a couple of years now and we decided to bring the gates in so cars could actually come in and not block road off, because its only one up and one down in [H] and then we’ve got, this thing that not’s elegant to have, you know it’s locks, just press it and the keyboard or how is it going to work with deliveries? Because they can’t really park in [H]. It’s a really really big problem that’s going on and on and everybody’s fed up with the subject, like oh no, not that again. Every month we have to talk about the gates, I think we’ve actually got an open day next week, where we’re going, they’re going to show us some samples.
Interviewer: Oh, that’s great.
Interviewee: Yes. I hope some gentleman is going to walk in with samples of full-size gates.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: On his shoulders.
Interviewer: Can install them right there.
Interviewee: Yes, if you would be so kind.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: That is for and we also got to raise a long, it’s going to stop, we’ve put it all by, it’s been there for a years now.
Interviewer: And has this been an issue then for a couple of years?
Interviewee: Yes, oh yes. We got people parking up the street and people tailgating as they come in, with security. There’s no other way they can get in, actually [unclear audio 25:34-25:37] a few months, it said I was expecting a delivery, so let them in, oh no, they came here in the end, they didn’t bring the delivery to another flat I hope.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: He felt so guilty, oh I didn’t let him in, but it’s pretty safe here because I leave the door open a lot, to test to see if they can…
Interviewer: Yeah
Interviewee: Just to see if they can get around
Interviewer: Right. It’s just mostly people coming into the garden, yeah, maybe, did you say a drug problem or something?, yeah.
Interviewee: We’d find them in the bushes.
Interviewer: Yeah, they’re trying to find a hiding place.
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: Understandable.
Interviewee: Anyway, that’s a united thing so I’ll phone the others, I’ll say, somebody’s in the garden, could you phone the police? Yeah I’ll phone the police, they go down to meet them.
Interviewer: Right. So to talk a bit about your, is your social landlord, is it the local council or is it—
Interviewee: Yes we are.
Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: It’s more 50/50 I think, because the leaseholders, say they’re getting out much money, they’re making a fortune, they bought them at council rates, you know, big discounts.

Interviewer: Right, the right to buy.

Interviewee: Right to buy--

Interviewer: And so, half the flats here, were owned by someone and then rented out again or? Okay.

Interviewee: I would love to be opposite number 20, last year, it was honestly a brothel.

Interviewer: Uh oh.

Interviewee: [...]

Interviewer: Uh oh.

Interviewee: Yes, and luckily, he didn’t believe us at first, but because [M] who is on the committee, it’s one of his flats and we said [M], it’s obvious, every 20 minutes, half an hour, it’s another man, sending out there to look around, there could be drugs of course, he’s like keep an eye on it, we went on holiday and we came back, it all cleared out, so ridiculous, it’s just ridiculous, I bang bang on the door, they went in and went out, he was pretty pissed, normally, trust us a little bit.

Interviewer: Right, right, so okay, to get a sense then, so roughly half is leaseholder owned and is it, it’s usually sort of people who own it, not sort of companies right?

Interviewee: We have, oh yes, a point. I don’t know what they’re going to do about it, but they’re going to build a T.F.L.O building opposite there.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Is mainly transport from [City X] and they are going to build a [unclear audio 28:31-28:33] station, which would be underground there.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: They’re going to build a 30 floor building, in our view but to get a-- I think it’s sold out, another company is sold out to T.F.O, who wanted to build even closer to us, so we wouldn’t have any view and that company has bought 5 flats here, one over there, 4 in this building, they haven’t because they’re sold out but they’re empty, they’re buying everybody out, so just give the majority to, very complicated, very sneaky and we were so crossed about it, even [K], well I told you, who moved out, she didn’t realize she left it in the hands of the estate agents and they sold it to these product developers, her flat and she has a say and she didn’t answer, well she never would allow it but she shouldn’t have left it in their hand, should she?

Interviewer: Right, yes.

Interviewee: Because it won’t be viewed from up there. It’s a lovely view at least, throughout the river and it was just lovely, she did love it.

Interviewer: That sounds very stressful

Interviewee: Very stressful, [G] is looking into, I don’t want to move but we’re going to have a lot of building going on, next few years building that and the college offset the overland behind
the hotel group that bought it and they’re going to build a higher hotel, underground the campus there, oh no not that, it’s everywhere.

Interviewer: Lots of building
Interviewee: Yeah, it’s really difficult trying to keep the windows clean but it’s stressful always, and the noise, the noise, but I love living in this area so, see if there’s anywhere else, because [G] is 75 and that’s a big age for us, a year apart for us.

Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: She says hopefully.

Interviewee: We’ll take to move and I love looking out down at things that are happening and across, I see guys from the hospital from here, off down that road, along through there, I’ve got an appointment so that’s where I get to pass.

Interviewer: It is an amazing view
Interviewee: It is lovely, and the older the city is, the top of it, there’s a take there, but of course as you go high, you actually see the [art museum] and that’s across the river in the city of [X].

Interviewer: I’ll take a look after, before I go.
Interviewee: Yes, yes, and try opening that window, I cant open that window, but I need to clean it, they bought this building on the edge of [B Bridge], is that 50 floors? Yes it’s brand new, they haven’t quite opened it, that one used to belong to a magazine company, [...] magazines and they built something with that, floors, 20 something and they made it way higher.

Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: I’m thinking about who did.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah I do. The lines.

Interviewee: It’s called [P House], you know that’s just on the river, by [B] bridge, used to be offices, called sea containers, which was to deal with, the big, some kind of sea containers, that dealt with, I’m sorry, [company M] and it has turned into a beautiful hotel, very smart and it’s absolutely lovely, my husband goes there a lot, he sits by the river, looking down on it, but I’ve work to do.

Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: He’s happy, he’s looking for a planner as well. So we’re lucky.

Interviewer: To what extent is the TMO consulted by the local authority or by any of the companies building in the area about things that are happening or new changes?

Interviewee: We are supposed to be really kept up to date with what’s happening with this land here right it’s a promise that never builds on this without our permission.

Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: Which of it doesn't agree with what they want because we want them to we've offered to take over the land and build some more council places, single places for people who—there’s a desperate need for single people.

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: To live here and we see it’s not suitable for children because a lot of people, and I love children myself, but we don’t really want to have children around, because you’re getting older.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: See what a miserable lot we are [laughter]. So the most we have is 2 bedrooms but we are being consulted and I probably got messages from, about that as well from the liaison gentlemen from [the council], who does, who is our spokesperson, he goes to meetings for us and I don’t know how he’s getting paid, I think the [council] pay him, but we have meetings with him about what we’re doing here and he represents us--

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewee: And hopefully not [the council]. [laughter]

Interviewer: So you, so the TMO is consulted—

Interviewer: But how much say does the TMO actually have over what happens?

Interviewee: We probably think we got more than we have, because they don’t have to consult us really, just sit there, have a lot of opposition and you’ve got Lib-Dem councillors on our side, they always have been, they do their hardest to go to meetings, as well, they say we’re consulted, one thing they have conceded at the moment, it’s the horrible factory building, if you look out, it’s called [...] health [unclear audio 34:54] because you have to look down, they are a T.F.O unit as well independent artistes and T.F.O has one as well, and they’re going to demolish it through this huge building, just here, just meters away really look at one light it looks like they finally give away to us and they’re going to do up [...] house because it looks for they thought it was trendy and it is in there for a couple of years they said on the balcony on the roof for all the shouting to all of you. They just to clear out you know they had their European flags flying as well, got to know the different countries .Oh they sent a message around the other day to say the T.F.O has decided they’re going to do up [...] house.

Interviewer: Oh, I love cats so...

Interviewee: Oh, Tussy, hello, she just wanted to—

Interviewer: What a beautiful cat, oh that’s fine. I have no problems with this, trust me, this is a great surprise.

Interviewee: She can’t resist temptation to come out. Go find [Z], she’s out of the ordinary, she doesn’t like cats, [...]

Interviewer: Oh no.

Interviewee: This is so bad.

Interviewer: No, it’s very funny, I love it.

Interviewee: Oh, bless.

Interviewer: As a student, [I] don’t get to spend a lot of time with pets.

Interviewee: I suppose.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: She has certain, what do they call it, she’s got [unclear audio 36:47] development because of her brain, the vet finally told us, because she walks funny, she walks very low and it weakens her bottom a little bit, and she just flops, but that’s part of it. Cerebral dysplasia, we just thought she was odd, which she is as well.
Interviewer: She is a beautiful cat, she’s very friendly.
Interviewee: And my daughter’s got her brother, he looks nothing like her, he’s a ginger tom.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Short hair ginger tom. She has got perfect--
Interviewer: Oh yeah, back to the interview, yes, I guess also the cat maybe wants to answer some questions.
Interviewee: She does, right Tussy, what would you say about this? Happy really, she can see that mommy gets quite excited about [unclear audio 37:49] here.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: But we can’t go anywhere that we can’t take our cat with us, she’s our life isn’t she.
Interviewer: Right, I imagine.
Interviewee: She’ll find out one day
Interviewer: Yeah, so you mentioned that the [borough] local councillors right?
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: Are very supportive of the tenants here.
Interviewee: They are.
Interviewer: So they consult the TMO on any decisions they make?
Interviewee: Yeah yes yes we always invite them to city meetings if they don't know about them, because they've been councillors for years now and I think they've been voted back in again.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But in response to labour they can’t, I think it's funny because it's actually labour owned here, but this little pocket.
Interviewer: Little pocket, okay.
Interviewee: That we just love our councillors, we’re not letting them go that easily.
Interviewer: And so I guess the sentiment I'm hearing is that the council is more likely to genuinely consult you whereas the companies are less likely to be genuine.
Interviewee: Yes. I hope that the council is, they got to they've got to send plans to us and we've got it in black and white that they’ll always consult us before they agree to anything, so we have to believe them.
Interviewer: But that's not the same for the developers?
Interviewee: No. Okay, the developer workers, they have tried to sweet talk us, they have taken us out for wine but we’re not fooled
Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And see the horrible designs that come up—and just the thing they talk about here now is slabs and it’s just awful, looking like that building, its glass and you can see into it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And it’s been up for years now [unclear audio 19:51-40:00].

Interviewer: Right, so the next question

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Right, so what type of local authority decisions are tenants always or usually consulted on and which ones are you not consulted on that might affect you?

Interviewee: I’m just trying to think. They didn't seem to consult us about putting cycle lanes around here which they are putting back wide roads here -

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Cycle lanes which pleases some people, but it has brought extra traffic around here because people trying to avoid it because it its narrow but also two four lanes to two lanes to get back to [...] switch and back and [inaudible 00:00:36 – 00:00:37] people are trying to avoid us and come this way, which is affecting us really because of the extra –

Interviewer: Traffic –

Interviewee: Extra traffic and it’s probably already quiet there now but such as Sunday mornings are so quiet you wouldn’t believe it's the same place. Now it's like a village and you can actually walk along the center of the road if you're really that mad, but you know.

Interviewer: I see –

Interviewee: Yes, there's a weird person going out there. But they have to by law tell us things because then we’ll have a protest, like we all protested against [inaudible 00:01:16 – 00:01:18] the railroads which is here but they are so noisy in the evenings. Recently people they don’t realize how sound travels when it goes up and we're on from us onwards, it gets really loud at the top floor she had the council coming around to measure decibels and its way out what's the limit is. But, I don't think they did anything apart from taking a hearing because I went to a hearing and said don't do it today but do something. They had like some sort of backers out there to try and back all the noise, but he can’t stop people chatting and you can’t expect we all to be inside in the middle of the summer's day, so we just put up with it. We shut the windows and put the air conditioning on.

Interviewer: Right –

Interviewee: People upstairs haven’t gotten air conditioning – I don’t know what they do but I suppose you get used to it and they do tend to leave by midnight when it’s sort of quiet out there again.

Interviewer: Right –

Interviewee: But it's dictated by them, what time you get to bed really. Anyway, the council say they did try to do something, and they have lay down some laws.
Interviewer: Right. So, they are meant to consult you about, anything that happens that would sort of affect I guess property values of this estate or anything on this estate but certain things like you mention the roads they're not as obligated to consult?
Interviewee: At least they did have a consultation, but we didn’t hear about that one.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: It’s a sneaky one and you should see the cyclists going partway painted Oxford you know about cyclists –
Interviewer: Yes, definitely!
Interviewee: But down the main road they still have accidents happening –
Interviewer: Right –
Interviewee: Not sure how that happens but they are all segregated which makes life difficult for us because we have to go across the cyclists to get the buses now and the buses are held up in all the other traffic for this stupid one lane.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: That's where it's good that my husband’s not here because he gets really upset about it.
Interviewer: Frustrating. So, if you or another tenant expresses an issue to the local council what type of response do you expect?
Interviewee: The local. We get a letter back to acknowledge it, and then sort of disappears. [inaudible 00:04:01 – 00:04:05] but you have to be really determined to – do you mean like the buildings or do you mean inside the actual flats.
Interviewee: I mean I guess for both, both the building and your particular flat.
Interviewee: Oh we have different, the TMO looks after different things, we've got the budget that will pay for certain things we’ve taken over but the council is running [inaudible 00:04:30 – 00:04:33] were raised yesterday actually. The hot tub in the bathroom is intermittently making those awful screech [inaudible 00:04:40 – 00:04:48] that it was just coming from the hot water tub. For a few days she can't use the tub and then you have to use the cold water and come in here to use the tub. We told [L] of TMO and she said Oh that's the council's duties so we told the council and they say no, it’s TMO, and were caught up between the two, but I think it's the council, because it’s the air or something in the pipes, not the TMO, they don’t own the building but the council do.
Interviewer: Oh, interesting.
Interviewee: So that just came up yesterday, it came up and I went to take a look and of course it behaved itself [unclear audio 45:42-45:48], my husband could hear it, he just heard and said oh gosh can you turn that thing off.
Interviewer: So there’s a bit of confusion about who is responsible for what.
Interviewee: Yes, there is.
Interviewer: With the TMO and the council.
Interviewee: Little bit of confusion but [L]’s going away, she didn’t tell us where she was going, what was it, it’s to do with [unclear audio 46:12] yes and we didn’t know, so it’s up to us now, we’ve really got to get on to the council, but there are real issues, it’s a building, she said what it was, [L] thinks what the problem was to rectify it, I said we got a squeaky tap and she said I thought to myself WD40 should fix it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I mean, we know that, but it’s more than the tap, the whole thing seems to be shaking, yes, so they are not responsible for that. I guess a lot of people are confused about what we’re responsible for, she did write it down, let’s see if I got it.

Interviewer: That’s okay.

Interviewee: Sorry.

Interviewer: No problem. Overall how would you describe the relationship between the TMO and the—I guess we’ve already talked about this actually the TMO and the local authority is generally supportive?

Interviewee: Well, they’re supposed to be supporting us, they do give us a grant but only however if they got the grant this year as is.

Interviewer: How interesting.

Interviewee: I don’t know how much this year of it.

Interviewer: Do you know why they cut the grant at all?

Interviewee: Well, they’re obligated to make savings right across [the borough], so they want to encourage people to become TMO’s so should be done there. I can’t, I don’t know the exact amount, but we’ve got 3000.

Interviewer: And has this posed a challenge for the TMO, to do its usual?

Interviewee: We still get some money from [unclear audio 48:17-48:24] a few weeks ago, I think they are still going to be paying us.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: So that’s make a difference, it’s 19,000 a year, that’s [unclear audio 48:31-48:34]

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: It’s just the joy of having us on the roof, it’s not going to much good just selling plants, I don’t think that would help, the board is up for hire and we do get a few people but then, if it’s local, we put the money down anyways so can’t be mean to them, so literally that’s what our money spent on.

Interviewer: Right. Alright, so how do you communicate with or receive feedback from other tenants? Well maybe not in the TMO.

Interviewee: They are free to see [L] when she’s here anytime and she’ll make an appointment in the evening if necessary, if she can’t see you during the daytime, and feedback, oh she does write down every customer that comes in to see her or compliment or compliment [unclear audio 49:36-49:40].

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: I don’t know if that’s a [L] thing, she just brought it in or what, I can’t remember but it’s a good idea, it’s very accessible to people, they can put a vote through the door or just come and bang on her door, if she’s here on holiday, but it is school holidays, her daughter’s off as well, which is understandable.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: It’s quite easy, if they want to see a committee member, I think most people know who we are.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: But nobody ever does.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: If they do, we’ll direct them to [L].

Interviewer: But they do sort of feel like they have a voice, if they want to use it?

Interviewee: I think they do, I’ve never heard anyone muttering saying how put upon they are.

Interviewer: Right, do you think there might be factors that limit other tenants from being involved in the TMO or getting their voice out in other ways out to the TMO?

Interviewee: We’ve got a few people whose English isn’t that good but, let me see, one person who should be coming, but doesn’t is an elderly, I think he’s even older than me, he’s Moroccan, he does speak English, but he finds it really difficult to speak out, he’s retired. In fact, he stops here very often nowadays.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: He’s not doing very well. I think it would be language, if anything [unclear audio 51:19- 51:25], I don’t know why they, It’s pretty easy to get to that’s why, It’s 12 minutes.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: They work here, banking, I don’t know why, they must advertise in [unclear audio 51:35-51:41].

Interviewer: I have though, a couple of final questions.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: Yes of course. We do, when we have our annual meeting, we do get it full and we do give them the offer of wine.

Interviewer: Oh that might be—

Interviewee: Yes, we have a feeding. That’s how [G], did volunteering, here’s a glass of wine he said and cake.

Interviewer: Sounds funny.

Interviewee: We have at every meeting, but that was funny. I still haven’t answered your question.

Interviewer: Oh, was just whether more tenant participation is always good? Kind of positive thing?
Interviewee: Oh, I see. The more, the merrier. We welcome everybody, we will find the a job to do if they would, even if it’s in the garden or helping out on the roof one day.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yeah, it’s good to see everybody, good to know them.

Interviewer: How do you see the future of tenant participation?

Interviewee: We’ll see more people move out and move in more people, youngsters, they don’t want to know.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Really don’t so as we disappear, the old ones, I can’t see anybody wanting to take over. This task doesn’t really count, every penny has to be accounted for of course.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: That would defy all my years as an accountant.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But you have to have this brain, this mindset, to be able do things like that. We’ve got to present the accountant and [Z]’s very good with the secretary bit, she just sits at the computer, had it been [K], her [Region Y] rival, she’d try to, she’d say “Would you be quite, I can’t catch up” and she’d shout, sorry and there’s [Z], she’s so laidback, she just carries on how I feel sometime, yeah but it’s okay if somebody wants to do that. We did have a South African lady once and she designed our [...] house logo.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: We’re very grateful to her but she moved as well, she’s in Holland to get away from us honestly. It’s not that far, it is also nice we started giving pensioners, which is our [unclear audio 54:24-54:28].

Interviewer: Oh, interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah that’s lovely, great surprise, even though I’m on the committee, I didn’t know they were doing it, they did that behind my back. Yes, so people over 60 had that.

Interviewer: Oh, that’s lovely.

Interviewee: Yeah, it is, isn’t it?

