

PRESTON COMMUNITY GATEWAY

Empowering communities in Preston

An account of the development of the proposed Preston Community Gateway Association's Community Empowerment Strategy



[Partners in **Change**]

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This report outlines the work carried out by the Preston Community Advisor Team, working with tenants and residents in Preston, from July 2003 to July 2004, on developing a Community Empowerment Strategy for the proposed Preston Community Gateway Association (CGA). Preston City Council, using ODPM Innovation Into Action funding, commissioned Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services to carry out this work on their behalf.

This report provides practical information to any other organisation that is seeking to develop a CGA. The processes gone through in Preston are unique to Preston, but the report raises a number of key questions that any organisation setting up a CGA would need to consider.



Where this symbol is shown, further information and documents can be downloaded from the www.preston.gov.uk and www.cch.coop websites. Where tenants are not able to download this information, copies are available from BCHS.

This report has been written by **Nic Bliss** from BCHS. Nic led the Preston Community Advisor Team, and was one of the two Confederation of Co-operative Housing representatives who developed the Community Gateway Model.

Preston City Council are one of the first Local Authorities in the Country to pioneer the Community Gateway approach. The Council's Gateway Team is led by its former Director of Housing Services Peter Deacon.

Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services are a leading community development and regeneration agency in the Midlands and beyond.

Partners in Change, set up in 1988, is a housing and community consultancy based in Wolverhampton with a network of offices and associates around the country.

Preston Community Network is Preston's Community Empowerment Network set up through funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit to provide a community link to the Preston Strategic Partnership.

Ashiana Housing Association are a leading Black & Minority Ethnic housing association, providing a wide range of homes in North-West England.

The Community Gateway

A report published by the National Housing Federation in 2003¹ showed the development of a 'friendly community' to be the most important priority to ordinary men and women in the UK in determining what neighbourhood they live in. This priority sat ahead of the provision of services and facilities and ahead of fear of crime and living in a quiet area. The report suggested that people are even prepared to 'tolerate poorly provided amenities' if the 'friendly community' priority is met.

The logical conclusion to the report is that if we want to meet the needs and aspirations of ordinary people in the UK, the facilitation of community needs to underpin all housing and regeneration programmes, which is generally not the case now.

The Community Gateway proposals were developed by the Confederation of Co-operative Housing (CCH) in 2002 to create an approach to large scale housing which has the facilitation of community at its heart. The CCH had seen how, in the community controlled housing organisations it represents:

- all available research had pointed to the value for money housing management of community controlled housing organisations²
- the intangible mutual support frameworks that had been set up contributed more significantly to tackling social exclusion, and were of more importance to both active and non-active residents, than traditional more tangible approaches to regeneration³

The Gateway proposals were set out in the *Empowering Communities report*, produced by the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Confederation of Co-operative Housing, and Co-operatives UK⁴. They recognise that the asset that has received the most substantial public investment in many communities is the housing asset and that this asset needs to be at the heart of the process of facilitating community.

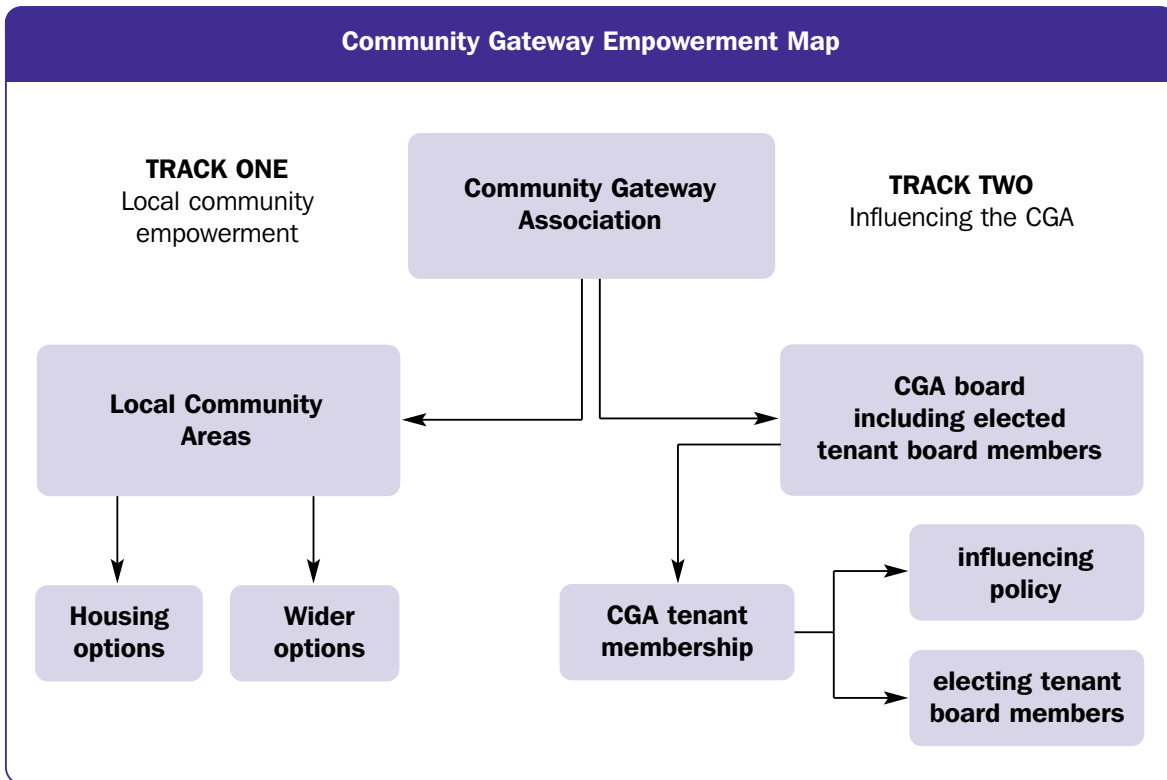
1. "Regional Futures & Neighbourhood Realities" – Professor Richard Scase and Dr Johnathan Scales – National Housing Federation 2003. This conclusion was based on the Economic and Social Research Council's British Household Panel Survey 2002, which has tracked the lives of 10,000+ families since 1991.
2. Most notably, "Tenants in Control: an evaluation of tenant-led housing management solutions" – Price Waterhouse – DOE 1995.
3. "Tenant Control & Social Exclusion" – Clapham, O'Neill & Bliss – Confederation of Co-operative Housing – 2000.
4. "Empowering Communities" – Hacas Chapman Hendy - Chartered Institute of Housing/Confederation of Co-operative Housing/ Chartered Institute of Housing/Co-ops UK – 2003.