Interviewer: So how do tenants in the TMO act as community representatives? That’s a very broad question but-

Interviewee: When you say representatives, they always got meetings at the town hall, not the town hall, the—

Interviewer: Council—

Interviewee: City hall, yeah and [the borough] town halls, they go to meetings there or other TMO’s they have meetings to get people together and the have training sessions and they go to that and they teach other, I hadn’t been to, I only been to one once with [V], I can’t remember what they were talking about, it was something to do with hiring people, it was an interesting time out there.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But you can tell, my memory’s really not that good.
Interviewer: It’s been good enough, so yeah, do you have any comments or anything else you would like to share or any?
Interviewee: Apart from being really happy here, despite being so crammed and tiny, it’s really just a family and why I think we’ve got so many sofas, we can always have our family gatherings here, so let’s say, we don’t put 4 people there, perhaps 7, 8.
Interviewer: Great.
Interviewee: I just enjoy the others as friends, they’re really sweet and we got together on Sunday, we had about 5 different people from different households, sitting there on the grass, well what's left of the grass, spiky grass.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: They took us a bit down there and they were just having drinks and we had everyone sitting go around a bonfire and we’re toasting marshmallows, it sounds very [...] doesn’t it?
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: We just like doing things like that.
Interviewer: Yeah. Are there often social events for the?
Interviewee: Not that many
Interviewer: Not that, okay.
Interviewee: Just the summer one, they might probably have another barbeque later on, we just try to have a new year, we even had a film evening once, that was very funny, it was a really stupid 1950’s film where we couldn’t stop laughing, ooooo very scary, so yeah, anybody’s free to use the barbeque, we’ve got 2 down there, as long as they clean up after them.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: They can invite their families and it was very nice, we had a—it was like bricks, but only it was designed by some, garden designing that we had thought of, that’s when we some money once.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Probably in ‘88, I can’t remember because they’ve got hotels and they’ve got new building and are supposed to give money to the locals and different inhabitants, like us, to improve the area.
Interviewer: Oh, interesting.
Interviewee: [unclear audio 57:46-57:48], anyways something like that.
Interviewer: But that’s no longer a policy, is it?
Interviewee: I think it is.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: You have to give something back to the community.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: We should take it and write building on it, so this is why we got the designer from [unclear audio 58:05]. Yeah, I’ll show you around it.
Interviewer: Yea, sure.
Interviewee: As long as [unclear audio 58:10-58:12] can do some work in there long as were there.
Interviewer: Fair enough
Interviewee: That would be funny if you see anybody in real life, ahh how’s about you [P]? You’re the one [unclear audio 58:22-58:23].
Interviewer: Be like, oh are you in the TMO? Can I talk to you for an hour? Can I come over?, that’s all my main questions. I have some, I can pause this now, so—
Interviewee: I love your earrings, so beautiful.
Interviewer: Thank you.
Interviewee: The colour.
Interviewer: Thank you.

Appendix 19: Cooperative Interviewee “Abigail” Transcript

Interviewer: I understand completely. So why did you decide to join the co-op and how did you get involved with specifically management co-op life?
Interviewee: Okay. Well, joining the co-op, the co-op was formed around 76' by basically a bunch of squatters and my current partner was in [squatting] with [B] so were a lot of the original co-op members were a part of that. And, so he heard about [V[, he was actually a founder member, I think he joined in 78', 79 and we got together in 1980 but we'd been squatting in the same place in [Region N] and he was trying to get us all to come and join in, come and join the co-op. And a few people did, but then we got together and at that time the housing, they were housing people in blocks so they had like housing blocks, so you know, you got 10 people or so in a block and purchase the houses we have to allocate them to people in that block and they would even be rehoused according to that. So he was in the next block to be rehoused. The flats, the house where we are had been allocated to people and they were being rehoused and then to the people. One, a pair of prospective tenants who'd been allocated, dropped out and decided they didn't want to live in the co-op after all and they were moving away and so it was reallocated to the people, somebody in the housing. The next housing block was cut between my partner and I got to piggyback. I shouldn't really you know having only join within a year or something I sort of, figuratively speaking, shouldn't have been housed then but we were a couple expecting a baby so we were housed. And so that's why I joined. And as for getting involved in those days, we had monthly meetings that were just a general meeting they didn't have separate management meetings. They were monthly meetings and everybody had to go along to the monthly meetings. And...
Interviewer: And did everyone go at the time?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, yeah they'd be packed up, and we had our own set of offices and rooms that we had bought before they were rehoused so, at that time [inaudible 02:43] and they were, they were all just really really dusty, full of people sitting on, you know, sitting on the floor, sitting on broken chairs, yeah, they were always pretty packed, they were always about 30 or so people at the meetings. And some of the others volunteer to take the minutes. They would happen to be a chair and a secretary and a treasurer to be the co-op.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And they probably were a guest I mean I just came to the monthly meetings at that time they must have been a management committee who may have met separately for all I know.

Interviewer: Right. But it changed over time or...

Interviewee: Well, we moved into...Oh yeah, no that's right because I was being allocated. That used to be 1980 because our house was in development, but then the housing corporation had a moratorium on all spending. So for at least six months, nothing happened to our house. So by the time we did move in, I think we may be fourth or fifth property to be tenanted.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And so we then realize that we needed to have a tenants committee, a residence committee, you know, we needed to...

Interviewer: To have all the different committees.

Interviewee: Yes. So that's when I really started becoming involved in the original co-op rather than just go to general meetings.

Interviewer: And what sort of drew you to co-op? In terms of, I mean at the time because there was a baby on the way and all of that, there was a housing need. But in terms of getting involved in committees or you know, attending co-op meetings and these sort of things, what motivated you to become involved?

Interviewee: Well the thing about joining the co-op was that we were going to be our own landlords.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And you know it was a co-op and we had, you know, we were all involved in running it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And my partner was training to be a bricklayer at the time and so he was obviously involved in the kind of maintenance sub-committee and all that you know.

Interviewer: Yeah, Yeah.

Interviewee: And I was a teacher and had a certain amount of skills you need to go to meetings and write minutes and...

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You know, take minutes, write minutes and do stuff.
Interviewer: Did you have any sort or committee positions or do you sort of usually volunteer to take minutes or the different types of things you're involved in?

Interviewee: Well, I mean we're talking about thirty-seven years of involvement, so I have. It's all voluntary.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Yes, it's all voluntary. So every year of the AGM we vote in the new management committee.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And some of those would be people who are standing again and they'll be all volunteers. So we kind of need about ten people, seven minimum, to be on the management committee. So the AGM, it's a [...] for volunteers and sometimes we get...

Interviewer: Great.

Interviewee: Some people, sometimes we don't. And then we have to co-op people during the year but I'm the kind of person who would, you know, put my hand up.

Interviewer: Right. And have you enjoyed, like overall enjoyed your experience with the co-op? Being involved, were there any challenges? There were probably some, but throughout your time volunteering with the co-op?

Interviewee: Well yes. I mean meeting like you see this, I know, 'How to' workshops. Now there's probably one about 'how to run or attend successful meetings'. And it's all, you know, its always a way where you get somebody who is just going to go on and on and on or is just going to throw in red herrings and ask stupid questions and, I mean not because they don't understand but just through sheer [cussedness] and so I'll be happy to be chair, to chair a meeting, to make sure people don't go on and on. And we do have standing orders where our meetings are all supposed to finish at ten o'clock. The latest an evening meeting should finish is ten. So you have to suspend standing orders if you got really important stuff that you have to do. It's better if you just adjourn and have another meeting. But I'm trying to answer what's been difficult about being in the co-op and not to other people, because, you know, we're all disparate human beings.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And we all have our own needs and, you know, fair enough. But you can get very annoyed by some people.

Interviewer: Right. So currently, how often do meetings occur? In terms of general meetings, committee meetings...

Interviewee: General meetings are quarterly and the month of a general meeting, it replaces the management meeting which happened monthly, the monthly management committee meeting also monthly sub-committee meetings. So there are five sub-committees. Membership, finance, finance, and employment together, maintenance, our new on core development which we just started developing again. And community and communications [inaudible 09:18].

Interviewer: And when there's decisions being made at meetings, is it consensus or majority vote or sort of what's the process of going from an issue to a solution? A problem to a solution.
**Interviewee:** Well a discussion possibly led by the chair, or the chair might ask somebody who's bringing the proposal or whatever to the meeting to lead the discussion and everybody would get a chance to say what they want. And so I suppose, you know, we kind of aim for consensus, which if you know, it might. If it's going to and fro, then I'm the kind of person to say okay we get a vote on this now. So that, yeah, majority vote.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Makes Sense. So how much time do you volunteer for the co-op in a given week or in a month? How many hours do you put in?

**Interviewee:** Well, none at the moment even though I've been promising [G] who's a worker, who's here every Wednesday, normally, to call in and do some meanie old task for her. But when I was chair, I would say, so that would be a two-hour meeting a month and then I was also on one of the sub-committees as well, so that would be another two-hour meeting a month. And then there would be preparations for that because I was co-chair when I established us having a co-treasurer year before. But of course it does mean you then have to meet with your co and, you know, work out what you're going to do. So that would be more meetings, but it did mean also that it didn't matter you couldn't go to a meeting that the other person could carry on. So then, so I was co-treasurer, then the last year became co-chair of the co-op. And there'll be other meetings with [G]. I mean as treasurer I was meeting with [G] every Wednesday, to you know, just to go through the finance and stuff that was going to be then presented to [L].

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, you know, anything from five hours a week.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Three, two hours. At least two hours a week but everything here [inaudible 11:48], you know, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** I know it's a [...] of strain for you depends on how many letters you volunteer to write.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Or how much research you volunteer to do.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. So, right. So you spoke a little bit about some of the specific roles you've done being co-chair, co-treasurer and I think, okay, I think we've covered most of those things. Right. So are there influential people in the co-op and I mean sort of like, personalities or I don't want to say figures, not like famous people, but people who are influential in the co-op meetings and things like that.

**Interviewee:** Yeah. A previous chair, [inaudible 12:43], was chair for quite a long time and for about three years he was saying, right, this is my last year and I'm going to step down. So he finally did step down, in 2016, I think. But he is still active within the co-op but he's not a chair.

**Interviewer:** Right.
Interviewee: But he was, yeah he was extremely and is extremely influential a very good understanding about the co-op, understanding about issues that need to be dealt very keen on a sketching streamline, being less wishy-washy, having proper quality. He has led over the past few years, a complete policy rewrites and sub-committee standing orders in terms of reference, complete review. I mean, not necessarily re-write, some of them have been though, yeah, a complete reviewer of policies and he was good with that, excellent bloke. I'm very glad he's still around. Because most people when they go after they'd been chair...

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: They kind of drop out.

Interviewer: Right. But he stuck around.

Interviewee: He stuck around, yeah.

Interviewer: How would you decide the problem-solving approach in the co-op? So, for example, if there is an issue, where do the solutions come from? If that makes sense.

Interviewee: Well, [G], the co-op workers, are in charge of the finding out. You know, getting us information to come back to the committee. All the decisions are made by the management committee and then brought to the next general meeting for, well information really, I mean they're not going to formally rectify at the general meeting, they're going to formally rectify by the management committee, but if the general members, you know, have a query or raise something then obviously you can go back to management and be rediscussed. Sorry, why was I saying that?

Interviewer: The question was the problem-solving approach. How do you...

Interviewee: Yes, yeah. So, questions will be raised at the general meeting about anything and everything and so then a working party will be set up.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: So they'll be a call in the newsletter or at the general meeting or at a sub-committee meeting where, you know, I'll say okay well that's really under the rematch of the maintenance or the communications group. So they'll discuss it at they're sub-committee and then, and you know, and if your interested in being part of a working party then, you know, make yourself known and so, yeah, that's that. Unless something comes up at management, and somebody who's on management, the chair brings out and says, okay, you know, let me think about this and I'll come back to the next meeting. Which, not just the chair, anybody can do that.

Interviewer: Right. What happens when they are disagreements among members and the co-op at general meetings or in working party meetings or in a volunteering context?

Interviewee: Well, I can't really think of any disagreements apart from getting things done. I mean, and workers saying about, you know, for example, somebody decided to have those bloody, I don't know if they are over dinner. Oh, part of they are. Aren't they? Perhaps I don't disagree with them saying much. But they had some lovely wall lights on here and anyway they go above. So, I complained and moaned a bit at the meeting and then apologized for being
grumpy at the end of the meeting. You know, because the majority decision had been yes, we're going to go for these, you know.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So that's a disagreement, that kind of disagreement that is an inconvenience

**Interviewer:** Right. Yes.

**Interviewee:** I've been on the complaints committee where between, it was made against the co-op for the way that they had for the way that they had been dealing with a situation between two tenants. A problem that one tenant was causing another tenant. And the victim, you know, had asked that co-op for support and had not received it. So he made a complaint. So I was on that complain committee, so we interviewed both the tenants, we did plenty of researching to how we can solve, help both the tenants and we took some resolutions to the management committee and they are resulting in more working parties and with a view to developing more policies on supporting vulnerable people and what it means to be a co-op member.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** What your rights and responsibilities are. So that's what's come out of it.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Sorry, that was a really bad roundabout answer.

**Interviewer:** No, no. That's a lot of useful detail. Yeah. But generally, it sounds like at the committee level they aren't a lot of disagreements or at that level, there isn't as many serious...

**Interviewee:** I don't think so, but like I said I haven't actually been to a’ committee meeting for over a year now.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** But the chair, I think that the secret is the chair and [M]’s the [former] chair and [R] is the new chair who I deserted and is now chair all on her own, [...], she's an actress so she's got kind of a presence and, you know, she can speak to a room full of people and, you know.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And, you know, she's got good people backing her up as well. So she's not on her own, so that's good

**Interviewer:** [T] does the co-op act to preserve the interest of its members at the community level. So, for example, if there is a new development in the area or, you know, something, adding a buy claim like, you know, just hypothetical things are changing in the neighborhood. How does the co-op as a committee act, or does it have a role that way.

**Interviewee:** No, not really, but I have recently volunteered to join the [neighborhood B] neighborhood forums, so [the borough] has these forums, you know, for people which various organization are part of and the [neighborhood B] forum seem to have fallen down a bit recently though I've been trying to join it and so they all come back to the co-op so that I can, you know, bring back information about stuff that is happening here, you know. But really, as those individuals are parts of various other organizations. I don't know about the green party, but, you
know, some people might be part of [neighborhood B] transition town for all I know. So individuals are already members of the wider community as well as other members of different groups who said they will bring things, you know. We do a lot of fundraising for Palestine and for water aid and, so that's got a bit wider, isn't it? And we have the co-op newsletter, the co-op website, the co-op facebook page. So if people want to advertise something they know about...

Interviewer: Happening, they can share it. As part of your involvement with the...So this was the question that I mentioned earlier but, as part of your involvement with the co-op, have you had an experience where you felt people weren't listening to you at all or weren't taking your opinion seriously in any way?

Interviewee: Yeah. About the decorations. It all looks fantastic now, but that's an example of a committee of committee work. This has taken years to get done, and it's needed and I came in last summer, I can't remember when it was then, some months ago, and they were workmen actually putting the new liner on the stairs and in here and that's been on the cards for so long and [G] just eventually said, right I'm getting it done, I don't care who's volunteered to get it done.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And not done it. 

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But these were built, I believe, well they were at least painted by volunteers. They might have been built by the contractor who redid the office upstairs and made such a mess of it that he undertook to redo the lighting in here and build the cupboards for us for free as a compensation for the mess he made upstairs. So that's why people would say, we can't let him give it to us in the mouth, he's going to do it, you know, it's all free. Well for [****]sake, I mean, you know, he seems wrong with those light. Just because you're getting something for free, doesn't mean throw away what you've already got, I mean, that was my point and it wasn't, I did feel like I wasn't listened too.

Interviewer: Right, so the next questions are going to be about the local authority or sort of the local council and the relationship between the local council.

Interviewee: Would you like a cup of the...

Interviewer: Oh yeah, sure.

Interviewee: Which one do you fancy?

Interviewer: That middle one. The one in your hand. I paused the recording just while that happened. Yeah, so when things are happening in the neighborhood, okay well I'll ask the broader question first. How would you describe the relationship between the co-op and the members of this co-op and the local authority or the local council?

Interviewee: The [borough] council?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Well we don't, strictly speaking, have a relationship with the [the borough] council. We did, in 1976 when we started...

Interviewee: [inaudible 23:53] after the council's permission.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: And we had to take nominations from the council's housing list. In fact, when you join as a member, you had to join the council housing list as well, I think.
Interviewer: Oh, interesting. Thank you.
Interviewee: There was something about, well if you're on the council's housing list, they bring your house by the co-op, and you're taken...
Interviewer: You're taken off the list.
Interviewee: Because they had that kind of nomination rights.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So we were nominating ourselves to be housed by the co-op because you know me.
Interviewer: Oh, okay.
Interviewee: But, that's the thing. In fact when I was on the management committee, that's, yeah, probably years ago that did come up. We needed to either renew our faith with the council, our agreement with the council or not, and I think we agreed not to.
Interviewer: Oh. It's sort of like, did they previously nominate certain people to live here, like every other person or something or...
Interviewee: That's right.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: Yes, it used to be fifty percent of the nomination rights.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So, and there was a period when we did take, and we have got quite a few tenants. And I'm not going to say the rude problem tenants because obviously, they're not but we do have some tenants who are in need.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: And, you know, and need a lot of support and they're possibly people who didn't choose to join a co-op.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: And didn't, well are not able to commit to coming to meetings.
Interviewer: And to...
Interviewee: How we run ourselves.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But we are social landlords, we're [inaudible] landlords. We are social landlords and we do support our tenants as much as we can but, I mean, we don't have [...] housing stock.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: We are currently doing a full way rehousing situation, so that we can rehouse somebody who've been in a too big a property now they children are grown, left home, she's in housing benefit, is not getting the rent for the whole property. So she's getting more and more in
arrears and that's something we've been aware of for quite a long time. But we're only now in a position to be able to remedy it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Simply because we can't just move people around. We can't house their houses to move...

Interviewer: To move people around. That's true.

Interviewee: We can't have someone moving out so someone else can move in. So, the council. Yeah, and previously I said we had a lot of short loan housing and we had a lot of people, we had so many people on our waiting list who were living in our properties as a short life.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And they all went on site and then, you know, they were on site for a year and something, so those people needed houses and council did give us several council housing.

Interviewer: Housing. Yes.

Interviewee: And rehoused, setting quite a few. My brother was one of them. And yeah, half a dozen at least people got housed by the council and some people of course then decided to stay.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because they were accidentally given permanent tenancies, long-short life tenancies with the council, so some people, you know, decided to stay with the council rather than coming back with the co-op. But now, I don't believe we have a relationship...

Interviewer: No, there's not much of one.

Interviewee: With the council...

Interviewer: Do you want me to try? Okay. I'll wait until you come back here to continue just so that the recorder picks up.

Interviewee: Sorry.

Interviewer: I'm worried it won't pick up very well.

Interviewee: Yeah, because I'm wandering around. I'm very sorry.

Interviewer: No problem.

Interviewee: Do you want to check or do you want me to say it over again?

Interviewer: No. I mean, it definitely recorded it, it just might be a bit quiet. Essentially if you didn't hear that Mr. Recorder, there's not much of a relationship with the local authority anymore but they use to be in the beginning and it use to be such that every other person would be a council nominee and, roughly, and that was doing part then to the... Did you say they were housing that was given by the council? No there was. Yes

Interviewee: There was some, about a half dozen people were housed by the council

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But it was due to if you are a member of the co-op you had to be on the house of council waiting list. So, when you were housed by being led by the co-op, you automatically got off the council's waiting list. So that's how we got around to 50/50 nomination. I don't think we, they must have been a very short period where we did actually take some nominations from the
council and people directly off the council list who hadn't been members already. But not very
many, and never again.