The following key issues underpin the Community Gateway's approach to the challenge of facilitating community:

- the need to generate opportunities for communities at the small scale, at the level at which people and communities are more likely to identify
- the need to pro-actively offer opportunities to communities
- at the time that is right for them
- at the pace that communities want to move at
- and on the issues that communities identify as important to them

So the Community Gateway takes a twin track approach to empowerment:

- **track one** - having a commitment built into the rules of the CGA to pro-actively and systematically offer a menu of empowerment opportunities to tenants and communities in Local Community Areas that relate to community identity. These empowerment options would include:
 - **housing options** extending from general dialogue between tenants and officers on the provision of the housing service and consideration of local area budgets, through to the devolution of management, and possibly ownership, to tenants
 - **wider options** relating to all issues within the local neighbourhood
- **track two** - offering tenants the greatest possible opportunity to influence the management of the Community Gateway Association itself, through:
 - having elected tenants on the CGA board (*the Empowering Communities report* recommends 7 elected tenants, alongside 3 councillors and 5 independents)
 - a tenant membership, which elects the 7 tenants on the board, and which gets opportunities to be involved in policy development



Community Gateway in Preston

In Preston, the Community Gateway approach became the only favoured option to emerge out of the stock options appraisal consideration. Whilst it appeared at an early stage that stock transfer was the only realistic option that would enable Preston to meet the decent homes standard, tenant representatives and a majority of Preston councillors were unhappy with the 'traditional' approach to stock transfer.

The emerging Community Gateway proposals presented a framework that could generate and develop the democratic accountability and greater say for tenants in strategic and local decision-making that tenants and councillors were keen to see being developed.

To further explore the potential of the Gateway proposals, Preston's then Director of Housing participated in the steering group that produced the *Empowering Communities report*, and Preston City Council took an in-principle decision to explore the implementation of a Community Gateway stock transfer.

Because of the innovative nature of the Gateway proposals, Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services (BCHS) were employed (working in partnership with Partners In Change (PiC) and funded through an ODPM *Innovation into Action grant*) to work with tenants and Preston City Council to develop the Gateway proposals. BCHS and PiC, alongside two further members of the team, Ashiana Housing Association, and Preston Community Network, became collectively known as the Preston Community Advisor Team (PCAT).

"We were fed up with bad decisions over which we had no control making our lives a misery. As tenants, we knew we could come up with better ideas about how to improve our homes and neighbourhoods."

Karen Sarratt

Preston Tenant Steering Group member



The key features of this programme were to:

- carry out an initial scoping exercise exploring the existing framework of tenant and community activity in Preston (particularly considering hard to reach groups), and to identify Local Community Areas for the proposed CGA
- implement community option studies in all areas of Preston
- develop a community empowerment strategy in partnership with tenants
- generally promote and disseminate the CGA proposals to tenants and to wider stakeholders
- investigate the possibilities of establishing a tenant empowerment worker training programme

The progress of this work programme is explored in detail in Section Three of this report. As the *Innovation into Action* programme came to a conclusion, the Preston Tenant Steering Group requested PCAT's further employment as part of the Independent Tenant Advisor role up until the stock transfer ballot. These two programmes have overlapped in the first quarter of 2004. Details of the work being carried out under the second programme are also included in this report in order to provide an up to date picture and to provide various resources to others considering a Gateway approach.