Interviewer: Right. While we were walking with your friend who talked a bit about how
[neighborhood B] is changing and there's a lot of neighborhood change, it's more expensive.
When a lot of these changes are happening, are developers consulting people in the
neighborhood? Where does the co-op fit with all the changes going on in the neighborhood?
Interviewee: Well we've got houses mainly in the [P Roads] **inaudible 29:57** and we do have
others dotted around. And they're all private residences.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You know, so, what it is, we were buying houses with housing association grant, it
use to **inaudible 30:13** home and community agency calls it now or even what they're called
now, but it used to be a housing association grant, which bought the houses for us, but you know,
they were very cheap in the 80's, in the 70's and 90's. And they're not cheap now.

Interviewer: Right. Essentially.

Interviewee: Basically we bought our last property which is that new bill there, so that was an
old property obviously it had to be rebuilt. That was the last place that we redeveloped and I
think that was 89'. But, sorry I can't, my memory is very bad, I can't remember.

Interviewer: Are residents of the co-op affected in any way by the neighborhood change? Or is
it more insulated because the co-op is self-financing? But are there other ways for which...

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, it is. We did get a letter from the back neighbor of one of our
properties asking if they could buy the back, which is the back garden of our property. Saying, it
looks like they're not doing anything with it, it looks like a junkyard. You know, cant I buy it
because my bit look backs onto it is so tiny.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I'll be willing to give you, you know, half or I'll even rent it of you. And so they
were some wasted discussion at the management meeting about how to respond to that. But what
we did in the end is we said no thank you and we contacted the tenant and there was some help
in tidying the carton.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. I see.

Interviewee: Apart from that, I don't know, I haven't sort of seen anything in the newsletter
about people feeling strongly enough about, but I haven't actually been to any sub-committee
meetings where obviously people will be talking about...

Interviewer: Right. These things.

Interviewee: Things like that. So I'm afraid I can't say anything about that.

Interviewer: Right, so oaky, I'll ask a couple different. So if you or another member of the co-op
expresses an issue too, how will I do this. To the local council, what type of response do you
expect? Whether it's not necessarily related to the co-op but relate to the neighborhood or related
to other issues in the area.

Interviewee: What would be the response be as a co-op?
Interviewer: As a co-op. Yes.
Interviewee: Well I can't think of anything that we do.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: But [G] would be the person to ask because she, you know, as far as I know the management committee recently asked her to contact the council. I mean she has housing benefits and that's still done by the council, I don't know.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But she is always in touch with housing benefit or about our tenants.
Interviewer: Is there anything, so you mentioned it took a long time to get things in the kitchen redone. Are there things that the co-op committee would not consult other tenants on and just do or does everything has to go through the democratic process?
Interviewee: People can decide when there's a booking diary. Let's see what's been booked. Have anything been booked? Notch, mid-day palates, Sible. Okay, so people can decide if they would like to use the downstairs room or even this room. Theilies have put it in the diaries. So we've had [...], pilates for dance, now it's got an art group. So people can decide if they want to, but [G] keeps the book.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: Well I mean it's kept here. So people...
Interviewer: People write it in and [G] makes sure that its...
Interviewee: So if you would like to book a room, email this, date, time, details to bookings at, or put a piece of paper in this diary with your name, telephone, etcetera on it. So, you know, so you can see. But there have been times when things have not been booked properly and they clashed with other things that other people have been planning. So, yes, so if somebody wants to do that, then they don't have to go to the committee to say, can I do your pilates class.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But if other people in the co-op heard that somebody was doing something that they didn't think were to be done on co-op premises, then they would contact the management committee to have a word.
Interviewer: Great. Let me see. Right. So, right. So I have a question about the budget. The co-op is self-financing off of rents primarily, right? And are there any other sort of grants for sort of other outside or community support that comes in to the co-op, besides the housing benefit? No. But you mentioned that the co-op is doing some development work as well.
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewer: Right, so financially it's in a good place at the moment.
Interviewee: Really very good place, yes.
Interviewer: Very good place, okay.
Interviewee: And we have built up reserves over the years.
Interviewer: Right. Right. So besides general meetings, how do different members of the co-op give feedback or communicate with the committee or committee members?
Interviewee: They generally phone up [G].
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Or if they know that they want to talk to the committee, then they'll contact, you know, that committee or go to that committee meeting.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: But it is generally going along to a meeting, and [G] would probably say come along to this meeting to talk about it. And we had a group which is being revived at the moment but it fell down because of this new running. It became quite ill, but we did have this fortnightly lunch club. So we'll have a meal here, so that was open to anybody in the co-op and that was a place for people who don't like going to co-op meetings, could meet up with other members of the co-op.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: If they weren't working on that day. So we had, I think we had different days of the week. And there's the co-op newsletter, so you could, you know, yeah. And there are people who have a lot of difficulty in getting involved are even getting out of the house. And the group that was doing the lunch was doing a lot of, you know, home visiting kind of thing, taking along meals, and people may still be doing that individually. I'm not sure.
Interviewer: Right. So, they're definitely tenants who or co-op members who don't go to general meetings or who aren't as involved. How do they, do they voice their concerns at all?
Interviewee: Yes, they are are some tenants, I could think of another house where there's a long-standing feud between tenant upstairs and tenant downstairs angrish [G]'s had to intervene several times and I think that's what the complaints committee is about. And I know that one I'm not sure its tenant I put tenant down, but she started coming to co-op meetings,
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So she can voice. Maybe she felt like she wasn't getting anywhere and maybe she realized that she had to put something in as well as just asking for support.
Interviewer: Right. That makes sense. Do you think they might be any factors that limit tenants from being involved in the co-op at all?
Interviewee: Yeah. Finding it intimidating walking into, possibly coming late to a meeting sit. And, I mean, maintenance meetings my God, I mean, I'm intimidated walking into a maintenance meeting because its table is chopped full of people absolutely full. I've never seen such a full meeting. And you walk in and everyone is kind of busy and nobody looks up at you. So, you know if you first come along to a meeting and you walk into one like that then, you know, where the chair is to busy or the person whos speaking has not got any awareness that anybody walked into the room then i can see that would put people off coming back again.
Interviewer: As opposed to factors omitting tenants from being involved, are there things that limit them from being heard? If that makes sense. Not just being involved or getting involved but having their own issues or concerns be heard.
Interviewee: I think, well I would have to check with [G]. [G] is our housing manager, she's been one of our workers for many years. Our only employment working party that's appointed her and God knows when. She gets a lot of phone calls, but she's obviously bound by confidentiality and she does report that to the management meeting and to the finance, employment meeting every month. And they are some things that, yeah. She finds herself in quite a difficult position sometimes I think.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because she does have to take on a lot of responsibility, depends on how well she gets on with the chair.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I know [M] used to be in here, you know, definitely all day on Wednesdays and he'll be in here at other times as well. And he was always on the face or emailing and so forth so, I think people can, you know, people can always phone [G] and she's very warm and open and everybody loves [G]. So, I don't think anybody would feel they couldn't be heard unless they were really really shut down. But I mean even the shutdown ones she'll do visits, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They're very, very lucky to have her.

Interviewer: Great. Do you have any comments on the future of residents participation and housing? Wait. Let's wait until this really noisy airplane passes.

Interviewee: Yes, sorry all the windows are open because it's so hot. Well, I just picked up a leaflet on Saturday about [the borough] tenants okay because [the council], of course, is selling off all the townhomes upstate, well a number of them. And so yeah, they are tenants group who are going to fight him against that and there is an organization and I picked up the leaflet in order to come to management to say is this something we should be involved in. But I haven't managed to read the leaflet yet. And there isn't a manager meeting in August anyway. You know, people want to be involved.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: People do want to be involved, there are tenant groups all over the place. But because I haven't been to any other organizational meetings, you know, I don't really know what the mood is out there or what. I'm hearing terrible things about the council, So, you know, who knows, the Government what's what, you know. Who knows. But we feel very privileged to be in a co-op as [J] would say, and we are our own landlords and we do our own properties but we are social landlords and we are community minded. The criteria for people joining, is, I mean how we shortlist people. Its housing lead a connection with [the council] or [neighborhood B] or [the borough].

Interviewer: Even if we were called family or whatever. And being a part of a community, not necessarily an activist but you know, having community spirit and [inaudible 44:19]

Interviewer: Right. Great. Do you have any other comments or questions or any other things you'll like to share or stories or anything.
Interviewee: No. I don't think so. I can talk my head off. You're tickling my throat now.
Interviewer: Great, okay.

Appendix 20: Cooperative Interviewee “Gabriel “ Transcript

Interviewer: All right, why did you decide to join the coop and how did you get involved?
Interviewee: Interesting, so I moved when I moved to [City F] and I was in school and I have a friend here wait let me show you what it's all about he told me about the quickest way to move in but he didn't tell me about the coop and I looked into it and I met a few more people and then I decided to accept the position and move in yeah through a friend.
Interviewer: Through a friend. Cool and is there anything that your friend said that you know attracted you to the idea of living in a coop at all?
Interviewee: Can you hear me?
Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah I can hear you yeah
Interviewee: I'm sorry my signal is quite bad so if I.

Interviewer: Yeah, no problem. So are you involved with the coop committee at all?

Interviewee: No, I'm not on the committee no. I was involved in doing welfare work, and step back from that because I, maybe essentially moved out, no, I didn't the coop but I went on volunteering for quite a while, in fact I so stepped down from that position and then , yeah.
Interviewer: All right.
Interviewee: And I was never, I never formally, oh yeah I'm doing, I'm doing work with the co-op but I'm not on any committee formally. I mean I have helped out with allocations and I'll help out with welfare but I don't formally have a role.
Interviewer: Right. So why did you decide to get involved sort of informally with the coop?
Interviewee: It kind of just made sense at time when I got back... and volunteering I needed to find a job and it didn't make sense to kind of commit a lot of time, so I just said I would pick up work as, as and when needed and it just kind of continued in that way. It was just out of convenience for me and my living situation at the time.
Interviewer: Okay. So you do paid work for the coop?
Interviewee: No, none of it is paid. I'm eligible to get food sometimes but I don't claim it.
Interviewer: Okay. Okay, great so overall do you enjoy you’re current... Your recent work with the coop... Your recent volunteering?
Interviewee: It's mostly been around donations for refugees actually. So what I spend most of my time doing is organizing donation pick-ups and drop-offs, and help out with a local charity. Like the local refugee charity in [City F] and sort of try and link the two organizations together.
Interviewer: That's cool and do you do this with other members of the co-op as well?
Interviewee: Not the refugee stuff that's kind of my own project. Dispatch of welfare and allocations and yes, I do work with members of the coop. We kind reach decision a kind of consensus of the commit, on working group and things like that.
Interviewer: Great, could you tell me a little bit more about your work specifically with the coop and with other members of the co-op and maybe share some experiences that you had in that work.
Interviewee: I mean I guess... I mean with regards to allocations what we're doing is meet new applicants and talk with them about co-op. And then work with the group to make a decision and she would ask applicants what we weren't sure about and then we would try and get the answer.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: About true consensus if he knows, if the applicant if he knows somebody in the coop already. That person...
Interviewer: Would have priority?
Interviewee: No, no, no they would not get involved in the process.
Interviewer: Oh they're not involved in the process?
Interviewee: Those people don't get involved or favoritism
Interviewer: Oh, interesting.
Interviewee: I mean, originally if that person gets in and a vacancy opens up in the house and they are interviewed by the house then obviously that fact would have been put on the decision and the tenants and their friends don't live together. I think could be to your advantage sometimes.
Interviewer: True, right and you said that decisions are generally consensus-based?
Interviewee: In the working they are yes, and I mean in the meeting like AGM and other meetings and then its majority voting.
Interviewer: Okay, what happens when different members of the coop disagrees on something how do you sort of work it out?
Interviewee: It depends on the, to what level of the disagreement. If it is you know... I mean one the questions you have to ask even as coop is do you resolve disagreements with housemates and you can just focus on what disagreements are small.

[00:07:43] inaudible
Interviewer: Right, so when you're really involved with the coop, how much time do you really dedicate like volunteer wise.

Oh

---

Interviewer: Hello
Automated machine: No call.
Welcome to giffgaff voicemail person you're calling cannot take your call please leave your message after the tone.
**Interviewer:** Hey, hey.

**Interviewee:** Sorry about that, I've come outside I'm at the train station and the train is going right past. But it should quiet down for 20 minutes in a minute.

**Interviewer:** Okay great and if we lose connection again that's okay I could send you some of the questions that I would ask and you're welcome to leave me a voicemail with them or something. Yeah we could... Yeah we could just continue and as it go it goes.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, yeah I'm sorry the signal is not great around here.

**Interviewer:** It's no problem, I hear you much better now than I did before so that's a good sign.

**Interviewee:** Yeah,

**Interviewer:** So I didn't catch how much time do you dedicate in volunteer work in the coop per week or month?

**Interviewee:** So I'm doing, I'm probably doing in between 5 to 10 [hours].

**Interviewer:** Per week or per month?

**Interviewee:** Per week.

**Interviewer:** Okay, per week. Okay that’s a lot.

**Interviewee:** No but it's kind of, I mean it’s, I might spend an hour day trying to sort out some refugee related thing and I put that down.

**Interviewer:** Right

[00:10:06 inaudible]

**Interviewer:** Right. What are some of the challenges that you've experienced doing this volunteering if any?

**Interviewee:** And I, I, I mean, I guess it sort of. That would have been when I was involved in welfare, and people have different approaches and different ideas on what was proportional with regards to welfare. And I mean welfare goes back to lot of issues when you talk about, how people deal with complaints and issues, if it is serious then can make a complaint and then an agreement will be put together from welfare. He will speak to the people involved, come to a decision and after that he'll take no action if that's the decision. Yeah it would have been issues when those in welfare complaints and people talk different, different ideas on how it should be dealt with.

**Interviewer:** Right. And in that case how would... How would you or how would sort of consensus be reached or some sort of agreement be reached in that kind of event?

**Interviewee:** We'll just... I mean sometimes somebody will just say I don't want to argue, or just go with this because of whatever reason. And sometimes it'll just be you just have like a you'd have a chat. I mean if there is three people in the room, which can help sometimes and that's three contradictory positions to take in which case has to be a bit of a problem. But we just have to discuss it for long yeah, or in some situations maybe get a new group together to go through it.
Interviewer: Right, okay, cool. And as part of your volunteering with the coop or attending general meetings have you had any experiences where you felt like your voice wasn't being heard or it was difficult to be heard?

Interviewee: Yes, but that was just once. On a particular issue.

Interviewer: So it's a rare, rare, rare occurrence.

Interviewee: Yeah for me it is yeah. I think we've quite good, the meeting is structured. So, if you want to speak then you can put your hand up and then you'll be put on the list. So anybody know if you want to say something you'll be given your opportunity to, to speak. I mean whether or not people don't feel they can put their hand up it's not a big question but I wouldn't you know, I haven't spoke of anybody about that I think everybody feels pretty comfortable about talking if they want to.

Interviewer: Great, so I was going to ask you, yeah so at general meetings how are agendas determined for the general meetings do you have any sense of that or not so much?

Interviewee: Yes, so if you if you want something then I mean then you can write to the secretarial working group and they put together the agenda. I think you got to have motions or items and put it to the Secretariat team a week before the meeting.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yeah so you send, you send an email to the Secretarial of team and they will help you write it, or and if you couldn't, you know if you could write it for yourself then you just write it and send it off and then it will be on the agenda.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. And the next couple questions is going to be around the relationship between the coop and the local authority. So do you know much about the local Authority or like your local Council and the relationship between the coop and the local council at all?

Interviewee: I mean it's no formal... It's no formal link. I mean we have, we have had people from the council come to the coop to speak. And then you have a... We have to potentially to use the community space. And it is to be used by some organizations that's including some consulates or, there is no official link. You know, I think half of the councils kind of regret allowing us to be set up, when we were set up. But because we are not never to be Central and very affordable and we've got quite a bit of land and we have the right to own more. If we choose to exercise that right then the council can't do anything, so we're taking up some prime real estate... You know yeah I mean that would be the personal views of the council or counselors but probably there's no official link.

Interviewer: Right. Could you tell me more about the relationship between the coop and the council in the sense of... you know as you mentioned before that may be the council regrets letting the coop be set up. Do you have any...? Could you sort of expand on that? A little bit

Interviewee: Yeah but I mean we don't actually have a proper setup facility 34 years ago or something like that. Now in the area out of [City F] not Great Britain at that time there was kind of a lot of squatting, it was quite run down, it was kind of out of town a little bit and based on helping or giving permission for this place to be built was a way to kind of you know rain in
what was going on in the community. But what happened is that now it became more or less Central [City F]. They're trying to gentrify the area and we've got, you know twenty two quite big properties on prime bit of land. Right in the middle of town, which they can't develop, they can't do anything with. Again you know I think... Given you know... I mean there are just some flats that are just piled up literally off the road and they could fit into a garden and we'd still have lots of space left over and they would go and you know close to six figures.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: I mean no, no, no. I mean close to seven figures sorry

Interviewer: Even more wow.

Interviewee: Yeah, so I mean the amount of income if they wanted to they could put quite a few instead of having space for one hundred kind of you would like live quite the alternative lifestyle while having a few hundred quite wealthy middle class business folk. I think they would yeah, I mean but we've I mean there was a development. Sorry there's a train going past.

Interviewer: Yeah, No problem I can hear you just fine even with a train going in the background.

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean we have, there was an old that belong to the council that was put up for sale two, two years ago. Because they wanted to move out of town and the coop they actually put a bid into buy to set up the coop and we were rejected for luxury flats. So again I think that if we little bit of distaste in exist and so we said we wanted to set up a cooperative over luxury flats, they would pick the luxury flats.

Interviewer: So, when the local council is allowing any is allowing any type of building to go on in the neighborhood whether they are spike lanes, or luxury development or anything like that. Do they consult tenants in the coop at all?

Interviewee: No, I mean, does it would yeah because it is the council land they have to put a note up who is selling it and make a request for bids so we would kind of heard it like that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They wouldn't you know I mean... They wouldn't... They wouldn't sell us the land. There was another bit of land going up for sale in the over the roads yeah. I live... I don't know if you know [City F] but and I've and maybe you won't know it's a junction just want to say over the other side of the road. So I mean.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I've full sight of the road, so I have... you know we had talked of the old deck it is still there. Although I'm not expecting anything because you know housing developers will hunt it and they wanted it but for a profit the process I think was essentially kind of social housing

Interviewer: Right, so in general while the local council will have to do some consultation for any land they sell off in general. They're not very, not necessarily like very open to criticisms or two alternatives to.
Interviewee: Yeah, I mean, I think, I don't think it's just unique to [City F] I think it's a general you know UK wide trend. You know council housing or social housing is on the decrease you know. I should rent and things like that. Or things about property ownership and this kind of, you know mostly.

Interviewer: Prioritized--

Interviewee: [00:25:21 inaudible]... affordable housing

Interviewer: Right, so if, if let's say like as a co-op or as an individual in the coop you expressed a concern to the local of authority what kind of response do you expect.

Interviewee: On what issue?

Interviewer: On local development sort of neighborhood change does that--

Interviewee: I would expect... I would expect them to say that for economic reasons we've made this decision.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I thought, you know it's what they're talking is there is [council houses] stated just down the road. Who can actually get in touch The Coop directly? The council houses they are planning and being demolished and instead of having them in houses they're going to build flats.

Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: But, but what I'm concerned about is obviously they will be moved out of those homes they'll be relocated and it will take however long for the coop to go up and they won't get to live in the area. And they're already been pushed out and I guess, you know what that is, the destruction of very nice properties lots of green space just to create, you know some private you know something to sell and you know the minimum level of social housing required. And in which it's, it's you know they'll say it's economic, they all say it helpful yeah. And rigid you have to, you know we're still, we're still we won't, I don't think they'll just fix it all.