Far from simply producing a written Community Empowerment Strategy, the work programme has involved a wide ranging process that aimed to define the potential involvement and engagement of tenants and communities in Preston on the Gateway proposals. The *Empowering Communities* report outlined a theoretical approach to developing community empowerment in a large scale housing organisation. The work programme in Preston has, and will continue to, translate these theoretical aspirations into practice, and the implementation of the Gateway proposals has required challenge and consideration of every part of the process of implementing stock transfer.

Five key points have emerged from the work carried out in Preston:

1. the Community Gateway is different
2. Gateway needs a change of culture – ‘traditional approaches need to be evaluated’
3. building a tenant democracy takes time
4. there is a need for a tenant ‘lead consultant’
5. links are needed with wider regeneration activity

1. The Community Gateway Model is different

As work has progressed in Preston, it has become apparent that the Community Gateway approach is different. Its radical difference is that it takes the ODPM’s transfer guidelines at their word.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT A COMMUNITY GATEWAY ASSOCIATION?

- it will frame the business from the point of view of **facilitating community**
- it will build a **tenant and community democracy**, do what is necessary to make that democracy mean something, and do this within an effective, mainstream, large scale **business framework**
- it will **pro-actively** offer options to communities in the local neighbourhoods
- it will have a tenant **membership** influencing policy, and **electing** tenant board members

This approach would appear to be quite different from other approaches to large scale housing provision in England. It aims to harness the significant untapped potential that exists in communities, to develop a sense of community ownership and responsibility that will radically transform the way that housing and neighbourhoods are run, and to turn this activity into a positive driving force in the Community Gateway’s business plan.

2. Gateway needs a change of culture – ‘traditional’ approaches need to be re-evaluated

Starting from the question of how to facilitate community and empower tenants requires a considerable change of culture in the way that housing services are provided. It means that many parts of the process of setting the organisation up have to be adapted from standard approaches, from how the CGA’s board is set up, through to how policies are developed, through to how the programme to set it up is put together.

This unpacking and reassemblage of the standard housing association package has had to start right at the beginning of the stock transfer process. The table on page 8 shows the work that has been innovative so far in the Gateway’s development.

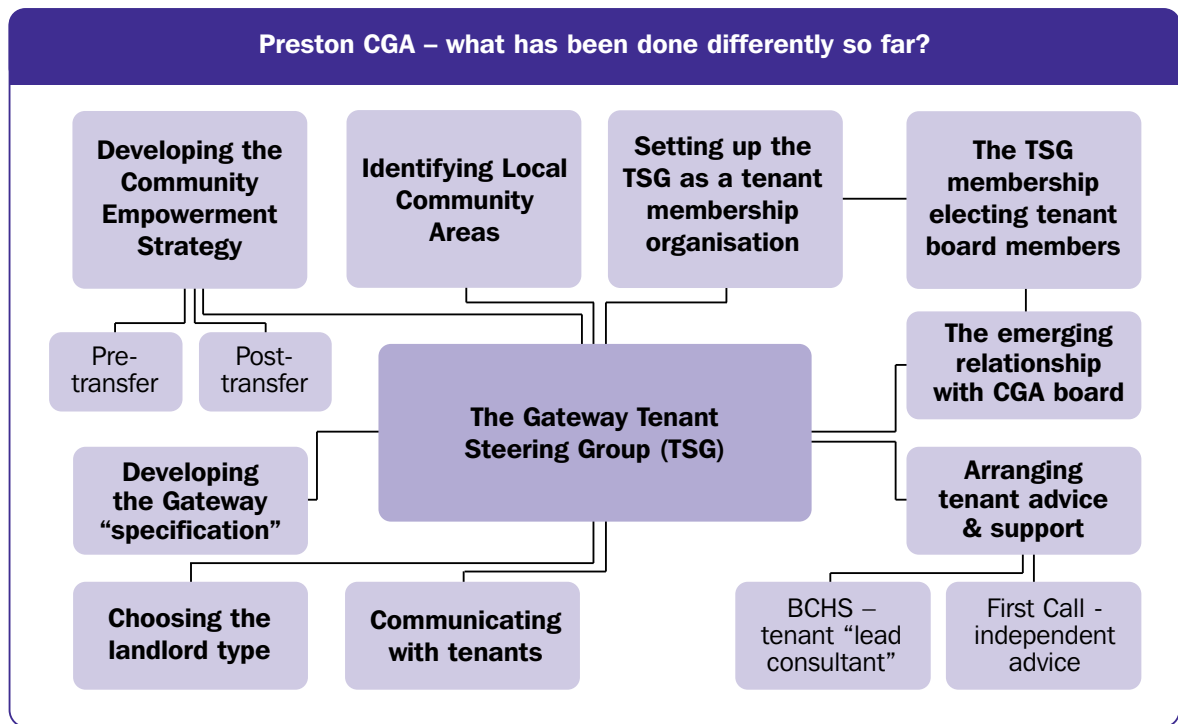
It is anticipated that all other features of implementing stock transfer in Preston will also require a unique approach to fit in with the requirements of the Community Gateway proposals. In particular, it is anticipated that the board development process will be markedly different from other stock transfer processes in order to establish the right links between the board, the Tenant Steering Group membership and Committee and tenants in general.