The tenants so worried about being moved out of their house, you know they have applied to be, you know they will be reallocated rather than we should just leave. Yeah some of them have lived there for years, like decades and eventually they're been told the council wants to move them out. So they can build some nice flats sort just expect. You know [City F] is I think some new a month or two ago I think that's the city in UK which have the biggest house price increases. So you know house prices have gone up more expensive and relative times here than they are in [City X]. I mean, think about [City F] we are actually only 45 minutes away from [City X] and so apart of it is you know around the train station used become business. You know [City X] “business types”, put a nice commuter journey you know if they, it can take less time to get from [City F] to Kings Cross and the council fixed into Kings Cross. With some tubes down or something like that so, yeah. [City F] is very expensive to live and property and land space is prime.

Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: It's all economic.
Interviewer: Right. So what are some of the challenges that are currently facing the coop besides you know having the bids rejected and sort of like maybe neighborhood pressures as well, what are some of the challenges?

Interviewee: To be honest we're doing pretty well at the moment. I mean it's obviously on going complaints, welfare issues but they have always is. I mean financially we are pretty healthy, you know we have quite a few active members most of them entered a few years ago. The coop's getting, I mean in younger people I'm moving in as well so yeah. It can, you know I think we're pretty healthy group quite a nice [...] community and you know all the, you have children running around and yeah I think obviously you know every community have its problems. And I'm not really... I'm not really in a position to kind of disclose the council overall instant issues that are going on.

Interviewer: Yeah that's fine.

Interviewee: And you know, I mean overall I think you're doing pretty well and I think you know.

Interviewer: Great, so let's see so yeah so financially the coop is doing all right. So how do you communicate with or receive feedback from the coop committee.

Interviewee: I have reports, so, so we have different working groups and we still have to submit reports to general meetings and to give an update on the work. And obviously, I mean all kind of, you know we all know kind of, don't each other but you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: We also need to know those person you need to speak to if you got a question about something personally maybe a question about something. You know so if there is a question about grounds, I wouldn't know where to go and speak to someone. You have no working officer yeah or but generally you keep up-to-date through the reports if there is a specific issues you We can approach the committee directly ask what’s going, and the work you can ask what’s going on.

Interviewer: Cool. So, there are tenants that aren't, you know people who live who live in the coop who obviously aren't involved with the committee, or aren't involved in general meetings, or volunteering with the co-op in any way. Do you think, do you know of types of factors that might limit other tenants from being involved?

Interviewee: I mean sometimes, jobs you know we have teachers and nurses here. You know have the regular schedules and work long hours, and not so much the teachers but the nurses. Yeah and like you just said you've been someone 6 in the morning getting ready to teach classes and get home at 5. You might just want to relax in the evening rather than doing more work.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: There are also other things like disabilities, like physical and mental, and they'll be bit of concern to be personality issues. So you know, not everybody gets on all the time, so if
people had a falling-out they may, you know not want to get involved if, if you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: In-fact I mean there is [00:33:31 inaudible], yeah.
Interviewer: Do you think that people who can't be involved or don't want to be involved for any of those reasons or other reasons have a voice in the coop, in other ways?
Interviewee: I just felt none of the reason why they wouldn't want to be. People are volunteering with whatever organizations, so they spend most of the times volunteering doing something outside of the coop. So that could be around arts, or music or thing like that, but I don't know if they have a voice. I mean within, within the, each house operates differently. So we might have regular house meetings to just try and, but I mean that doesn't work all the time and that's an issue generally. I mean, I guess I'm wondering what you mean by your voice. Like literally?
Interviewer: Like if they, if they have an issue for example, do they feel comfortable sending an email about it or can they put it on the agenda without being at the meeting or sort of that kind of thing. Yeah.
Interviewee: Well yeah, I mean with the yeah. I mean you can put something on the agenda and then turn up at the meeting. I mean traditionally that hasn't been... That hasn't generally doesn't go down too well at meetings. Because you can't ask the person questions, so if they say I want to do this we vote on it yes or no. And these people are wondering how much it's going to cost or whether, you know then people [...] to be looking forward to something when they're not informed about what they are voting on. And I know, I know that there are instances where people represented people and I know that does happen. But I mean I wouldn't, you know I don't I have the kind of [00:32:02 inaudible] I'm not one of those people, so I don't know what they would do. If you know what I mean.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: I'm sure you know there is, you know, if there's complains that that will be dealt by, dealt with by welfare. And so they'll be heard by the welfare committee. So yeah if, if they want to make, you know if they want to make their voice heard, those are the structures to do it.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: I mean, yeah, we have office as well and we have two members and staff. And yeah I mean they tend to get the, you know the blunt if something happens, you know people tend to go after the official and then work out what they want to do. [00:32:52 inaudible] Run administrative things and you know that side of the coop and they do kind of help with issues as well that I'll try the arrangement.
Interviewer: Right. Do you think that more resident participation is always good in the coop?
Interviewee: It depends on what the issue is. I think if it is big enough, if it is something that is going to affect the whole co-op then yes.
I think that if it is an issue that is relatively high and a little bit straightforward then having more voices tend to make the meetings go on more longer

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So yeah, it is dependent on what the topic is. You know if it’s about how we are going to, how the coop is going to spend its money, or if it's about redeveloping that's quite a long process and we have the solar panels installed on all the roofs. And so now we yeah, we actually don't know. But we make money from selling electricity we don't use. And we have to keep that money for other big project, so we wanted our voices to be heard about that. But obviously you know, if you're going to you know put in new kids, you know, playhouse up, you know having a hundred people's opinion on is, you know nobody's going to disagree with having, the kids having somewhere to play with. You just need to have it.

**Interviewer:** Right. Do you have any comments on the future of resident participation or of future coops?

**Interviewee:** I don't, I mean, I think kind of considered as to, wonder how exactly people are going to get involved in the coop and so I think they are... We are trying to make it considering to get people in who will, you know actively what to do work. And you know getting people into the coop to, to work that wasn't the case but people wanted to, live here just because, just because it’s cheap. And there weren't really interested in anything else. But you know, all of those people kind of left and actually we're getting lots of young new people in. You know wanting to get involved in different working groups and yeah, yeah and do stuff in within the coop.

**Interviewer:** Cool, do you have anything else, anything else that you want to add or any other comments or stories or anything you want to share about, yeah.

**Interviewee:** I don't know I mean it, I mean it it's, not all you know, when you write it all down it can sound really broad and nice. But it doesn't always work out like that, you know people do you have disagreement and yeah, it's not one hundred you know hippies living together in harmony. Yeah, well you know none of us are cartoons, you know we've got jobs, and we've got life stresses and these co-op some of the people got kids and families and responsibilities. And you know, I think we generally get it on okay, we do. I mean we do have got quite a big garden and during the summer we've got the fire pitch and there can be parties on weekends. And that sometimes can be, you know what I mean by this and not enjoy yeah I guess that part is not entirely harmonious hippie coming in. But just hundred people trying to live together, I mean in a community that you wouldn't I mean yeah you know.

**Interviewer:** Right

**Interviewee:** We'd be pretty much on, I don't think there's anywhere else in [City F] where you could [...] streets. And all the neighbors know each other.

**Interviewer:** Yeah
Interviewee: And we go to meetings and talk about what they're going to do together. But given that you know, given that we see each other a lot, yeah that exposure obviously increases the chances an argument, I mean there's no friends that lives here people don't like each other but yeah it's not some kind of harmonious community.

Interviewer: Right, yeah. Great that's all of my main questions.

I have some general demographic questions just to know like the people I'm interviewing. You can abstain from any of the questions if you don't want to answer.

Appendix 21: Cooperative Interviewee “Laurie” Transcript

Interviewer: Okay. Great. I've begun recording then so we can--

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Begin. Hold on. Let me make sure that you're loud enough. Okay. So why did you decide to join the coop and how did you get involved?

Interviewee: Well, I was going [join] another co-op in [region B].

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: It was kind of, sort of, you know, but it was kind of by chance really, because I was looking for somewhere to live and I went to Housing Association Office and they said oh no, we can't help you. But why don't you try upstairs? There's a housing Co-op. So this is a different one, but probably quite a similar model I've assumed. So I said oh yeah, here's an application form and what they do is they interviewed you and if they thought you were like, okay become a member and then if you're single person they put you in a shared house.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Until like a flat became available that you could apply for.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, so that was in [region B] and I, yeah, within like a year. I had my own flat. I was only 23, it was fantastic with a really cheap rent, and then I met my partner who lived over this way. She's living [region S]. She meets someone through work who was in [X] housing co-op and he said who you ought to join my co-op. So she joined [X], she was in a [short life] house and over here and then, we applied for a place together in this co-op. And we actually didn't have anyone, you know, we weren't competing against anyone because actually at that time nobody wants to live in...[00:01:53 inaudible] Because of the riots in the front line and stuff. So well, we had like a [...] almost three-bedroom flat really and in 1985 we moved in.

Interviewer: Oh well, so you've been living in a coop for a long time. And did you get involved with the coop committee at any point?

Interviewee: Yes and I'm very involved now more than I've ever been actually. Because we care about continuing this sort of model of housing. And it's kind of about with a [...] like house, which is like a fully neutral co-op. It means that we, we own all the properties collectively that we don't
own anything individually. If you get my, when you join by one pound share, which like a token share and you become a member and then the members own and run housing.

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Have you talk to anyone else in the coop?
Interviewer: Yes. I've, I've talked and talked to one other person in the coop.
Interviewee: So you know how it kind of set up.
Interviewer: Yes, I do. I'm I'll still ask you about the set up a little bit just to hear it from your perspective.
Interviewee: Okay.
Interviewer: So are you involved, so you mentioned you got involved because you care a lot about this housing model. Are you involved with any other sort of organizing or involvement in the community or anything like that?
Interviewee: No, I'm sort of, I've started to get in touch with other people and other coops around [City X] and just some people who started organizing when selected the nation's housing bill that came out. Some activists in co-ops started organize this little campaign against the housing Bill and link up with other tenants’ things.
So I kind of know some of them and what I'm trying to do is, gradually built in links with other co-op in the area because there are actually quite a lot of co-ops in [City X] and but we tend not to even know who each other is. So it turns out that they coops within a mile off one up in [region K] and yesterday me and my partner went to garden party of Co-Op up in [region P]. Which is like the borders of [region C] and you know a year ago, we didn't even know they existed and it's just bonkers, isn't it? So we're trying to put a, build some links it is.
Interviewer: With, with other coops --
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: And that's sort of on the platform of protecting the coop model and connecting with other people as well in the community. I guess.
Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.
Interviewer: Yeah
Interviewee: I'm trying to promote coops
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: You now as a, as a housing model.
Interviewer: And what particularly what about coops is attractive to you or is important to you?
Interviewee: Well, it's like I said, we run it. So we make all the decisions about the housing will decide who lives there, and decide how we given maintenance, and all stuff that comes back all the financial decisions. We know we're actually yeah, we actually run it. We don't have to go and ask anybody.
Interviewer: Right
Interviewee: We set the rents that some people are still on like an old thing which used to be till the end of the eighties where it was like called a fair rent and it was set by a kind of government body.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So some people are still on these old fair rent, maybe a quarter of the coop, but the rest are on like standardized rent that we'll decide what the level is. So it's a bit like Yeah, I don't know what your politics are but it's a bit like you might imagine like socialism to pay.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah working collectively.

Interviewee: In the moment. That idea was like the work around the factory, you know, and if it's actually quite difficult because you've got all the personalities, you've got people that don't really want to be involved and really want to have a land, a nice landlord, you know?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: And it's about trying to get people involved in keeping involved and seeing like the value of it. You know because everything in [City X] now, you know, like like a property, you know, everything about the housing ladder and owning property. And if you're, if you don't own property in, you're not fortunate enough to be in a council position for Housing Association or co-op. This is at the mercy of these people who are who are well paying their mortgage for them basically, and I'm totally against that--

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I'm not against people buying somewhere to live and living in it moving in it and living on it forever. But I am against this like buy connect thing where basically people are building a property empire and the tenants are paying that mortgage with a really high rent at the end of the day. There's nothing and they can be kicked out whenever they're landlord feels like it. It happens a lot and people just get go anywhere. I'm going off the point because I'm going on and on and you want to talk about the coop.

Interviewer: Yes, but I understand I get the sense that what's special about a co-op is you're not at the whim of, of these landlords as well, that it's sort of, you take control together.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I guess I got that idea and overall do so then do you enjoy your involvement in the committee in in sort of running the coop? Is that an, an enjoyable activity.

Interviewee: I think sometimes it's quite hard.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It's you know, it's worthwhile, you know, and I see it's something it's something that I should do because I've been really fortunate to have that got into this sort of movement when I was young and it's like really practically impossible now like people to get into a co-op or do anything where you know, that's kind of alternative.

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: So I feel like really fortunate and I want it to continue. So I feel like you know, what I what I can do is be involved in that keeping it going and keeping it like kicking over and running and putting some of my energy back into that. Yeah, that's how I feel about it. So I'll probably always be doing something in the coop because otherwise it's just about you. It's about just you and you viewing your plan your life. And actually that doesn't really work because it's about a collective enterprise.

Interviewer: Right? Right. So could you tell me a little bit about the co-op in terms of how meetings function how often they occur and how decision-making happens?

Interviewee: Okay if I guess it, the general membership has an annual general meeting every year.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: And at that, at that AGM. The membership elects Well, I mean there isn't hosting really there's not people going still do it, but they kind of like elect who's going to be on the management committee for the next year. So, so how it operates is that the general membership delegates the running of the coop to the management committee.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: For that year. And then the management committee has subcommittees. So there's membership, financing, employment, maintenance and communications and community. So those four subcommittees have reps on the management committee. So there's a that the management committee kind of delegates some of their work to the subcommittee's and then the subcommittees report to the management committee and then the management committee every three months has a general meeting where there's reports from the subcommittee's in the management committee.

So that everybody in the membership knows what's going on and then if if there were any changes so you make changes to the policy or you want to put the rents up at like liquid or whatever then that that is decided by the management committee, but they will take it to the general membership. So the general membership could you know like say no, no, no don't do this and kick it out

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And then we've got two part-time workers one does housing management of all the bookkeeping and stuff and the other one coordinates the maintenance.

Interviewer: Right. That makes sense. So my next question is how much time do you dedicate to being involved in the coop committee in a week or in a month?

Interviewee: Yeah. That's something I don't really record.

Interviewer: Roughly.

Interviewee: Probably about five hours a month.


Interviewee: Yeah

Interviewer: One and a half hours a week, roughly.
Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: And so among committee members responsibilities or sort of tasks are divided up?
Interviewee: Yeah,
Interviewer: And people, do people volunteer to do certain things, or is it sort of like somebody suggests someone to do a certain thing, or how do you volunteer to deal with the specific issue or problem.
Interviewee: Well, that the somebody chairing who usually is the chair of subcommittee.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: I'm a secretary or somebody that takes a minutes.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Like regularly, but sometimes like I'm on memberships that we kind of rotate it. Because I think it's quite useful thing to have people like taking turns chairing a meeting or taking the minutes, you know, so that you learn these skills.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: And, and then, you know, you have the business of the meeting and if something needs, say somebody writes in about something, you know, then we'll ask the volunteer to write, to reply to that person.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So it's kind of yeah, I'll ask people to take on a bit of work from the meeting.
Interviewer: Right that makes sense. And is there any particular thing that you've been involved with lately you mentioned coordinating with other coops, but anything else?
Interviewee: Well, we got our membership every two years we doing audit it. Like it's called an occupancy audit where we get every tenant to fill out form. Saying who lives in the property that giving it giving some other information. So like those kind of like that that's quite a big task which takes up quite a lot of energy and needs planning and we'll be doing that. At the end of this year like early 2019 audit and then you've got kind of chasing people up and filled it out and so on. And then there's a like there's other saying we think we should open the membership and taking a few more people. That's another huge thing of like getting advertising getting application form interviewing, you know, so they're like that there those big things or visit somebody moves out or dies. Unfortunately, we're sort of got aging demographics, people are dying now. Yeah, and then we've got a small housing list and then we'll. So when that house is to get them will be able to apply for the property and that so then there's an allocation meeting to decide who should move into that flat. So, you know, it's so sort of things and then day-to-day stuff, you know week month to month stuff.
Interviewer: Right. Right. So that makes sense. And would you describe the problem solving approaches as collaborative, how much influence does the chair have in terms of deciding the agenda or sort of what people are working on?
Interviewee: We've got a standard agenda along with people you know. With stuff you've carried out and, and so is every month or as it puts in there yes it shows how it is effect the agenda. But I think the chair can stare things. Yeah, they probably have more I want to they probably have a bit more influence than someone who isn't chairing but it's you know, the idea is always to be collaborative. You know, we don't really have so often. We finally reach consensus about what we should do about certain things.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Yes, I would take plenty advice from like having management workers and other people management, you know if we are not sure what to do.

Interviewer: That makes sense. What happens when there are disagreements among members? How is that dealt with? Yeah.

Interviewee: Well, if it is about an issue you know that we so strongly disagree I suppose we have a vote on it. I think if we try. Making it not personal as much as possible. And that what we started to do now about three four years ago. Is we probably have some food? So for the weekly meetings some people come from work you know they're missing their evening meals. So we have food sometimes it's just somebody on the committee buy some stuff. Sometimes people cook, but we found that when like sit down and eat together. It's your much less, antagonistic, I think that's what like EU and UN... [00:19:16 inaudible]

Interviewer: They order some food.

Interviewee: There is a lot of eating there.

Interviewer: Yes. That's true.

Interviewee: Yeah, so so there is dialogue and I think that's very useful... [00:19:35 inaudible] I know we have a code of conduct so it's all the management sign the code of conduct and the committee we've all signed the code of conduct. Saying that you know you won't be rude or unpleasantly you won't use the influence you have on the committee to serve your own housings.

Interviewer: Right

Interviewee: Situation, so you know like you're not going to get your maintenance done or place your maintenance before anybody else. You know what I mean.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Being on membership is not going to make you more likely to be allocated to a property.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And you can't use that platform for influenced people that you know your situation. You know so terrible that you know you have to take precedence, you know, you can't get so much recognition off whether trying to be objective is quite difficult when we all know each other. Yeah. I'm trying to be fair and trans, have process that are transparent.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So that you can see clearly recording how decisions are made and the reasons why. Because then that stops that feeling that people are acting like a little kid about or something.
Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense, of bit of a check on power.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: As part of your involvement with the committee have you had experiences whether that's within the committee or with the local authority or anything like that. An experience where you felt that someone wasn't listening to you or taking your opinion seriously?
Interviewer: No, I can't say I have actually. But I can't really we don't really have an issue with the local authority, or really any outside bodies particularly. We are accountable to the, I don't know what they're called now. I think it used to be years ago. It was a housing corporation they used to fund coops and then it got they got abolished. So I think we were accountable to such as homes and communities agents or something, but I think it's called something else, but that is just dealt with us. Having monthly meeting and the auditors so we don't have monitoring as such dealing with other bodies were quite such as closed in a way, you know.
Interviewer: That makes sense. And so overall you mentioned that there's not much of a relationship with the local authority. But could you describe that relationship? Is it positive is it neutral or or.
Interviewee: Well the only relationship we had really because I never funded us in the past. But because we were with the housing corporation. Then coops were set up, the housing corporation gave you loans to buy properties really cheap from like the and seventies and early eighties.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: [We] now paid off all those loans. But because we had public money and we're a registered housing social housing provider and we are accountable to save this [...] agency, and we used to have to give 50% against each property. When you have to distance ourselves from the council--
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewer: What happened was as a squeeze on housing got harder and harder really because we are mostly single people. We're only single people that couldn’t really get on the housing list. So people who have like, well, kind of support needs who couldn't really be met. So it wasn't very helpful because they were the people that were being sent and we did have you know, within ourselves as members and most of those people.
Because of whatever reason and because they came, they probably came in. So I'm not sure you're very of like bringing really interested in a coop or wanting to be involved in a coop who's never really managed to integrate them into being involved in it. They just came, they were never serious, so a few years ago, we just stopped asking them ourselves. And that's that was the relationship overall. We don't really have anything to do with them.
Interviewer: That makes sense.
Interviewee: Yeah
Interviewer: But are there currently any is there anything happening in the neighborhood whether like a development or council work or anything that is affecting people in the coop at all.