3. Building a “Tenant Democracy” takes time

The course of this programme has seen Preston tenants move from a position where there was limited input from tenants to Preston’s strategic housing approach in 2003 to a situation where tenants are constructively, positively and pro-actively discussing the complexities of stock condition surveys and the CGA business plan in 2004.

Key to this change has been the Tenant Steering Group framework where Preston tenants have been enabled to independently determine their vision and lead on key issues in the Gateway process which has gradually led to a strengthening of their confidence, ability and trust that their views will be integral to the CGA’s development.

However, at this stage, the Tenant Steering Group cannot be said to be a tenant democracy. Building a genuine tenant democracy, a purpose of the Community Gateway approach, will take some years to develop.



However what does exist in the Preston Gateway Tenant Steering Group is the best possible tenant representative body that could be built at this time in Preston, in that:

- a. all Preston tenants have had the opportunity to become involved as members of the Tenant Steering Group or of its Committee
- b. the Tenant Steering Group includes representation from most areas of Preston, different age groups, different circumstances and different backgrounds
- c. the Tenant Steering Group is particularly mindful of making decisions that the wider tenant population will support, and understands the need for it to continue to build its representativeness

4. A tenant “lead consultant”

The journey that tenants are taking in Preston is credit to their commitment and ability. However, that the Tenant Steering Group has had the services of BCHS and PCAT, has been an important component in helping them to develop their vision and ability to challenge the traditional approach to establishing a housing association.

On behalf of the Tenant Steering Group, BCHS has become involved with every part of the stock transfer process, including the independent tenant advisor role, but also the communications role and the lead consultancy role.

If stock options appraisals are intended to lead to organisations that will develop sustainable communities, a key conclusion that needs to be drawn is that Government needs to do more to ensure that tenants have access to tenant orientated skilled advice. Regardless of whether a Community Gateway Association is being set up, local authorities, in moving forward the stock options appraisal process, need to have on board people with:

- skills to work independently with tenants
- the vision and commitment to develop tenant-led approaches
- and the confidence and ability to challenge the accepted way of doing things to ensure that tenants get what they want out of the process.

This level of tenant-orientated lead consultant could be through specialist agencies or through lead consultants employing staff with appropriate tenant orientated skills, but regardless of how its done, tenants need access to people or organisations who are paid commensurate to the high levels of skills needed.

This role needs to be in addition to the traditional scrutiny role of Independent Tenant Advisors. Indeed in Preston, First Call Housing Consultants were recruited by Preston City Council through the Tenant Steering Group, to act as the Independent Tenant Advisor. The tenant lead consultant role advocated here needs to not be independent in the way that an ITA is meant to be.

It needs to be a role where the person or organisation is able to be a champion for the option chosen by tenants and in place until the relevant organisation is set up, in the same way that the lead consultant is there.

5. Establishing links with wider regeneration activity

Some limited work has been done during this programme to link with wider regeneration activity taking place in Preston. Given that the CGA's approach relies on a neighbourhood based community empowerment approach, the CGA will need to focus carefully on how to bring together the various community initiatives taking place in Preston. There has been some joint working between Preston City Council's Housing Department and various regeneration initiatives including:

- street and neighbourhood wardens programmes and a CCTV scheme worked on in partnership between the Housing Department and community safety staff
- joint working on SRB and NRF funded programmes
- council housing improvement programmes and renewal area work
- the One Voice Neighbourhood Renewal programme.

However, relationships between some programmes have at times been inconsistent, and there is a need for a more seamless framework for community regeneration.

These difficulties are not unique to Preston. Major housing assets, built through successive generations of public sector funding, need to be used to ensure that neighbourhoods work as a cohesive whole, and competition between different housing providers and neighbourhood programmes can be a barrier to this.

The cross-sectoral and community led approach of the Community Gateway, where communities are encouraged to determine the futures of their neighbourhoods, will lend itself to creating the right relationships between housing and other service providers.



This section outlines the course of the work programme carried out under Innovation Into Action funding.

1. Initial publicity

At the outset of the programme, there was an extensive need to disseminate general information about the Gateway proposals to tenants. Therefore an initial brochure was distributed to all tenants outlining:

- the Community Gateway proposals
- the work that PCAT were doing with tenants and communities in Preston
- questions and answers on general stock transfer issues
- information on how tenants could get involved with developing the proposals

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Good practice note

Ensure that all tenants receive information on how they can get involved with the Gateway.

2. Tenant surveys

A survey form was also distributed to tenants with the brochure seeking information on tenants' initial views and concerns.

The results from the survey were generally supportive of the Gateway proposals. On a **9.71%** response rate (**665** completed survey forms)

- **54.0% (359)** said that they thought that the Community Gateway proposals sounded like a good idea
- **31.3% (208)** said that they wanted further information before they expressed an opinion
- and only **14.4% (96)** said that they thought the proposals were a bad idea.

In order of numbers of comments received, the reasons respondents gave for their support for the Gateway proposals were:

- to get improvements done to their homes
- having a stronger say in the management of homes
- development of community spirit
- a general feeling that anything would be better than the status quo

The following table shows the importance that respondents placed on the following items in the consideration of the future of Preston's homes.