Interviewee: Not really, we've got next where so is where I live they can old. It wasn't It's not that old these built-in 1980s. I remember when it was built it's the health clinic.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: After about 20 years they closed it and it has been empty for years and years. So eventually the NHS sold just as they are selling off stuff all the time. Yeah, they sold it to a private developer He wanted to turn it into houses then he wanted to turn it into shops by the time he want to through the Planning Commission they changed the rules to all planning things have to now have vote and affordable housing elements agency do these kind of things

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So that developer says you can't make enough profit on it. By doing the affordable housing elements so it's just empty and it's just a dumping ground stuff and they rip they don't come took the roof. Most of the roof was full of tiles. So water was going on and nothing is happening and we're worried that water will get into the neighboring properties as their own by our coop. And so there's a kind of writing thing going with the counselors and people at the agency of the developer and trying to get something to happen. But other than that nothing really, you know, what we've got most of their properties like there's a bit even 22 flats around a shared garden. But most places you've got like individual houses docked around and then there's one new built scheme that we did in about 1992 it's got 6 Flats in the people have just kind of. It around in the streets you know with each street having at least one or two Co-op houses. It's got quite a lot and I always got quite a few our conviction but nothing that's really affecting us.

Interviewer: Right. And does the local Authority consult people in the community or people in the coop when there is some kind of development or change going on in the neighborhood?

Interviewee: Probably

Interviewer: Probably

Interviewee: There are a few loads there some loads of stuff at the town hall and not dancing building and their building new English and reshaping to social housing. I think I probably had like a consultation exhibition that went well with Bella but you know, really they have already made their mind up you about the consultation exercises it by just a box ticking.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: To say they have done it. Because they have already decided and they don't they don't really want to know. What people in the community thinks Well, I think they're not really interested. You know they've got their challenge not sunlight and loads to the back of us and the cleaning organizers called fixed and greens been going for 10 years standing with planning office numbers. How can we develop that road and bringing some social housing Put a co-op their have some shelter housing and you know that when they put their final plan in last year the
planning committee turned it down after all those years of like local people's work, unpaid work and then they showed how they've got there. They've got their own housing team that's going to do a development, which they've got this thing called Landers which they're going to build properties some of which they'll sell, some of which will be for like they'll rent.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And it's a way around building council housing, which I still got the right to buy. So in some ways it's kind of pointless, councils building council property. Because people buy it and then it's private and goes into private sector. So the [R] living thing will be like the housing that they build social with will be like council housing, but you won't have right to buy, but that will be entirely run by the council and whoever the council puts in charge of it and it will just be like really like private developer, you know, not accountable to the ratepayers or the taxpayers of [R]. It won't be council in the way that perhaps council committees are. But they say they're cooperative, the council and they're listening and everything but really they not at all. It's just all like talk.

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense. So is the current and so the current finances of the coop come from rents primarily.

Interviewee: Yeah,

Interviewer: Yes and is, is the co-op in a good financial state with rents?

Interviewee: Yes, very good.

Interviewer: Okay,

Interviewee: Because we've, we've actually paid off all the mortgages now. We might only one like one tiny mortgage left. So so their new mortgages to pay, so the rent money is clearly going on running cost of the coop, workers’ wages, maintenance and so on.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So we're in a very good. We're actually sitting on possible lots of property. It's worse because now because property has gone up so much in value is very valuable property now because it is a very desirable from being somewhere we are no one wanted to live. It's become a very desirable areas so people's money so on paper we are financially sound, yes.

Interviewer: Great. So how do committee members communicate with or receive feedback from tenants besides meetings?

Interviewee: Well, the things that--

[00:32:31 inaudible]

Interviewee: There is feedback you have feedback about whether it was done. You know whether the contractor was like.

[00:32:42 inaudible]

Interviewee: And you know that kind of stuff. So whether you doing a good job, whether you're happy with him? As far as other things go. Well, you know will we won't be prepared, be
involved, welcome just the tenants complaining, you know what I mean because we're not a landlords.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Although there is a tendency for people to think that we're just the landlord to you know-- [00:33:18 inaudible] For myself I feel if people have an issue then they need to come and bring it to a committee and talk about it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And you know we'll find a solution to it.

Interviewer: That makes sense. Yeah.

Interviewee: Because it's a coop.

Interviewer: Yes. Yeah

Interviewee: The Housing Association yeah.

Interviewer: So there are some tenants’ right, that don't go to committee meetings or maybe don't get involved. Do you think they feel they have a voice in the affairs of the coop regardless?

Interviewee: Well I don't know.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I don't care actually.

Interviewer: Fair enough.

Interviewee: I really don't care because it is a housing coop and if they choose not to engage at all I mean I really don't care what the reasons are for that whether they feel but no one listened to them whether they feel disenfranchised because we're not that kind of organization.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: It's about being corrected.

Interviewer: Right? Do you think there might be some factors that limit people's involvement? Yeah.

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Yeah, some people really busy. You got kids or.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: They work really long hours so they can't go to meetings you know people who got pissed off 20 years ago, Because someone need stuff and never came, and never came back so the people who need for all kinds of reasons why people are not there.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: What we are always trying to encourage them to be there, and you're not just about trying to get people on into the general meeting every year we have to food, we have drinks and wine after which, we really try and make it a friendly you know social event

Interviewer: Event.

Interviewee: but the last day [...] we had a quiz in the middle of the meeting. The quiz took longer than the AGM you know. Just a way of we engage you know.
Interviewer: With people.
Interviewee: People yeah.
Interviewer: That makes sense.
Interviewee: We're not being if it's like not, you know, I probably sound quite hard saying I don't really care but when you're working quite hard at something and other people are not.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: I don't think they have much rights to make [complaints].
Interviewer: Yes, fair enough.
Interviewee: Their not happy with things it's like you're not happy with it. Come along.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: Try and change it to how you wanted to be.
Interviewer: That makes sense. Do you think more tenant participation is always good?
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Do you have any comments on the on the future of resident involvement in general whether that's in coops or elsewhere.
Interviewee: As you know there are a lot of people that are on the stage now, who've didn’t you know they say organization. I don't know how much they are really happy for that housing.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: I think you know some is better than none.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: You know I would like you know being in a coop doesn't suit everybody. Because some people don't want to be really involved with it, you know they’re too busy or just rather than do something else you know they just want to have somewhere decent to live, that they're not going to be kicked out after year, that rent is affordable, so they could, because like the coop of things.
[inaudible]
Interviewer: Yes
Interviewee: It's meant that they can be a different kind of person to if they were like stick stuck in non-touch job because they need most of their money to pay the rent.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Then they would have had to move out that long ago, see what I mean.
Interviewer: Yeah
Interviewee: But it doesn't, it doesn't suit everybody but I think would be interested in being in a coop. And that you know being involved in decision making and running it, I think most people probably just would be a kind landlord who with a lot with a secure tendency and an affordable rent.
Interviewer: Yes
Interviewee: And got some influence over how that's organized, it's probably the majority of people.
Interviewer: Right, that makes sense. So that concludes the main questions. I have a couple of General demographic questions and you're welcome to, to skip any of them if you if you don't want to answer of course.

Appendix 22: Cooperative Interviewee “Nolan” Transcript

Interviewer: Okay, it says it’s recording so —
Interviewee: Okay.
Interviewer: So, could you tell me a bit about your history with co-op?
Interviewee: I came into the co-op in, well I was made aware of the co-op in February 1991, but I joined the co-op in September 1991, so I didn’t really have any knowledge, experience or understanding of co-op as a housing provider, I’ve only heard of [the] council which is like the local government —
Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: And then you have housing association which is still social housing, but it’s run by organizations, rents are slightly higher, and management is filled by somebody other than the tenant, whereas cooperative is run by the tenants, for the tenants. My experience and knowledge, prior to the beginning of 1991 was zero, and it was through—I was diagnosed HIV positive in January and then February my [counsellor] said, you know, what was my housing situation, I was homeless at the time, I was living on different floors and he said, maybe, let me see what there is, so I was on the council waiting list, but because they’re all free, at the time had a good relationship with co-op, that’s how I was referred [for] housing there, after that 9 months.
Interviewer: Right, excellent. So why did you join this particular co-op as opposed to other ones and basically about your motivation for this particular co-op.
Interviewee: Well, in all honesty, there wasn’t any, it was purely on need, and I needed somewhere to live. The council housing at the time was based on points —
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: And they were quite administrative, so they would fill out a form, they’d give you points, but they didn’t necessarily have any sense of your background or history. If you had a medical condition you got a certain number of points, but they didn’t really assess how the medical condition affected your housing or your ability to get […], so the council wait for housing was long, you could wait years and the housing association route, again was quite lengthy, whereas the co-op, because it’s all done by the people that live there — it was done on referral so they could just take a referral from the [rule of 3] and we take referrals now for lots of different reasons but an official body could refer you and you get interviewed in a month, so that was the kind of motivation for going down that route, is really the speed and the fact that it’s in close proximity to the hospital, because that’s my treatment centre. So again, and I was born in the next road where I am living now, so I’ve born and bred in this area, so it just felt very
familiar, like in the right place, there was something available, which I had to go through a process for, yeah, from start to finish it was a 9 month process as opposed to a 9 year –

**Interviewer:** Process yeah —

**Interviewee:** Or 29 year.

**Interviewer:** Longer, yeah. So, are you involved — you mentioned that sort of the tenants run things at this co-op and I’m wondering if you’re involved in any particular way in managing the life of the co-op, so whether that’s events planning or if its finance — what kind of stuff, if you’re involved with anything?

**Interviewee:** Okay, when I first joined, I was 22, the co-op had actually been in existence for several years before that but in a different format, it didn’t literally have the buildings we have now, there was squat[ting] and basically the people that were squatting in the derelict properties —

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Decided to form a co-operative then they went to various organizations to get funding for people that may have AIDS, people with disabilities, single parents. They also went to the council and the council agreed to give them the properties on condition of once the development is done, they get 50% back and used for their lists. So, when I very first joined, I was very young and the majority of people that were there had already had almost 10 or 15 years of co-operative living –

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** So, when I first went to try and become involved — and one of the points of the interview was, we don’t source out our management, we do it ourselves, would you like to be involved? And I just thought it was a brilliant concept, that I could have a really meaningful input where I live -

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** When I first started, it was quite difficult because I was coming into an organization at a very young age, I was maybe one of the youngest people in the co-op at that time, majority of the people there, were either in their 30’s or 40’s and they’d all known each other for a long time as well –

**Interviewer:** Right, yeah.

**Interviewee:** So, to kind of find yourself suddenly a part of an organization and you really want to help, and you really want to do your bit, but actually, what you’re offering, maybe wasn’t what was necessarily needed.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** It was quite difficult. So, at first, yeah, I did join the management committee, but the experience was so traumatic that I actually stopped volunteering, because would go and say for example when the rents were being set, I said well, I think we need to charge a little bit more because - and I would be referred to as one of Thatcher’s children. The politics of the co-op are very left wing.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Even I would say communist-Marxist—you know there are some very, very extreme, not extreme as in, you know, hoods and throwing molotov cocktails, but very principled people there, and I come from more of a centre-right philosophy and that just didn’t work initially.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: So I withdrew and didn’t do anything for about 5 or 6 years, which was uncomfortable, because I felt like I was living somewhere, where part of the reason was because I wanted to be involved, so once I actually found my feet, got that confidence, I got to know quite a few people, it was then easier building up a relationship with other members and other tenants and other people on other committees. So I then went back in and started looking at maintenance, so I was on the maintenance committee for, I would say, 4 or 5 years and I also worked, I was also a coordinator for the selection committee, which was to look at new members, because I knew how amazing it was for me to sit in an interview, and tell my story, just for people to hear what I had to say and think I was worthy of being heard and I just thought that I would be able to do the same for maybe someone else who was maybe nervous or unsure or was maybe at a bad place in their life, so those are the two committees that I really sat on: maintenance because I got a thing about people building as nice as possible, and selection also just because I feel for it, I kind of knew a little bit about it and I felt I had a little bit of knowledge, whereas someone else that would only be on the —
Interviewer: Right. So, talking about your involvement with maintenance and also with the selection committee, before we actually get to that, I wanted to find out how you found out about that role or how you sort of inquired about it?
Interviewee: The co-op, we have an annual general meeting every year, normally its April time and then, every quarter, we’re supposed to have a general meeting and at those meetings, the general meetings, the major issues come up, for example if there is a funding issue to be discussed, we don’t discuss someone’s fridge or someone’s flooring or whatever —
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: It’s really just co-op-wide issues that are brought up at the general meetings and at the annual general meeting, all of the committees from the previous year resigned and we get a new set and at those times where there will be lots and lots of volunteering, committees are being brought forward and everything is being fine but there’s been other periods of time where maybe certain influential members have withdrawn, they’ve left, so it’s at those meetings that we find out where the co-op’s need is for participating and although they always say, we got enough committees, there have been times when there has been enough and they don’t necessarily say that we need more people, but it’s at those meetings that you generally find out where the co-op is, in terms of people wanting to do their time now, whether there’s a need for more, over kind of being okay, so those are the kind of forums that you find out about it, but of course there’s
always the reminder at every meeting that we all co-op, so that’s kind of always the undertone, we are a co-op and if you want to survive, you have to get up off your ass and help the fight.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Because that’s what we are, and I think sometimes that gets a bit lost, some people think oh, I don’t have to do anything, well if we did that, we’d be a housing association paying double [the] rent.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that’s really interesting, I wanted to also ask about, whether you enjoy the experience of being involved with the maintenance committee and the selection committee because you said you’re passionate about these things, or those things but whether the actual experience itself is enjoyable or satisfying?

**Interviewee:** The selection committee was really enjoyable because you felt like you were changing someone’s opportunity, someone’s outcome, someone’s life and it was really quite humbling sometimes to be in a situation where I could say I think this person would work brilliantly with us, for co-op living, they seem to be want to be involved but they are also in real housing needs, look where they’re coming from, what their challenges are, are other organizations providing for this kind of circumstance, so the selection committee, which I did for about 5 or 6 years was just joy, pure joy, I loved doing it. Maintenance committee was forward, because you always got attention between cost and rent.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** And of course, the less they do, the less rent has to be affected. We have a certain funding formula that we have to stick to, so we can’t put rent up by 50%, 100%, we can’t do that but there are other times where things have gone wrong with the co-op and there has been a real need to commit to expenditure, but the other side of that is there is a quantifiable group, who really say we need to keep rent affordable, that’s absolute, I understand the tension.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** But that’s why the maintenance committee wasn’t - is still valuable but it wasn’t necessarily always pleasurable.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** If that makes sense

**Interviewer:** Yes. So, I wanted to also ask if you’re involved with other types of organizing or politics or management or think about now or in the future?

**Interviewee:** I, well after I was on the maintenance committee, which, I was on for -2001, 2002, I was working at the time and I was actually the chair for a year, which, some people would say it was the best year we’ve ever had and other people would say it’s the worst year we’ve ever had. We had a person who was the overseer, she wasn’t in your face but she wasn’t a member or a tenant, just someone who we employed, she initially worked on getting the building up and running and working with contractors and architects and whatever but once the building were finished, she continued as almost like the maintenance manager and she worked in the office, along with [F], who was a member, so we had two people who we were employing, one was a
member, one wasn’t. One was responsible for finance, one was responsible for building maintenance and it got to the point where there were some maintenance issues with the co-op, which were so serious and weren’t being addressed, but actually it came to a head and she resigned and she took us to court and we ended up paying her ten grand to do it, [F] also then resigned and said she didn’t want to be involved anymore and at that point it was [unclear audio 14:28-14:34] and after that experience I really decided, you know what, my politics, my methods of doing things, my view of how the co-op could be, I’m not really sure if its shared by enough people, to give me credibility to say I think, I’m not just talking about, I think, you know, I’m representing other people and I wasn’t sure I was doing that so, for many many years, I didn’t do anything, because it just felt that my approach was maybe not the best, with the makeup of the corp that we had at the time. So now what I do is, I do stuff outside of the committee structure and then one of the things that come up in other meetings is that if you’re not on a committee, you’re doing something else, for the co-op. You can be involved in the co-op, you don’t have to be on the committee.

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: The committee structure is quite rigid at times, there are certain things that we have to stick to, there are certain things that we have to meet, different policies and procedures to follow, whereas, I’ve done things outside of the committee structure and for example, organizing the cleaning of our building, we have a cleaner, there have to be an equipment board, they need a locker board, so I arranged all that, I managed to do all that which saved a lot of time and effort, but it wasn’t done through a committee, it was almost done in agreement with co-op, not within a formal structure—

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: I have found that doing that kind of thing works better for me and ironically, it works better for me because its more projects that are down, without the need for a committee structure—

Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: But it’s still advantage to the co-op.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: If that makes sense.
Interviewer: Yes, less sort of bureaucracy I guess.
Interviewee: Exactly.
Interviewer: So, going back to sort of the committees and sort of these general meetings, I was wondering if you could tell me a bit about, not only how they function, but how decisions are made? what other consensus, majority and sort of the structure of those meetings.
Interviewee: Right. The annual general meeting should be attended by everyone, so we have 44 units and this summer 2 occupants, 3 occupants. We have 50 members and the expectation is everyone comes to the general meeting because that’s when all the committees resign, that’s when the accounts are presented and we have to agree with them or not, that’s where we choose
our solicitor for the next year, that’s where we choose the board for next year and I don’t think
it’s an unreasonable expectation, even if you don’t want to be involved with co-op that you don’t
come to that meeting, I think everyone should be at that meeting and I think if you don’t come to
that meeting, I think we have to look at why you’re not coming to the meeting.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And if it’s a consistent pattern, I think we have to be much more proactive and say
this environment, this is clearly not for you, you clearly don’t want to be involved in the job and
you really don’t want to have any input, for whatever reason, we’re not going to judge you, but
we have to be, we have to participate for this to work, and you haven’t for five years, eight years,
ten years whatever and I think this should be a reason to, we can expel members. If you have a
meeting and there’s two-thirds of the co-op there and if everyone votes to expel a member we
can do that. It’s never been done, except once, when we found that someone had a council flat in
another borough, and they had a flat in our place, and they were subletting one.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Interviewee: And then so we let him go. But it took a long time, year and a half of legal
wrangling and stuff, we did it, but there are – with the annual general meeting, because of the
fact that it’s once a year, it should really be attended by everybody. General meetings, generally
work, the notice goes up 7 days before, we know roughly when they’re going to be, but the
notice has to go up a week before with an agenda, so everyone is aware of what’s going to be
discussed.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So if you want to write a letter to represent yourself if you can’t make it or if you
want to challenge something that’s been put up, you can do a little research beforehand, so for
example, the 1st general meeting we had, the discussion was around allocation of housing
resource, we’re a small co-op, we got 44 units, we got people who are living in units that are
maybe too large for them, we’ve got some people living in units that are too small for them.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: We’ve got people living on flats above the ground floor, who would like to live on
the ground floor, for accessibility and mobility issues and the general meeting would decide if
we would devote a general meeting just to having this discussion [unclear audio 19:52-19:54]
should we be thinking about giving tenancies on a rolling yearly basis rather than a lifetime
basis. Should there be an expectation there if you’re living on the ground floor, if you’re needed
to move to another floor to allow because again, that’s how co-ops flow, for the betterment of
everyone, not just yourself.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, there have been occasions where general meetings have been called and only
around 6 persons have turned up and you can't have a meeting with six people, because that
would be a very risky sort of view, even if - Well, I don't care what they decided as a co-op, we
have to be more reflective of the people that we have with us. So, there was a period, a few years
ago, where people just didn't come to meetings and they would cancel, and we get that, the same.
You know about the meeting, we ask people when they want to have it, the issues that are going
to be discussed. It would have only been an hour, so it's not like a whole day thing.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.
Interviewee: It's manageable by size, I think, achievable items of the agenda, if there is a big
discussion we sometimes actually hold a meeting outside of the cycle and we’ll say we're going
to have a day to discuss X and we’ve done that twice, and actually it was really well attended,
maybe 35 people have attended one of them. So again, the old way of doing things may need to
change, but again, you have to have everybody agreeing to that.

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: And if people don't come —
Interviewer: They can't agree to it.
Interviewee: Exactly and they end up sticking to the same frame, which may not work for
everybody.

Interviewer: So, when people do show up are decisions consensus - based or is it majority or
two-thirds or just the committee or?
Interviewee: No, I’m trying to think when was the last time, the last time we had a meeting,
which was about this housing, there was some certain questions around - So for example, one of
the ideas before it was that maybe we should have a committee form to look at all the housing
stuff we've got and see where we could change it, so that people didn't have to move. So, for
example, would it be practical to put in a stairlift? Would it be practical to partition a flat? Would
it be practical to extend the property, so the person doesn't have to move? Because one of the
things that came up at the meeting was that although it was supposed to be all for one and one for
all —

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Actually, we do get attached to the properties that we’re in.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: I’ve lived in my flat since 1991, I’m very attached to it, that’s my home, and even
though it’s on the ground floor and might be more suitable for someone in a wheelchair, for
mobility issues, I was awarded that flat on the basis if because of my disability or because of my
HIV status, that flat was funded partially by HIV grants, which is why it’s designated for
someone with HIV and/or a disability. The decision at time was - or the question was asked, "Do
we need to set this group up? and at the time, everyone voted yes, it's never happened, because
again, things are decided but it takes someone to push it forward to make it happen. It won't just
happen overnight, because we don't have a group of five or six people working externally from
us to say... Oh, this is, this is... so we are going to make sure that you do this, the decision was
taken, but it's never happened. So, when decisions aren't taking it really is incumbent of the
management committee to make sure that the decisions taken in the general meetings or the
annual general meetings are enacted.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: And again, when the committees are full and they’ve got 8 members or 10 members or if the next couple of meetings, after the decision has been taken, if there's any two or three people that can make the meeting, they can't make that decision, because it’s not enough of them.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So, the whole committee structure, whilst it’s the one we have, isn't necessarily the one that works best to get things done, to move the car forward, which is why sometimes it just feels like —
Interviewer: Running in a circle.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Interviewer: Yeah, so how much time do you think for you, you devote either informally or over your period of involvement with the selection committee with maintenance and even now, more informal involvement, how much time does that take out of your week?
Interviewee: Very little.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: Very little. I mean, it's certainly, when I was in the selection committee, there would be a period when a flat came up and you would then spend maybe a four or six weeks doing a lot of, sort of, administrative work, letting the council know, letting the roll free know, we’ve got a flat, sending out application forms, putting them back, getting together with the rest of the committee, having a look at them and arranging the interviews, but apart from day which you interview, the majority of staff was really done in the evenings or weekends over a cup of coffee in someone’s flat. So, it’s a very - a lot of stuff is done quite informally, obviously certain committees have to meet in the office to give it a sense of gravitas and formality. But actually, when I was on the selection committee at the time, we would say, “oh we’ll meet at so and so” and we go through the application forms and it would be done like this, over a cup of coffee. So, it never actually felt like work, it almost felt like a social.
Interviewer: Yeah.
Interviewee: The decision is still taken and certainly, when we were interviewing people for properties, we would do that at the office, where that’s formalised, but I think being on - part of the co-op is not time consuming and it just depends about who else is working involved, because this to say, there are some very robust personalities who are quite challenging to work with, and that also puts people off —
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Or in some ways, encourages people, a friend of mine who is upstairs from me, David, in number 5, he did architecture for 3 years or 4 years. Every now and again, I'll pop up and say, "Oh we have a chat about stuff”. I say to him time and time again, why didn’t you join the maintenance committee, I was on the committee, why don’t you come to the meetings with me and he said I don’t want to work with those people and yet, as soon as the committee’s
changed, within one year, there was six of us on the committee and if we got so much done, because there wasn't any conflict amongst us, everyone just wanted to get stuff done. So again, it's sometimes it's not just about having the structure there in a co-op, because you might be sitting opposite your neighbour, disagreeing on how things are done that can be quite limiting, because sometimes, for example, we have my neighbour upstairs and ever since I've been here, the longest, never politics are extremely different.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, I'm always a little bit apprehensive about doing anything where I would come into conflict with them because they’re my neighbours. That’s part of the co-op and some people have learnt how to rubble on with it and they talk with their neighbours and then they sit on a committee and act like nothing's happened. Whereas other people would say, I don't want to be on that committee because so and so is next door. So, it can be quite challenging, even though I get that you’re in charge of your own destinies, it sounds quite appealing.

**Interviewer:** Right. So, you mentioned, oh feel free also to—Yeah, drink coffee and stuff, because I know a lot of talking, can be really exhausting as well, you mentioned robust personalities. So I was wondering if you felt that sometimes the robust personalities are attracted to leadership positions or is there a bit of a struggle to get people who, as you mentioned with your example, might be hesitant to work with certain types of people?

**Interviewee:** I mean, for me that is always the thing that causes the issues, it's the personalities, it's not really the policies, because the policies, everyone agrees on generally. We had a policy enacted quite recently in fact, maybe four or five years ago, the parvous policy. Basically, the previous policy said that if you want your partner to become a member, you have to notify the management committee, [unclear audio 29:19-29:25] for a calendar year and then go back to the management committee a year later, and if you still wanted that person to be you could then start the process of that person becoming a member.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And of course, to become a member you have to be voted in and at the moment, we have a situation where someone is considered to be under-occupying and it's one person, occupying a 2-bedroom flat but they’re in that situation because their partner previously who was the original member died.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, [A] was the original member, joined in 1990, he was there before I was, and for the last 16 years, he was living with his partner, [M], [A] then passed away which meant [M], who had now become a member was in a 2 bedroom flat, and the co-op said, we think it’s important that somebody else is offered that flat, but [M] has now got a partner and he wants his partner to become a member, but then there are people saying he has now become a member, if he is a member we can’t ask [M] to move. It’s that whole tension between knowing someone’s situation, having a view on what qualifies someone for a flat.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.
**Interviewee:** Differences in interpretation of policy and you then get to a situation, when you do find yourself being less reluctant to being involved because, -- Well for me, I sometimes think that the less they know about you, the less they can hang you out to dry.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, it is quite, quite fraught, at times, and unfortunately with the co-op because it is so small...

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** And we all live on physically on one little part of a street. If you don't have a bit of a robust personality, you will end up never being involved in any part of the co-op at all.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Because you have to in that you see me that to give us to go sometimes because they are as I say, there are a group of people who have been there longer than I have, I’ve been there since 91 but they’re people there who were there when they were squats.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Obviously went through the whole thing about getting the funding, or whatever, building these leasing spaces, they will build themselves amazing spaces, they do it out of the goodness of their heart, they will get something out of it, but those people are a generation above me, they’re in their 60s, had families, but now have adult children, and they want to say, they find it, they think, I want to say, there’s some battle they’ve been fighting on, there’s been so many ups and downs, to plan for it, because that’s just their character, but if you’re coming as a teammate, which happened to me which is why the history — I worked on the committee when I first joined and then decided no, this just isn’t for me.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Because it really did feel like you’d just say something, and you'll just get criticised.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** We don’t do things like that here and it’s like if you’re in the co-op, in you’re in the council flat, that’s not how we do it and you’re like, Jesus, I only said we could probably put the rent up a little more than a pound.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** And yet, we really begun to.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** So, the personality in the co-op does influence people that they get involved because every year you see the same stuff, there's the same cohort, they’re just always on committees because it's just what they do.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** and robust ones and the timid ones coming in and out, in and out, depending on who else is on the committee and whether they manage to supply every year.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Because there's also that burn out thing, sometimes, if you have quite a bit a year, like that maintenance fee idea, it’s really hard work, we had the, we were doing sickle maintenance as well, where the whole street was being redecorated, and it became an absolute battle ground, even having meetings over the choice of paint colour.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: It got that —
Interviewer: Detailed, yeah.
Interviewee: And at the end of it, three people said I can’t be in this gang and actually one of them has never done anything again, because it was such a personally draining experience where, there are other people on committees, they’re still on committees.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Maybe it doesn’t make a difference either.
Interviewer: Yeah, maybe. Alright so, so we talked a bit about—
Interviewee: Tell me if it’s useful.
Interviewer: This is very useful, yes, trust me.
Interviewee: Okay, because if I’m not answering your question, just tell me.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: Don’t be afraid to tell me that’s not what you need to know.
Interviewer: I will definitely do that. So yeah, we talked a lot about how responsibilities are distributed, to sort of volunteer for a committee.
Interviewee: Yep.
Interviewer: And is there any sort of, can you-- is there a limit to the number of people you can have on a committee, right?
Interviewee Well, there isn't really because you generally think, even if you have 15 people on the committee, 9 times out of ten, half of them won’t show up, and they may make 7 out of the 10 meetings a year.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: So generally, we don't ever say, we've got too many, but we will always say, we don't have enough because we need a certain amount to be core. So, I think the management committee, we need to have five plus the chair for the lower committees, I think it's three plus. So, for example, on the finance committee it’s three people plus the treasurer, on the maintenance committee, it’s three plus the maintenance workers. I think the most committee, I think we have five or six plus the chair. So, we always have a minimum and if the minimum [don’t] turn up, [the person running the meeting] will say, "Sorry we're not quorum, we can't do anything” and everyone will be sent home, and then you get e-mails, come on guys, we need membership participation, and we all said we’d do this at the beginning of the year, we’ll get some feedback and so hopefully get people to come to the next meeting.
**Interviewer:** And are there positions where there are elections at all? Sort of contested elections?

**Interviewee:** No, I’ve never thought about that. We don’t really, we have, I’m trying to think about all the year. I don’t think we’ve ever had a year where we’ve had more than one person wants to be the roles that are, that we need to vote on, so for example, the chair is a show of hands.

**Interviewer:** Majority or?

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Oh okay

**Interviewee:** And generally, the majority will all say yes, because it means they don't have to do it.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** And quite often there is a bit of a giggle when it goes around, who’s going to be the chair this year and everyone looks around, like who's going to be the first to blink, because the chair sometimes can be quite a fractious position, because you’re dealing with complaints, you’re dealing with members disputes, you’re dealing with the speed of rents going up or coming down, you’re dealing with policy changes. The chair really is the person that sets the tone for the year, as to how the co-op is going to function and we've had some very hands-off chairs, who’ve kind of just allowed things to happen, things we kind of rumble through a year and actually, nothing really terrible has happened. We’ve had other chairs, who have been quite descriptive, and with many restrict—I felt, when I was the chair, I had certain aims and objectives I wanted to get done, and although it was quite disruptive at the end of the year, there was a huge checklist for things that we managed to get done. Whereas somebody else may have taken a different style, and still don’t have all the ticks. At the end of the day, it’s that personality, you have to think, do I really want that person to be the person that sets the tone for the coop? It’s usually very, very rarely have dissenters. So, for example, this year chair, is the chair that we had for the last two years or three years, and but he said, I’ll do one more year, but next year I want it and I think everybody's perfectly okay with that, because to do it more than two years, is unusual.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** He has done it now for four and he would say okay no one else wants it, I'll continue doing it, and we ask for a show of hands and everyone puts a hand up because everyone wants him to do it because it means they don’t have to, we've had a treasurer, again that needs a show a hands and then it goes back to the selection committee, the person that, when I was on the selection committee we had, very quick information, we had two flats come up and we had lots of battle because they were both ground floor flats.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And we interviewed a couple and a single person, and they were both fantastic, but the flat that we had was really just suitable for one person, so we said, which should be enough,
we're really sorry, we absolutely think you are deserving, but we don't think that it’s reasonable for us to allocate you that property because of the size.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** It’s really designed for one person, but we’d like to keep you on the list.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Even though we didn’t have one, we said we’re going to keep you informed, who knows what’s going to happen, and within a month, another ground floor flat came up.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** With little satellite down there, five minutes’ walk. We’ve got 4 ground floor flats down there, another flat came up, but a bigger one, that had a garden.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And the committee said, “We're not going to have an interview for that, because we've already spoken to someone”. It was physically too small for them at that flat, this flat would be perfect, for that person, [R] has been our treasurer, I think, maybe a year or two years after he joined. So, maybe 15, 18 years he’s been the treasurer and he’s so good and so competent. [unclear audio 40:44-40:46], but as a treasurer, amazing, and he has continued doing it because he enjoys doing it. Again, when we said, “Do we have anyone else who would like to be the treasurer? and [R] always says I’m happy to continue, if someone else would like to do it, I'm happy to do a hand over for six months or a year. Generally, because it's quite specialized role and he has really done such a good job at it, that it might be somewhat intimidating, for someone to want to step in his shoes, but again that requires a show of hands and Richard has always been voted in unanimously. We have a secretary, who is the person that signs check, so, it's quite a low key, but again, that requires a show of hands but as far as the committees are concerned, someone needs to nominate. So, if I said I'd like to be on the management committee,[J] would say I nominate, someone else would say I second and that’s it, we don’t require a show of hands, because as long as you’re nominated and seconded, you’re on the committee.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Whereas with the chair, the treasurer and the secretary you have to be nominated

**Interviewer:** And then.

**Interviewee:** Someone has to second and then we have to vote because they’re the three kind of pivotal —

**Interviewer:** Positions.

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay that's great. So, overall it seems that this is particular to co-ops as well, but the problem-solving approach is pretty collaborative.

**Interviewee:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** But because of people's experience, specific members sometimes might have more solutions in-line kind of thing.
Interviewee: Absolutely.
Interviewer: Okay, so this question is in your opinion, who are the most influential people in the co-op, but you've already sort of talked about those three pivotal positions, but—
Interviewee: Yeah, the positions, are pivotal, as far as the organization is concerned.
Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: Are those 3, the chair the treasurer and the secretary, but actually, the most influential people are often outside of those roles, and it's the people that have been there from the day it was built, and they have just achieved a certain stature because of their experience.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: We had a female member, who [had] challenges, she got married and moved away, she very rarely come to meetings, she didn’t say a lot, but when she did, it was always bang on the bloody money. She, whenever there was a written co-op issue such as a complaint, when there was two members in dispute, people always asked her to be involved because, she was just seen as a safe pair of hands, someone with no agendas, someone with no track story that seemed--she was someone who I would say was universally admired, and respected, because of the role because of her behaviour, she would know the chair, she would know the treasurer, she would know the secretary, she was always on the management committee. And again, it was that - so, that regularity that she did that every year, she was a committee member for maybe five, six years.
But as I say, when things sometimes went badly wrong, she would say something or do something that really studied the suit, so even though she wasn’t in one of the influential positions, she became someone influential throughout the co-op.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: [T], who is upstairs in my building, number 8, again, he’s a long-standing member, he chartered the co-op through some really difficult waters when [A] left and [S] resigned and threatened the core and we have been working for a very long time, [T] was the one who kind of managed to hold everyone together and at that point he was the chair, but had it been another chair, I'm not sure that we would have managed as well as we did, because he wasn't under the organizational pivotal person, but actually as just as someone that everyone knew, everyone felt assured that [T] would do the right thing or say the right thing. Organizationally, as far as paper work is concerned, the three roles, it doesn't really matter who they are because those are the roles, beside the chair that has a certain effect on policy procedure and if you get a letter from someone like [T], just of the committee, people take note of it because they know he’s someone —
Interviewer: With experience and —
Interviewee: Exactly.
Interviewer: So, you mentioned sort of how there is a bit of an issue with certain tenants, not showing up for meetings, and absence of tenants, how does that compare to events or... I don't know if there are parties or things or social events in terms of--
**Interviewee:** I mean, we have one garden party a year, usually in August, September time. There have been some years it's been really well-attended and the whole co-op turned out and it started at let’s say two and ended about minute, and it's been really well received. There’s been other years where because of what's happened in the co-op, people have not necessarily felt like they want to be in the same space as potentially, other people that they may have had disagreements with.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, again, it's that whole living with committee members, it’s that whole living opposite someone who's just made decision that's going against something that you want.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So, for example I want to have a new bathroom and the committee said no you can’t, I pass that person in the stairway and I think thereafter.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** I just wanted a new bathroom and you said no, actually, the labourer didn’t say no, the committee said no.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** But because [that personal is...] on that committee, it's sometimes quite difficult for people to separate the two, so the social events are really the one main event is the garden party, but because we're actually all quiet - I think that we’re quite diverse group now and a lot of the old guys has gone because they’ve either left or bought property and moved away, it’s almost like a new cohort coming through of people who have kind of dabbled in committees, but are now finding their feet and essentially, if I don't like something, I can now say it, whereas 10 years ago or 5 years ago because I was still new and there was this old guy around, maybe I wouldn’t. We had one away day we did a few years ago when we were talking about after [S] and [A] resigned, what’s the co-op do if we want to employ someone? Are we going to still have members working for us or do we think that actually being a member and an employee is a conflict?

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** Because [A] obviously was seen as very much, one of the people in the office, but actually she did the books, and then she went home to her family and at that time, we decided no, we would not be employed by the co-op because that was a big question mark over the future, or someone said listen, how about we have in a way day and we did it over the road and we had to use a - but they had a room at the bank, and again, I think maybe 35 people turned up, because we know it was like, okay, if you don't turn up, and you don't say, we’re in danger of folding.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So that was really a need to, we don’t have a Christmas party, we don’t have – One of the interesting that’s at my building, we have a communal, it was designed because at the time, the co-op thought that it would be good to have a space where people could get together and have coffee, eat together and there’s a little sink in there, it’s got the doors, it’s got the
gardens, it’s a beautiful backstory, because that whole community idea of doing such socially, just never happens because once everyone moved into their flat, they realized I don't have to think about that person anymore. We were living in squats, we have to go, because we have nowhere else to go.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But once everyone got their own little spaces everyone became very independent, and the communal spaces, we had won it, we had one on 3 floors, it’s used as storage, the garden is communal at the bank of the property where I live, it gets number 20 to number 30, but the person at number 20 has colonised their part of the garden, the person at 30, has colonised their part of the garden, because people do like to have their own bit of space, when they choose to intermingle, it’s very much one on one. I get along very well, with my neighbour, we get along very well, with [D] upstairs but even if they had a party, I wouldn’t go.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Just don't want to necessarily make small talk with, that I don’t think are relevant.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's fair.