	Very important	Important	Not important
More money to improve and modernise all Council homes	552	90	13
Tenants having a greater say in the way homes are managed	336	239	39
Better management and maintenance services	498	126	9

- better communication
- improvements to the repairs service
- tackling neighbour nuisance, improved security and things for young people to do

Again in order of numbers of comments received, concerns that people raised included the following:

- concerns about housing associations
- concerns about rent levels
- a desire to see no change
- concerns about repairs and improvements being done properly
- political support for the principles of council housing
- concerns about the accountability of the new organisation

Nearly 200 people indicated in the survey that they would like to be involved in some way with the development of the Community Gateway.

Good practice note

Carry out an initial Gateway tenant survey to assess what issues tenants consider important.



The results of this survey were confirmed by a subsequent survey carried out by PCC's Housing Department which had a 11.7% response rate (763 completed survey forms). Again tenants in this survey demonstrated that the most important issues for them were improvements to the overall quality of their homes, and to the repairs and maintenance service, but issues relating to tenant engagement were also important – 61.5% indicated that some improvement was needed to “involving tenants in the management of their housing”; 65.4% to “keeping tenants informed”; and 70.0% to “taking tenants views into account”.

3. Preston Community Network & the Preston Community Volunteers

An early decision in the programme was to bring the Preston Community Network in as part of the team. Particular members of staff from Preston Community Network had a range of community contacts which proved invaluable to the dissemination of the Gateway proposals at an early stage.

In particular, Preston Community Network recruited a team of community volunteers from tenant and community groups, who carried out a programme of door knocking to increase tenant knowledge of the Gateway proposals and the response rate from the survey (their respective community groups being paid for the volunteers' participation). Some of the Community Volunteers subsequently became involved in the Tenant Steering Group.

Preston Community Network also arranged a series of 5 public meetings in areas across Preston. Some of these public meetings were poorly attended, but 3 of them attracted significant numbers and lively, but generally positive, debates.

Good practice note

Explore links with any existing borough-wide community representatives groups, such as Community Empowerment Networks.

Good practice note

Consider how tenant volunteers can participate in communications processes. Nothing gets the message across better than tenants talking to tenants.

4. Reaching hard to reach groups

Ashiana Housing Association had been recruited to the PCAT team in order to ensure successful dissemination of the Gateway proposals to black and minority ethnic communities in Preston. Ashiana arranged a Gateway multi-language surgery, and also visited a range of groups representative of different facets of black and minority ethnic communities in Preston, including:

- Preston Muslim Forum
- Sahara Women Project in Preston
- Preston African Caribbean Council
- Racial Equality Council
- Gujrat Hindu Society
- Anguso Saba Centre

Unfortunately, the surgery was not well used, in part because the numbers of black and minority ethnic tenants registering on Preston City Council's waiting list has historically not fully reflected the make-up of the local community⁶.

Visits were also made to most of Preston City Council's 16 sheltered schemes to discuss the Gateway programme.

Good practice note

Be aware of what “hard to reach” tenant groups exist, such as Black & Minority Ethnic communities and sheltered schemes.

Good practice note

Take appropriate steps to reach “hard to reach” groups.

⁶ 16.8% of the city's population is from an ethnic minority background. The CGA will need to carefully consider what steps need to be taken in its diversity strategy to ensure that the tenant population start to reflects the ethnic minority population of Preston.



5. Tenant representation

On BCHS's arrival in Preston, Preston City Council had identified a network of 15 existing tenant and community groups. These groups, funded through Preston City Council's housing department, ranged from well established community groups with a strong representative base, and in some cases, operating local community premises, through to small fledgling groups needing considerable support from Preston City Council's Tenant Participation Unit.

These groups came together as the Tenants Umbrella Group (TUG), a group that served as the representative voice for tenants in Preston (alongside a previous group, the Preston Tenants Liaison Forum, a PCC sub-committee that brought together tenants and councillors).

An Audit Commission inspection report into Preston's housing maintenance service in 2001 had pointed towards arrangements to involve tenants in the service as being weak, although the report indicated that some improvements had been made by 2002. Improvements have included:

- two tenant conferences to discuss repairs issues
- the establishment of a Housing Task Force, consisting of tenant and local authority staff and member representatives, to tackle the issues raised by the Audit Commission inspection
- work to develop a Preston Homes Standard in partnership with tenants
- development of structures to involve tenants locally in partnering Major Works programmes
- informal work with local groups by neighbourhood housing officers.

Nonetheless, BCHS's perception of tenant representation in Preston in July 2003 was that, whilst the PCAT work has shown that there are a growing number of tenants keen to participate, the structures for tenants to impact on decision-making had been limited, both locally and borough-wide.