Interviewee: There’s a very, I want to say a very limited and the one thing that we have put starring is after the general meeting and [J], one of our new members, he’s an amazing cook.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: He does a whole lot of food, which the co-op pays for and again, everybody can get together and have food after meeting. We had one a couple of months ago, and he said I want to come back to the flat, for the garden communal and there were many people there talking and whatever, but you could see the people that just don't really gel or bond in the flat. So, there isn’t a social calendar, that there isn't a big list of things that we do [unclear audio 51:35-51:37].

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So I think, yeah, we talked about influence and control of sort of meetings, we talked about your initial experience when you first moved into the co-op and so sort of struggling to be heard and so actually we've talked about all of the sort of turning moment things and I want to talk a little bit at the end of this interview about the local authority and sort of the relationship between the housing co-op a and the local authority, I wonder how you would describe that relationship.

Interviewer: I think it's good.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewee: I think it's a good relationship. [D] is our local authority, [the council] has always been Labour-controlled, which is left wing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Not far left but [unclear audio 52:25- 52:27]. A conservative will never ever run the council, not in a million years, people will probably vote for them but it’s a wasted vote, because this a very labour heavy constituent and [the borough] has always been like that.

Interviewer: Yes.
Interviewee: But despite that, I think the council that we have, are quite open and quite pragmatic, I think. There are certain things, so for example, when a flat becomes available, we have a 50-50 arrangement with [the council], when they originally gave us the buildings, and we did the math, they got 50 percent of what was left so after everybody who was in squat took their flats, they then divided the rest of the stock, so it was 20, 10 to [the council] and we get 10 through internal allocations.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, every time a flat comes up, we have to say is it [the council]’s or ours? and they have one next one, we get, then we get one

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: And it's not about the size, it's purely, you had it last time, so for this one we can use for internal.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: When we got to [the council] and we say, we got a property is it's a studio on the third floor, they sometimes send us [unclear audio 53:58-54:00] and we say it’s not suitable and [the council] would say, they use their own criteria, they don’t use ours and that’s where the conflict comes. We have a resource or a policy, it’s one member, one bedroom, that’s how we work, so for example the house at number 20, it’s a 3-story house, when it was being built, it was a 3-parent family, so a lesbian, straight mom, straight dad, at the time they had 2 children.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: So they had a 5 bedroom house, they then had another baby, so that’s six and eventually, after about 2 years I think [M], [M] was actually lovely, she helped raised the children until 2 years old, she moved out so you had mom and dad and 3 children, in a 5 bedroom house, because they don’t consider the mom and dad shareholders, they say moms a member , she has her own bedroom, dad’s a member, he has his own bedroom, and they have children and that’s why they see a proof to it because they’re probably going to have one more, so they were given a 5 bedroom house, but they don’t expect mom and dad to share. Upstairs, they live in a 3-bedroom, 3 double bedroom property, under our formula, [A] has a bedroom, [L] has a bedroom, at the time they had one child—

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: When they had a second child obviously the second child and they not share, but actually they’re given the property on basis of one bedroom per member.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: When I moved in, I moved in with a partner—

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I was given a 2-bedroom flat, one for me, one for my partner, we were both members. When he left, I asked if I could have sole tenancy, which they gave me, so I’m the only one in the co-op that has a 2-bedroom flat, but I’m a sole tenant.

Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: Because they don’t do that now. What [the council] [would] say, is a single room is a one key flat, one person flat, a double bedroom is a 2-key flat, 2 persons, we don’t, we go the other way, so we’re 50% less, say one person in a bedroom, doesn’t matter if it’s a single bedroom or a double bedroom. It’s one member, one bedroom, whereas [the council] [would say] we’ve got a one bedroom flat, they’ll send us sometimes—

Interviewer: A couple.

Interviewee: A couple, yeah and we say no, we don’t do that, because what happens if the couple splits up, who gets the flat? because we don’t have the housing stock to just give them another flat, that's why we say, one bedroom, one member. If something happens, they at least can have their own big runs on space. I guess if at some point, another property, or the properties, come up, we can separate them at...That's why we don't have a couple, as having the same bedroom. So, if something happens they can at least have their own bedrooms and if at some point another property, or 2 properties come up we can separate them.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: That’s why we don’t have couples being in the same bedroom.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: So, the relationship with [the council] can sometimes be quite challenging because their policies are different from ours.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: They actually, they've got, if I say found when we really explained it to them, certainly when I was on the selection committee, there was this flat, this one bedroom flat we had, they sent us [R] who was on his own, but they sent us [R] and [M], and we said the flat is too small to house 2 people, even though on the [the council] floor everyone would get in, whereas we said minimally, if it’s a couple, they have to have a one bedroom. We wouldn't give them an open plan so that is probably the biggest area of conflict

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Is how many people do you think can be put in a flat?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So, in my flat, I’m there on my own but I’ll be enrolled to be occupied fully is only with one other person, for [the council], it’s 3 other people.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So that is where, so for example if my [unclear audio 57:56-57:58] [the council] would probably send us the mom and dad and probably 2 children of the same sex.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Because they wouldn’t allow a boy and a girl to share, but that’s what they’d send us and we’d go no, we don’t want 2, we don’t want 4, but actually the interaction with [the council] has gotten a lot easier, because when I first joined, if you haven’t been fit, you’d do that all yourself, you have to fill it out, you have to sit in, now, the co-op has really good relationship with the council and we have maybe 50 percent of our residents on housing benefits, they don’t
have to do anything. The co-op sends all the data to [the council], [the council] update the forms and it’s just, because they understand that we're a trustworthy co-op and we're not going to ask for housing benefits for someone who's working or they’ve got a 2 million dollar house plan and are broke.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** It’s taking a while, I think it helps them, co-op is quite left wing and the counsellors quite left wing.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** So, I think there’s a meet where it’s like politically — The only thing that we ever really, the restrictions are obviously how many people can live a flat and also people's co-operability. In other words, if we’ve had people come to us and one is, if it’s a gentleman in a wheelchair, he spoke no English, didn’t matter because his sister came with him and his sister said, which house would he be living in? and we said, well, it doesn’t really matter, because it's about the accommodation and he didn’t sit something and she didn’t sit something in Iranian and the committee said "Oh is it something he doesn't understand or do we need to explain something? And she said, no no no he just doesn’t want to be in a house with anyone, that’s gay and we said okay, so we’re going to stop the interview here, because you may be living in a house where her house where someone is gay, someone's Christian, someone has one arm.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So immediately, that person isn’t co-operable, incapable because they have a view which is in conflict with the views of the co-op.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** With [the council] [unclear audio 1:00:26- 1:00:30], why didn’t they just tell him that there wasn’t any, or there was, that’s irrelevant, whereas in social housing or in the council, you wouldn’t say who else is living in the building, you would take the flat, because it’s took you to 20 years.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** You just take it, you don't care. If you’re living in your flat, you don't ever need to see anybody, you don’t ever have to go to a meeting with your neighbours or anything, because you can deal with the council on the phone. Whereas with us, because we’re running ourselves, [the council] sometimes, don't understand that those opinions –

**Interviewer:** Matter.

**Interviewee:** [unclear audio 1:01:04-1:01:10].

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** I can’t say I want free speech but only when he speaks to me and only when he’s nice to me, he has an absolute right to have that opinion, and that view, you just can’t live here with it, because he’s not compatible—

**Interviewer:** Yes.
**Interviewee:** If he wants to go and live somewhere else and some other housing places, oh yeah, we’ll keep you away from the queers. What do I care?

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** We just can’t have it here and actually he would be more suitable to a council property.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Because you would just be happy to get somewhere, whereas with us because it happens so quick, there’s a bit more of a, I think he felt he was slightly more able to pick and choose.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** They wouldn't necessarily work well in the co-op and also the number of people, well otherwise I think [the council] appreciates the fact that they have a social housing provider in the borough that would be very fair with them, we take one flat, they take one flat, there have been occasions where, internally we had 3 flats at the time, we had 3 flats come up, we actually said, we’re working with [the council], because the last time we took someone out of sync. So, we've always been very far with them.

**Interviewer:** Right

**Interviewee:** Yeah, I think we have a good relationship, I would say.

**Interviewer:** Right. Okay, so just a bit of details before we finish the interview on this. So, it's sort of like because the council gave initial funding for the co-op, every other one that opens up, they get to decide who comes in?

**Interviewee:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And if there's an issue with the compatibility, the co-op does have sort of like a final say?

**Interviewee:** Absolutely.

**Interviewer:** Okay, that's good for me to know, and yes, I'll finish with one last question. So, what are the types of local authority decisions whether that's related to the co-op or the surrounding neighbourhood? And which ones are the tenants and the community consulted about and which ones are they not consulted about?

**Interviewee:** Anything to do with a local area, but this isn't really to do with the co-op, this actually has to do with how the co-op works with residents. As you walk around you may see little yellow posters on the. - Anything relating to planning, removal of trees, bringing trees in, changing the way the road works. The latest big thing at the moment is co-op is going to charge more to pump your diesel car and then the cost, it goes up everywhere, unless it's something that specifically affects the co-op, we have more right than the next-door neighbour that owns their property or the neighbour who is renting privately —

**Interviewer:** Right.
Interviewee: Or [M] and [G] live down the road, we're all the same, the only thing that we may have any difference is when, for example over the back, there's a primary school, they want to put in an extra term.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because the co-op acts on to the school.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Rather than all of us individually sending in our objection, we do it through the co-op, because the co-op has more rapid tasks, so if I write in on flat [321 X House] saying that I don't like the fact that there's going to be AstroTurf and lights in the school, day and night, they might go oh, that's one objection, whereas if the co-op writes, because it's the social housing body, it carries a lot more weight.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So it really depends on what the issue is, being consulted on, as to whether we do that individually, or we expect the co-op to do it on our behalf and usually with the example of the AstroTurf [unclear audio 1:05:28- 1:05:32] and I saw it and I sent it to the co-op and I said, is the couple aware that this is being considered? And they didn't know and came up with a meeting. So, the co-op has sent a representation saying "Can we have some more information about heights of lights and whatever."

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: That will get a much quicker response than if I had done it on my own and because it affects the whole of the co-op, it's easier.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: They can't live up to many, 44 people's expectations and the accounts are getting 44, despite arguments.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So, but otherwise we get treated, we got to have a hotline to the co-op. The deal is in, the notice went up and I just have to see it, in our centre, they're charging more for diesel.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Well, just because I'm a member of a co-op and social housing, I don't get-

Interviewer: Any special notice.

Interviewee: And in that respect, I think is quite good because it means that we treat you the same.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: And everybody else, and there is a parity between us living in co-operative housing and people living in housing associations in council, being probably rented.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: We're all given the same information at the same time, so we're never disadvantaged, but there can be an advantage in that we are with our owner and say, we're only
from the co-op just carries little bit more weight, because they are a recognized social body, housing. Yes. It represents a larger number of people.

**Interviewer:** Exactly, great, I mean, yeah, that's pretty much all my questions. I guess I was also going to ask about the financial situation, but you've explained that already, that it's sort of like to do some counsel and there's also grants and things like that and rent.

**Interviewee:** Yeah. I mean the initial money that we got in probably, 86, 87, we got money because we were providing, the majority of units, were single people and single people were basically not being looked at or looked and considered by the council, because they were looking at single moms, families, children, old people, people with disabilities, so your white single gay guy, wasn’t being looked at. I'm obviously [unclear audio 1:07:56-1:08:02], mainstream or housing awareness. A lot of HIV charities gave us money and we got grants based on the fact that we were building flats, specifically to house people with HIV and AIDS because they were losing their homes, because they’ll tell the landlord, I can’t pay my rent because I’ve been out of work for a month and they can notice they’re queer so there was a whole load of money that came because we were doing something specifically to help an under or disadvantaged group at the time. Since then once the places were available, it was really just rent that kept us--we pay, and I think, two, two or three of the mortgages has already been paid off. So as far as the finances are concerned, the next big discussion which again, would come up at a general meeting is once the mortgages are paid off, how do we calculate our rent? Because at the moment they look at the mortgage for a house and they go right, there’s one with 2 bedrooms, so everyone pays per [unclear audio 1:09:05] to what the mortgage is, but when there’s no mortgage.

**Interviewer:** How do they calculate the terminus, yes?

**Interviewee:** How are they going to say, well you need to pay X, for what? For maintenance? Are we going to have upgrades for what we’re maintaining? because there will be something that will say, "I think we just need to maintain the building, as they are because it keeps it affordable, whereas my contention has always been [01:09:34-1:09:38] and bathrooms, solar panels, let’s make this feature for the next 30 years.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And the people on housing benefit, don’t pay it anyway, but if you’re on housing benefit, what do you care if you’re paying 28 or 30 pounds, you’re not paying it, the council is paying it and we’re always, I would say 80% less market rent.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** So, I pay for a 2-bedroom, 2 bathrooms, I pay 440 a month, normally you would pay 2000 for that flat.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** So, we pay about 80% less —

**Interviewer:** Already -

**Interviewee:** The market rate, so if they say to me “well, we're going to put your rent up by 20 pounds a month” [unclear audio 1:10:25-1:10:32], 25 years like what we do with our
mortgages, that would be brilliant. There’s a whole load of people that’s split between old members, left wing and people who say we need to get the finances as tight as possible, do we need moving that? As long as there's glass, it's fine. I look and go, “well it looks a bit cloudy, can we replace it? “we go yeah, but there’s nothing wrong with it. Now, so there's, again, the financial tension between people who want to see the co-op move to the next phase.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** And get feature proofed and people who go listen, we’ve got 4 walls and a roof, we’re living in a home and we’re paying 80% less the market rate, let’s keep it like that, which is another argument, and as I say, it will be that argument the next one, I think that’s going to be the next big —

**Interviewer:** Argument.

**Interviewee:** Argument, yeah, it’s funding. What are we funding? how are we going to fund it? how are we going to decide? What we do? when we do it? one of the houses has already had its windows replaced for a 10 bag. So, they have done everybody's front windows first probably, but at the time, that’s what they did, but again, because the people in that house [unclear audio 1:11:54-1:11:57]. So again, it's one of those things that being in a co-op, I wouldn’t want to live in council accommodation, because I like having some input into where I live, housing association I think you pretty much get best of both worlds, because you’re not allowed to sitting with your neighbour in a committee so you don’t have these conflicts.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** The funding is based on maintaining the property and in showing that it's relevant to the time, whereas I haven’t had—my kitchen still is my original kitchen.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** If I was in council recommendation or housing association, it would have been replaced maybe once, or twice.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** So again, living in a co-op for me, it has been, probably the best of the three because I'm gay, because I’m HIV positive, I think that would have been difficult in other environments, whereas here [unclear audio 1:13:02-1:13:14], but I think it needs looking at again, because the co-op system from 88, does not fit the purpose of 2018.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Something has to change, whether that's the way that we do it, whether that's how we fund it, whether that's how we run it, it may be that we say, "You know what, we're going to have a - we're going to employ a property management company and they’re going to make all the decisions, we’ll also make the decisions, but they'll implement them and that way it will be a collective thing. So everyone has to agree, yes, we all want new baths and then we get them , if you don’t, it’s not your neighbour, it’s actually the co-op that said no.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** At the moment it just feel quite —
Interviewer: Okay, so I guess the sense of getting is the tenants’ participation is good generally is it always good or appropriate for everyone?

Interviewee: Can you say that again?

Interviewer: Okay, I’ll read the question, it says do you think more tenant participation in the management of their homes always good?

Interviewee: I think as long as everybody is made to feel, that their view is as valid as the next, I think, I kind of wonder why anyone would want to live in anything other than a co-op sent

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: Because I think to be able to go to a meeting and express an opinion and even if it's not connected, the fact you can still do that and go back to your flat thinking, you know what, I didn’t get the extra 2 % raise, but at least I got the opportunity to say, that's what I like. Whereas in the council you just get sent a letter, this is only rent, and you have no input to it at all. Then they want to charge you another 50 pound per year because of the roof that might need replacing in 28 years’ time and you may be dead. It’s anything is given, housing association, because they were managed by a group people, a [housing association], they probably have about 400 people working, it will accelerate, so you’re not just paying for where you live, you’re paying other people to do things, which may be the [housing association] need a marketing department, social housing marketing, I’m not pretty sure how that works, but I would feel if I was paying some marketing exec, 60 thousand dollars a year, half of it is coming from my rent, whereas a co-op , even though there is a struggle, and I’m going to say, I’m very fortunate, not unique, but certainly one of the - I would say one of the, if there’s 50 members I would say is maybe 4 of us that have done this on point because of the rent, we pay for my own bathroom to be done, it cost me 6 grand, people think, that was not even your flat. I think I've lived there for maybe 30 years. I couldn't have lived there for 30 years, if I had to pay for it normally. Actually, I’ve saved hundreds of thousands of pounds over the year, it has allowed me to fly once every 3 years to Australia, that has allowed me to [unclear audio 1:16:48- 1:16:52] that have allowed me to have a nice flat. One of the rooms, one of the wet rooms, I got a wet room in here and we go in and we say we’re going to pay to have a shower in there, I said no, I like the wet room as it was, we argued, they said, "we'll give you eighteen hundred pounds because that's all the budget that we got for that room. I said fine, I'll play the rest and it means, I’m in a flat that people come in and look around, if you look at others they literally were like they were built in 1988 and had nothing done to them because as long as the door opens and as long as the taps turn, we’re not going to do anything to them.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I don’t really want to live like that, so my thing is while I’m saving on rent, so what if I put 10 grand or 15 grand into the flat over 30 years.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, why anyone would not want to be in a position like that is beyond me and I think the people that may be living in council accommodation are, probably happy not being
involved, they could be like going home, coming to work, locking the doors, thinking I don’t have a meeting to go to, I don’t have to make any decisions, there’s a [unclear audio] next door but she didn’t do this, and I think with housing associations, you pay more than—housing association probably pay the highest of the social group, then the council in the middle, then the co-op is the lowest.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** But of course, the co-op, won’t have stuff done to it for 10, 15, 20 years.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Whereas the council have a legal obligation through an act of parliament that they have to do certain things by law.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** Because they’re social housing.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Interviewee:** There’s also a lot of other things and we’re exempt from all of that

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** Because we are self-managed.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** And as long as we keep safety and to be aware of that. So, I think, housing co-operative is the smallest sector of social housing. The council is the biggest, then housing association and housing co-operative, is the smallest. Generally, co-operatives are smaller.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** So, they won’t have 20, they won’t have 50 flats or 100 flats, they maybe several rates.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Or like us, we’re one of the large ones, we’ve got 44 units. There’s another one in [the borough], I think they’ve got 28 units. We are all physically quite small and that has it benefits because it means that if you want to get involved, you can get involved and you’ll know everyone around the table, but on the other token you’ll know everyone at the table and they’ll all know you, so I think it’s really, what sort of personality you have, actually I don’t think policy has anything to do with it, because I think, wherever you go, whether you’re left or right it won’t be your politics to take what social housing you end up in or that you choose. It’s the kind of person you are.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Do I want to be a part of my community or do I want to sit back and not have anything to do with any of the decision-making process, just pay my rent and I’m done?
Appendix 23: Cooperative Interviewee “Samuel” Transcript

**Interviewer:** Whoops. Okay. There we go. I have started recording, great. All right. So why did you decide to join the coop? And how did you join?

**Interviewee:** Why did I decide....I decided because the rent here, basically, it was just so incredibly cheap. Looking anywhere else in this area, you're looking at 400 pounds per room, this is 260.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Interviewee:** That was, that was actually my main drive. Money.