Whilst on paper large proportions of Preston City Council's homes were represented through the network of tenant and community groups, the real engagement that these groups represented, in some cases, was limited. These difficulties, certainly not the fault of the people involved in the groups, who are generally working hard to represent tenants effectively, were the results of several factors (most of which are not unique to Preston):

- the long term and substantial problems faced in some areas of Preston meant that it had been difficult to build up local commitment amongst tenants to their neighbourhoods
- in some cases community groups were "burning out"
- there had been a general lack of clarity about the extent to which local groups could influence local decision-making. For example, there was some confusion about the status of local lettings and estate agreements that some groups had worked on, and whether these agreements had been agreed with PCC (and indeed whether PCC was implementing these agreements, particularly since changes to the housing service). Uncertainties of this nature had created a general climate where some local groups were not sure if their involvement was having a clear effect on decision-making.

Given that TUG has been based on representation from local community groups, it had also suffered from similar problems. Several tenants expressed concern to us that TUG, serviced and directed by PCC, was not sufficiently independent of PCC to generate a tenant vision. This led to concerns amongst some tenants, for example, that major changes were made to the housing service (as a result of the Audit Commission's inspection process) with limited input from tenant representatives.

At an early stage of the programme, discussions were had with all of the tenant and community groups, and with TUG, to explore how representatives from the groups would want to be involved in the Gateway programme. It was agreed with TUG and the community groups that a new and independent tenant group, which any

tenant in Preston could become involved with, would need to be established to discuss the Gateway programme (as suggested in ODPM guidelines).

Good practice note

Work with existing tenant representatives to decide what structures need to be set up to represent tenants on Gateway issues.

6. The Gateway Tenant Steering Group

A formal decision to set up the Gateway Tenant Steering Group (TSG) was taken at a tenants meeting on 13th September 2003. It was decided that membership of the TSG would be open to all tenants in Preston⁷ and that there would be a committee drawn from the membership⁸.

Good practice note

Set the Gateway tenant representative group up as a tenant membership group.

Initially 12 tenants and one owner occupier were elected by the first tenant meeting to the committee, but this membership was subsequently augmented by a further 13 tenants following a tenants meeting on 16th January 2004. This second meeting also saw the opening of the membership list for the wider group. TSG membership is free and has been publicised widely to Preston tenants and leaseholders. The reasons specified for membership of the TSG were:

- identifying with and supporting the work that the TSG was doing to get the best deal for Preston tenants (at this stage, prior to ballot, specifically not saying that membership means support for the Gateway proposals)
- being able to be involved in policy development for the Gateway
- receiving the monthly *Gateway Membership Matters* news sheet on the work of the Committee (all tenants also receiving a copy of the newsletter, the Gate, that sets out information on the Gateway proposals, as well as Preston Estate News, the bi-monthly Preston City Council Housing Department newsletter, both of which have widely offered membership to all tenants and leaseholders)

- being able to stand for and vote in elections to the 7 shadow tenant board member positions

Dependent on the TSG committee's long term role, TSG membership could also mean that members will be able to stand for and vote for the committee's membership, and it is anticipated that this membership may become the initial membership of the CGA.

What will CGA tenant membership mean?

Work is ongoing on how the CGA's tenant membership will work, but it is considered that the tenant only membership will be important, and that it will need to have more of a role than that played by most housing association memberships. The following points can be made about a Gateway's tenant membership:

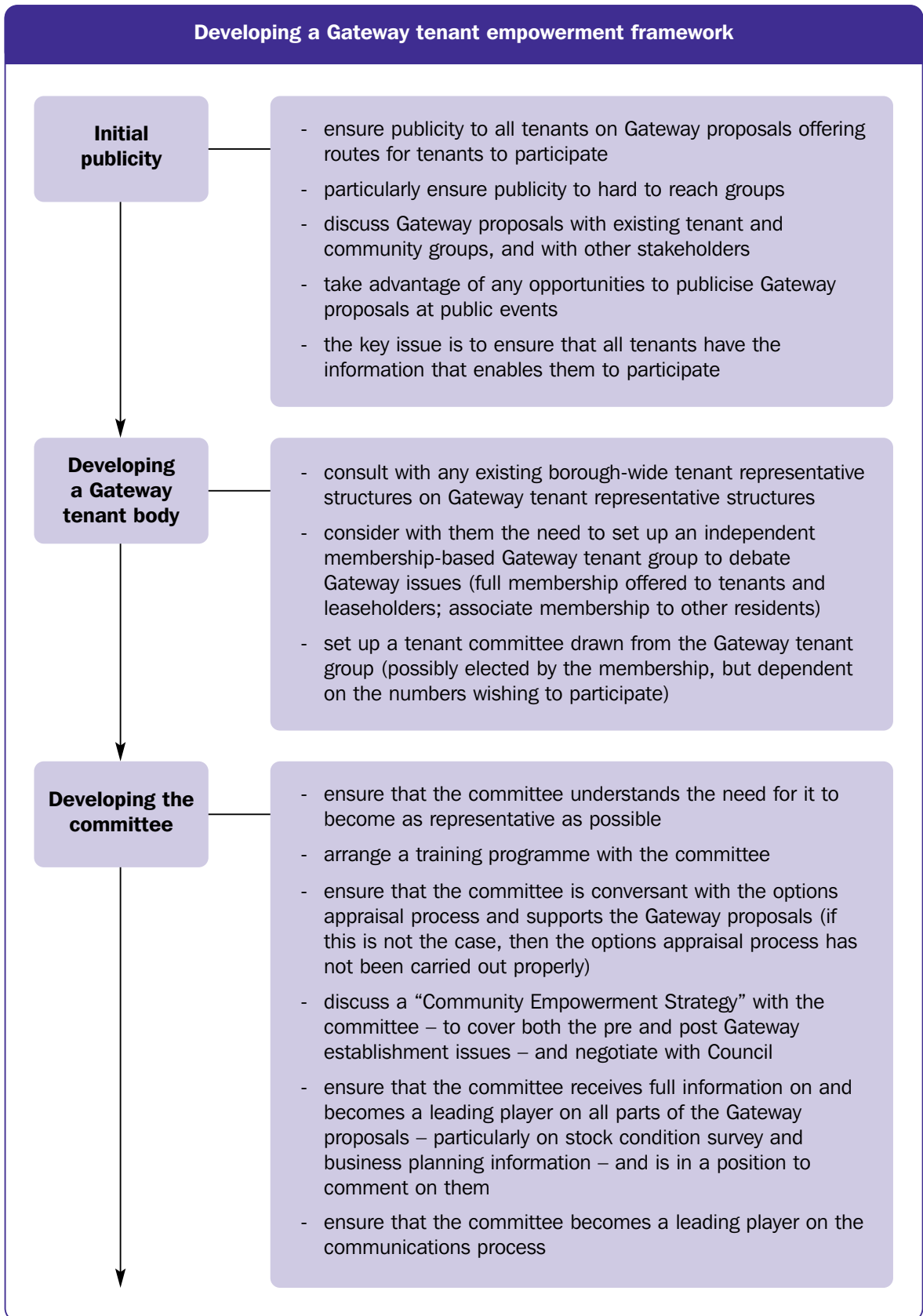
- the tenant membership will elect the 7 CGA tenant board members (possibly through an elected tenant committee)
- the tenant membership will be able to participate in policy development
- the tenant membership will receive standard items at the Annual General Meeting as well as a report on the progress of the Community Empowerment Strategy
- the tenant membership will be able to submit 'motions' to the CGA (probably through an elected tenant committee)
- whilst it will be good governance for the CGA Board to carefully consider the views of its membership, and to seek to take its membership with it over difficult decisions, the CGA Board will not be fettered by the membership. The CGA Board will be an independent body that will be responsible for the CGA's decision-making.

Whilst initial membership numbers may seem low, 221 in July 2004, it is important to note that the intention of the Community Gateway is to build a tenant democracy. It will involve establishing a relationship of mutual trust and respect between landlord and tenant, which will take time. Given the fragile nature of tenant representation in Preston in July 2003, it would have been unrealistic to expect a higher initial membership at this stage.



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7. using the wider definition of "tenants" to include leaseholders.
 8. open to all TSG members in the initial stages to encourage inclusivity, but potentially to be elected by the TSG membership at a later stage.



Developing a Gateway tenant empowerment framework contd.

Developing the membership

- ensure that membership opportunities are regularly publicised to all tenants (making it clear that tenants can participate as much or as little as they want)
- hold public discussion-based Gateway tenant meetings where it is clear that tenants are having an influence over how the Gateway proposals are being shaped
- ensure that tenants receive membership newsletters over and above whatever publicity is going to all tenants
- ensure that elections to the Gateway Board and Gateway Tenant Committee are run through the membership
- ensure that the membership has the means of discussing key policy issues

Building the structure into the Gateway

- consider appropriate tenant representative structures under the Gateway. Existing council tenant representative structures will need to be changed to accommodate the Gateway's tenant membership structures
- where setting up a housing association, transfer the Gateway Tenant Group membership to the CGA's membership (any legal membership fees can be kept to a minimum and paid by the Gateway Association)
- establish appropriate links between the Gateway Tenant Group and Committee and the Gateway Board
- ensure that the Gateway Board are fully conversant with and support the Gateway principles

Establish the Community Gateway

Retired nurse, **Freda Olsson**, aged 72, was one of the first to sign up for membership of the Tenants Steering Group. Freda said:

“My greatest hope is that the Community Gateway will help to bring a little more dignity back to the life of Preston’s impoverished neighbourhoods. If people feel pride in where they live, they will look after it.”

Good practice note

Ensure that there are clear reasons why tenants should become members.

Good practice note

Particularly ensure that tenant board members are elected through the Gateway tenant group membership.

Good practice note

Don't expect a big membership at day one. It will take time to build a tenant democracy.

7. Developing a framework for community empowerment

The following were key outputs from the Innovation Into Action programme:

- a **Scoping Report** was produced that considered the practical application of the Community Gateway proposals and what it would mean to the delivery of services. In particular, the Scoping Report set out what delivery of services through Local Community Areas would mean to how the service and business plan would be developed.

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Good practice note

Consider how the Gateway's business plan needs to be shaped to relate to the Gateway proposals.