**Interviewer:** And did you, are you involved with the committee at all? What at the coop--

**Interviewee:** I am, I am indeed. So because it's, so rent cheap, because we run it our ourselves basically. So I moved there. And that is what it is, it's our duty to run it ourselves, really, to take part there, the perk is cheap rent but you've got to help out otherwise it wouldn't be there all the time. So I'm maintenance coordinator.

**Interviewer:** Cool and you got involved because you want to sort of maintain that rent standard right?

**Interviewee:** Yes, basically

**Interviewer:** Cool.

**Interviewee:** But also feeling a need to actually help out.

**Interviewer:** Right, and are you involved with any other types of management or, or sort of leadership positions elsewhere?

**Interviewee:** So what we have, we have a meeting every month where are we need at least 10 people there and decide what direction the coop is going to go. So everyone will have like a different agenda. Everyone will put forward different ideas you know for what we will discuss and vote on. And yeah, that's open to anyone so you don't need the committee members to do that. The committee members here is really just sort of like a lip service type of thing, it's not really necessary.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Interviewee:** But is is really necessary from the legal standpoint, but that's not how we really run it.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so it's sort of it sounds like it's consensus-based sort of like everyone--

**Interviewee:** Yes, consensus-based.

**Interviewer:** Okay, cool. Do you want to tell me a little more about how meetings function and how often they occur?

**Interviewee:** Okay so once a month we have a meeting first Wednesday or first Thursday of the month there is at least 10 people there, there are 88 people living there. So it's about 10% I guess. And we got a chair she's the one who directs everything, you know, makes sure that everything is kept to a short time frame, it probably take about two hours each meeting sometimes it gets a
little bit heated, sometimes it's nice and smooth, yes, it's just literally whatever people want to talk about as long as it's on the agenda. We'll vote and decide as a coop what to do about

**Interviewer:** Cool and do you enjoy your involvement with the coop?

**Interviewee:** I do, I do. It's very different from what I'm used to. It's a little bit of a hippie fest, I would say. But I guess talking about why I wanted to move there in the first place. It's something I've looked at before, co-op living but it was always living on someone's farm and working for them, this is a bit different. It's literally. You've got your own life. You're not having to work for them. It's all voluntary and you're able to live your own life at same time. So it was brilliant and, they offer to train you and stuff like that. So many specialist [inaudible].

**Interviewer:** Right. And so how much position, how much time do you dedicate to sort of Co-op life like committees or meetings within a week or a month. Roughly

**Interviewee:** Okay so a meeting that's 2 hours a month you know, you only got like three a year but that's probably all I do to be honest. But for the actual maintenance side of it, well, it's mostly just answering emails to be honest and I would say maybe just 2 hours a week. When I was working a different job I was spending a lot more time I was going around trying to fix stuff myself, so with then I could say I probably spent about 8 to 10 hours a week. Whereas now it's just probably an hour and a half sort of thing.

**Interviewer:** Okay, cool. And when you sort of have a meeting where you sort of decide what gets done together as a community, how are responsibilities distributed among the committee or among all the people there? And--

**Interviewee:** I'm sorry could you repeat that?

**Interviewer:** So once you've sort of made a decision at a committee meeting like, all right, we're going to do this...

**Interviewee:** Okay

**Interviewer:** How are sort of responsibilities distributed among the people at the meeting?

**Interviewee:** Okay it's literally down to volunteers, so we might have ideas for people, who is best for it. But if they're not there at the meeting then you can really just put it on them so it's literally whoever's there at the meeting who goes, yeah, but its normal the person who put the idea of on the agenda I'll be there to say yeah, I'm willing to take this forward and see what I can do.

**Interviewer:** Okay cool. And could you talk a bit about your specific role? You mentioned, it wasn't maintenance, sort of?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, maintenance that is literally [void] checks when someone moves out checking the room making sure the tops, lights and doors are all working and stuff like that. Then there's also when people want repairs, I have to go around with assess it to see if it's needed or not most of the time, it isn't, it's just aesthetics. Then there's the actual repairs and signing them off. Anything over 2,000 pounds of got to take to a meeting an extraordinary general meeting. Anything under me can just okay.
And then there's also a lot of hours. So when the office staff aren't there, so we have two or three office staff which we employ all year round. When they're not there on the first port of call for any emergency repairs, boiler breaking down, for a running toilet.

**Interviewer:** Okay, cool, so could you tell me a bit about you mentioned that you volunteered for this role and part of that was part of getting involved was a commitment to maintaining a low rent. Do you have any memory of sort of like when you got involved in sort of what the experience was like of going forward and volunteering?

**Interviewee:** Okay yes, so I moved in, a month later I put myself up to be the maintenance coordinator. Because there was only one person doing it and she was disabled so she wasn't really getting a lot done. I felt like I could help out there. And yeah it was quite easy going to be fair, they help me out, I had another guy who used to do the maintenance coordinator role and he sort of showed me what to do. Gave me hints and tips, and the office staff was brilliant as well, so I say without the office staff it would be floundering a little bit because people can't be bothered to pull their own weight is what I think. But yeah.

**Interviewer:** Cool. Okay. So going back, okay, we talked about collaborative approaches. Do you feel like there are people who are particularly influential at coop meetings or sort of like, yeah, people who are more influential or have a lot to say?

**Interviewee:** I feel like that is a perceived thing for sure, I feel like people think like all there is a clique over, there is a clique or whatever but that's not really true, it's just people. I think when you first move in you are a bit reticent to join in you just don't know anyone or anything. But if [you] just put yourself in there and get involved you start to, you learn more about people, people know about you it's not a clique it's just some people who care about it and are there all the time.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee:** Well, yeah that's actually it. I wouldn't say people are more influential than others some people are louder than others but that doesn't make a difference, you know, it's all down to if things get voted through.

Interviewer: Cool and so, so how many tenants are in the coop? I don't know if we talked about that.

**Interviewee:** Eighty-eight, about.

**Interviewer:** Eighty.

**Interviewee:** It's about eighty-eight.

**Interviewer:** Okay, and how many show up for meetings usually?

**Interviewee:** How, how many [....] it would be in the minimum amount anywhere between 10 which is minimum 15, I don't think we've had a meeting with more than 15 people.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Okay cool. And it's usually isn't usually like the same 15 people or is it different?

**Interviewee:** You have the same half, half of the people would be the same people every time and then the other half it would just be whoever feels you know to turn up on that day. So you get a bit of rotation there.
Interviewer: Okay, cool. So, so with regards to like the discussion agenda for meetings, so it's sort of it sort of like everyone arrives at the meeting and then people who have things they want to say to bring up during the meeting or do they bring it up? Do they email it beforehand?

Interviewee: You have to bring it up to the secretary before the meeting, so that they can put it on the minutes and then this get distributed to all the houses. So we can all read what minutes are so we are all be prepared. You know, be going to the meeting knowing what we talked about.

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewee: Yeah it's not fair to just drop it.

Interviewer: Okay

Interviewee: In the middle of a meeting like that. Yeah okay.

Interviewer: Cool. And so what happens when there are disagreements among people in the coop and does that happen?

Interviewee: Yeah it does happen, it does happen, we've got a mediation team which [nobody] really wants to do but it's something that has to be done I guess. Where someone from not from outside the coop but someone who, living in [a different] house for example, so if there's an argument between two housemates then someone from another house will come and try mediate. And try and you know conflict resolution and all that.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. And so you said that people don't really want to be involved in that is that because of... Oh yes.

Interviewee: I feel like if you just move there it's [the] perfect time to join because you don't know anyone--

Interviewer: Yeah

Interviewee: But when you do know people there because it's a community type thing then you're going to want to go inside you know and you feel like it's just not a very nice position to be in.

Interviewer: Is that an issue with other roles in the coop as well? That if you sort of make a decision as a committee, or as a group that kind of goes against a person is that kind of an issue of tension as well or?

Interviewee: It can be, it just depends on how thick a skin you got. You know, really, I feel that that's the reason why some people don't want to take any sort of positions of power as you have it because you don't want to have to deal with upsetting people but sometimes if you've got to. You know you got to think of the rest of the coop. Not just that one person's feeling.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But it does happen if it doesn't happen you just got to move on with most people understand after short amount of time anyways. So it doesn't matter--

Interviewer: Yeah. Cool, as part of your role. Have you had an experience where you felt that somebody wasn't listening to you or didn't care about your opinion whether that's.

Interviewee: No

Interviewer: Okay.
Interviewee: Quite honestly no that has never happened...
Interviewer: Okay, so that's the first half and the second half questions. I'm the second half are about the local authority. And but before we begin could I just get a sense of whether is you’re... So is your Co-op completely financed by its members or is it also local authority finance?
Interviewee: So it’s a tricky one that because when it was first set of it was from a local Authority group or maybe it was a central government rather I'm not even sure of that. But it was the try to build community-based living you know it's just aware the project in the 80s or late 70s I'm not sure.
Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.
Interviewee: But we just have to service a loan, so that's their whole involvement now it's just literally us paying them to service the loan but no involvement other than that.
Interviewer: Okay, and okay. So now they don't really have much of a say of, of what goes on at the coop or anything.
Interviewee: Evidently they did more of the original planning of buildings and stuff, but now no, if anything we are going to them trying to get more coops built.
Interviewer: Oh, okay interesting. So how would you describe the relationship with the coop and the local Authority?
Interviewee: Just an easy one is literally there's no work required on either side occasionally they will ask about building a cycle path, you know behind us or something. It's quite its quite friendly, you know,
Interviewer: But I think that doesn't bring any problems.
Interviewee: But I think that doesn't bring any problems.
Interviewer: Cool. Okay, and in general they would consult you about things that are happening like yes, you mentioned a cycle route or whatever.
Interviewee: Sorry can you repeat that?
Interviewer: And generally the local authority would consult you about stuff like bike paths for other...
Interviewee: Yes definitely, definitely, they have to.
Interviewer: Right, and then do they consult so would they consult like the committee and then the committee would bring it up in a meeting or so.
Interviewee: I'm pretty sure they just contact the office staff and then the office staff would bring it to our attention like tell the secretary and then put it onto a general meeting.
Interviewer: Okay, cool. So. All right. So if you're another tenant expresses an issue to the local Authority what type of response do you expect?
Interviewee: Sorry you're going to have to repeat that one.
Interviewer: So if you or another tenant expresses an issue like in the community or in the neighborhood to the local Authority what type of response would you expect?
Interviewee: If we have an issue with what?
Interviewer: Whether it would be a bicycle path or a new building or something else?
Interviewee: Oh! Okay. Yes but I suppose if one single tenant have an issue you could take it to the council yourself there and act independently. But you're better off taking it to a meeting and saying hey, how does the rest of the coop feel about this? And then we could cover as one voice and probably make more of a difference.

Interviewer: So overall do you feel that another benefit of living in a coop is that as tenants you can sort of you have like a voice together rather than a lone voice?

Interviewee: Yeah there is there is that, but what I obviously think is the best thing about it is, is the rent. But I honestly think that it’s first and foremost the best thing about it. It's unbelievable actually God-sent, that and the training that they offer. If you're willing to actually put your neck out and do something then you get something back out of it but you only get what you put in.

Interviewer: Okay great, and could you tell me a bit about what you know of how the a little more. So we talked a bit about how the coop was financed. So through the community-based living grant sort of like initial loan and stuff. But if you have any more sort of just general information about the basically how the coop funds itself or funds, fund some....

Interviewee: Well I know that the font itself now, so there was just that initially alone which were servicing but that's, that doesn't matter anymore. How we are funded now is just through tenant rents.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Interviewee: That pays for absolutely everything. We also have money which we invest as well on different you know difficult project. And we bank with an ethical bank and stuff like that so I think that’s. Yeah that's how we found ourselves.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. So do you have any comments on other sorts of relationships that the co-op has with the community like whether that's about that's?

Interviewee: Okay, yes so [the weekly] fair, that's something that happens in [the city] all along, all along [M Street] actually the celebration type thing you know, we have market, stalls and stuff like that. Everywhere. We've got a big car park at the back of the houses and so we set that up got a lots of stools and have music, stage and stuff like that. And it just sort of create awareness about us. We also have a magazine which goes out we have people actually come up with stuff to put in them.

Interviewer: That's cool.

Interviewee: In the last past year we've had like two issues or so but it was meant to be a monthly thing but people come in and then move out and so the ideas go... ideas as they go.

Interviewer: I think this is the first coop that I've heard of with a magazine. So I have to ask about that. In the future.

Interviewee: Oh really!

Interviewer: Yeah I've never heard about that that's really cool.

Interviewee: Well I’m literally thinking right now about getting a story in the [city] evening news because. Well I've worked for [the] City Council now and that's all thanks to working first and volunteering here at the co-op.
Interviewer: Right.
Interviewee: They put me through a course, I've just finished that got a decent job. I feel like celebrating it all. You know, saying hey, thanks for the coop, it's not just for [...] hippies.
Interviewer: That's great yeah, that sounds like a really great place to live especially the rent bit.
Interviewee: Yes, yes.
Interviewer: So let's see. Where was, Is there any I guess this is probably more of an issue in London than sort of other places, but do you have any other issues with them any other local developers or sort business going on in the community?
Interviewee: Yeah so there is [M Street] [00:18:37 inaudible] which is where a council building is being knocked down and it's going to be redeveloped as “affordable housing” which you know, you can't see me fingers out. But...
Interviewer: I understand I know what you're doing the quotation marks.
[00:18:49 inaudible]
Interviewee: Yeah, yeah it's not really affordable but yeah but as, we talked about lobbying to try and get another co-op built but we nearly turned our heads, because we can't have rights to buy this year at all so there was no danger of them you know losing half their money from us buying out the properties. But I think in the end a YMCA which I, is something I don't know a lot about. Because that it just depends, it just depends if people can rally up enough support then something will happen, but most of the time people are just quite happy just to let things happen.
Interviewer: Okay. Cool, so I guess yeah generally talked about this but do you have anything else to add on how tenant Representatives in the coop act as community representatives? You mentioned there was sort of yeah, I think we already covered that with the sort of events.
Interviewee: Actually yes the fair yeah, also there is Strawberry Fair that's the biggest free Festival in England anyway as far as I know. The coop is not solely behind it at all, but there are a lot of the members that are big part of it.
Interviewer: That's really cool. So how, so you mentioned give any details on how you communicate or receive feedback from other tenants besides meetings? Do...
Interviewee: Feedbacks about meetings, I guess we've got ask Co-op discuss, which is like a big thing over emails. You know it's like a really good group. People found themselves a WhatsApp group as well there's a Facebook group.
Interviewer: Okay
Interviewee: So yes social media I suppose more than anything but if anyone's actually got a complaint or actually got a grievance than there go to another meeting.
Interviewer: Okay, cool. So you meant so we talked about the number of tenants that come to meetings do there might be any factors that limit tenants from being involved in the coop and sort of them.
Interviewee: Shyness.
Interviewer: Shyness
Interviewee: Shyness, nervousness, not knowing anyone, lack of self-confidence that is those are the main things I'll put it down to, also the perceivance. Perceiving that there might be a clique you know you see different people meets all the time or your voice is not going to be heard then that's just all in people's head so you know it's not a lot like that at all. Yeah, what else, what else what are the reasons when people want to go to meeting laziness. That's my big my big reason why they go to meeting they can't be bothered they just finished work. Half, half of the people there they're not working all day so Yeah.

Interviewer: Right. Do you feel that people who don't come to the meetings feel they have a voice when it comes to issues in the building on their flat?

Interviewee: I think people definitely do feel like they have a voice I mean you anyone can come up with an agenda and minute but yeah and then in the actual meeting you might be scared to vote the way that you feel but that kind of just come down to who you are as a person really.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. Do you think it'll be better to have more tenants come to meetings then the amount that currently do come?

Interviewee: I think it would be good to have a lot more member participation for sure. I don't know how the meetings would go if it was full. If everyone was there I don't think the meeting get finished. We would be there for like 12 hours probably.

Interviewer: Yeah

Interviewee: But no, I think maybe participation is probably my biggest issue with the entire place, you know, when you've got 10% of people doing the work for the other 90% just doesn't strike me as fair and I feel like that's down to the makeup of the members like age group and stuff like that I find that the older people are willing to put their own time into it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yes, people in their early 20s, they come in and they just want the cheap rent and that's all they're there for.

Interviewer: Right. So yeah, so I guess the next question was do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: I'm so sorry say that say that again?

Interviewer: I guess, we sort of answered this question, but do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: Sorry I still didn't quite catch that. Old something?

Interviewer: Oh, do you think more tenant participation is always good?

Interviewee: Oh! No.

Interviewer: No, okay. That's, yeah

Interviewee: I feel like in everything about these meetings is if you put something forth on the agenda, if you turn up there you're probably going to get yes because no one really cares everyone's just like yeah yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's very rarely you’ll get something voted against unless it's quiet a contentious issue. So most of the time you sent something for it it's going to get voted for.
Interviewer: Right. Do you have any comments on the future of tenant participation and on the future of coops?

Interviewee: Yeah I'm scared it's going to end up like a lot of the co-ops in London where it's no longer run by community and its run by an outside management team you know where they deal with maintenance issues and all that stuff and then the rent is going to go up because you've got to pay for it.

I feel like that's my main concern and... And that's why when I interview people to move into my house my main question is. How are you going to get involved? Do you want to get involved and don't let me down very much. So

Interviewer: Oh no. All right that's my last artificial question. If you have any... Do you any comments or questions or any sort of

Interviewee: I've got questions yes yeah

Interviewer: Yeah

Interviewee: I was just wondering who how many people have you manage to talk to. And how many coops are there?

Interviewer: So, so far. So I started like two weeks ago. So so far. I've talked to one two, three, you're the fifth person. I've talked to and I have another six or seven lineup eyesight to have like 20 interviews in total and I expect at least four or five of those to be coops.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Probably more than that let me count. One two three there's going to be. Yes at least at least four or five co-ops but I expect.

Interviewee: What are the main concerns you've heard from are there coops community members?

Interviewer: So I've heard so a lot of people, So for example in London, one of the issues of our tenant participation is language that you know, if you're if you're in London, for example that it's like, you know, incredibly diverse but you know, you might have, you know, people who speak 10 different languages and just one flat over one story building and then you know, if you don't speak English very well. It's also a deterrent to being involved, but that's always an interesting thing that came up.

Interviewee: Okay yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I'm glad I don't have to deal with all that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Participation is generally an issue and as you mentioned the age thing comes up as well. You're definitely not the first person to mention that it's harder to get younger people involved. Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, which is the same. Has anyone else mentioned rents.

Interviewer: Yeah, Absolutely. Yeah. I think the first person I interviewed was a guy in a coop and yeah and he talked about basically how a co-op allows them to sort of live like a much more comfortable life than he would. Otherwise he could otherwise be really struggling to get by and
yeah and just sort of, I don't know. I was really sold on coops, makes me want to live in one to be honest.

**Interviewee:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** But yeah.

**Interviewee:** One more question when you're finished writing your paper or whatever, could you send me a link so I could read it?

**Interviewer:** Absolutely yeah. I'm definitely, I'm planning on emailing every person individually participated and sending them a copy of it. And also if you at any time want me to send you a transcript either of this like conversation or eventually, you know, it'll take me a long time to type or sort of like--

**Interviewee:** Oh, don't worry I'm not expecting that.

**Interviewer:** But if at any point you know, if you want those just send me an email and I'm happy to pass on that information. Yeah, or if you have any other questions, feel free to email me. Oh, I have a couple, oh I almost forgot I have a couple, like, general demographic questions that I ask everyone.