- defining the **Local Community Areas** which would form the basis of the Community Gateway. 10 Local Community Areas were defined in which options for empowerment would be offered to tenants and communities, together with 30 sub-areas in which empowerment options would also be available.

Good practice note

Work with communities to define Local Community Areas and sub-areas.

- an initial task the TSG committee carried out was to produce a two part **Community Empowerment Strategy**:

- a **Community Empowerment Strategy Protocol** to cover how Preston tenants would participate in the work to establish the Community Gateway from the beginning of 2004 through to establishment of the Gateway

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- a draft **Community Empowerment Strategy** for when the Community Gateway is established. Effectively what will be a policy for the CGA itself, this document will need to be formally reviewed and agreed by the CGA board as it considers its policy framework. This document was largely based on the model Community Empowerment Strategy in the *Empowering Communities* report.

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Good practice note

Work with the Gateway tenant group to develop a Community Empowerment Strategy.

Good practice note

The Community Empowerment Strategy needs to cover before and after the Gateway is set up.

- meetings were held with a variety of wider stakeholders in Preston, including the following:
 - PCC representative on Preston Strategic Partnership
 - PCC officer responsible for PSP's Housing Thematic Group
 - Eaves Brook Housing Association
 - North British Housing Association
 - Collingwood Housing Association
 - Lancashire County Council
 - PCC Regeneration Manager

Meetings in relation to PSP's housing strategy are of particular significance in that the PSP has identified as one of its key housing aims the extension of the Gateway principles to all tenures in Preston. Clearly, the neighbourhood focus of the Gateway principles would benefit from the involvement of other tenures in the development of neighbourhood options.

Therefore some exploratory meetings were held with representatives of the three largest housing associations in Preston.

All associations expressed interest in the Gateway proposals, although all realised that any cross tenure approaches could be a long way off. In particular, the approach taken by Collingwood on the Callon estate seemed to be consistent with the Gateway proposals.

Meetings were held with other stakeholders in relation to the Gateway's neighbourhood options based approach. Important to the success of the Preston Gateway will be how it manages to co-ordinate its empowerment approach with existing empowerment and neighbourhood regeneration programmes in the City (eg. Sure Start programmes and the police's PACT programme).



Good practice note

Engage with other stakeholders at an early stage.

8. Option studies

The innovation into action programme anticipated option studies being carried out in all areas of Preston during the course of the programme. There were three key reasons why carrying full scale options studies would have been impractical at this stage:

1. the resources were not available to carry out proper full scale option studies across all 6800 homes in Preston.
2. carrying out full scale options studies would not have been a sensible use of resources given that they would have been carried out at least a year (if not more) prior to the establishment of the Community Gateway
3. if full scale option studies had been carried out, this would have led to confusion about responsibility for the implementation of action points emerging from option studies. It would be unrealistic to expect that action points could be implemented under PCC's existing service, especially at a time when PCC is seeking to implement Audit Commission recommendations to improve its services and when it is shaping itself up for transfer to the Gateway.

Good practice note

DON'T carry out full blown options studies with tenants way before the Gateway is set up. It could be difficult to develop any options chosen until the Gateway is set up.

The last point is particularly pertinent in relation to the Community Gateway Model. The Model recognises that the local authority options appraisal and any consequent stock transfer period are not the best times to be discussing neighbourhood strategies with local communities, because attentions will be focused on the bigger picture at that time. The Community Gateway Model recognises the importance of neighbourhood community empowerment and development, but suggests that this work needs to happen once the Gateway is set up. What needs to happen in the set up period is that the framework for community options studies needs to be developed and resources identified.



Therefore the following took place in relation to options studies:

- community *mapping* in all areas of Preston, identifying areas that communities identified with and what key issues and community and other activity existed in those areas
- discussion and dissemination of community options with the existing tenant and community groups in Preston, including one emerging community group
- identification of community aspirations in the areas represented by existing tenant and community groups
- identification of what activity might need to take place under the Community Gateway (and in some cases prior to the Community Gateway)

Good practice note

DO work with existing tenant and community groups to identify their long term aspirations.

A template of the outcomes of option study work is shown in Appendix B (full reports are downloadable). Recommendations for local community empowerment work that could be initiated under the Community Gateway are shown in Appendix C.

We would recommend that the following should be addressed in the shorter term:

- exploration of tenant management options in the 4 areas specified (under the Right to Manage whilst the homes remain owned by PCC. If a tenant group serves a Right to Manage notice on its Council prior to transfer of the homes, the ODPM will usually fund the complete programme to set up the tenant management organisation provided the new landlord agrees to fund its contributions to the programme)
- clarification of PCC's position regarding possible Estate Agreements with Brookfield and the Trees Estate
- clarification of PCC's position regarding Local Lettings Agreements, including training and support for tenants to understand legal lettings obligations
- consideration of how any existing tenant participation initiatives will dovetail into the emerging Community Gateway community empowerment framework
- consideration of how existing work to involve tenants in improvements to the repairs service and major works programmes will dovetail into Community Gateway frameworks

Good practice note

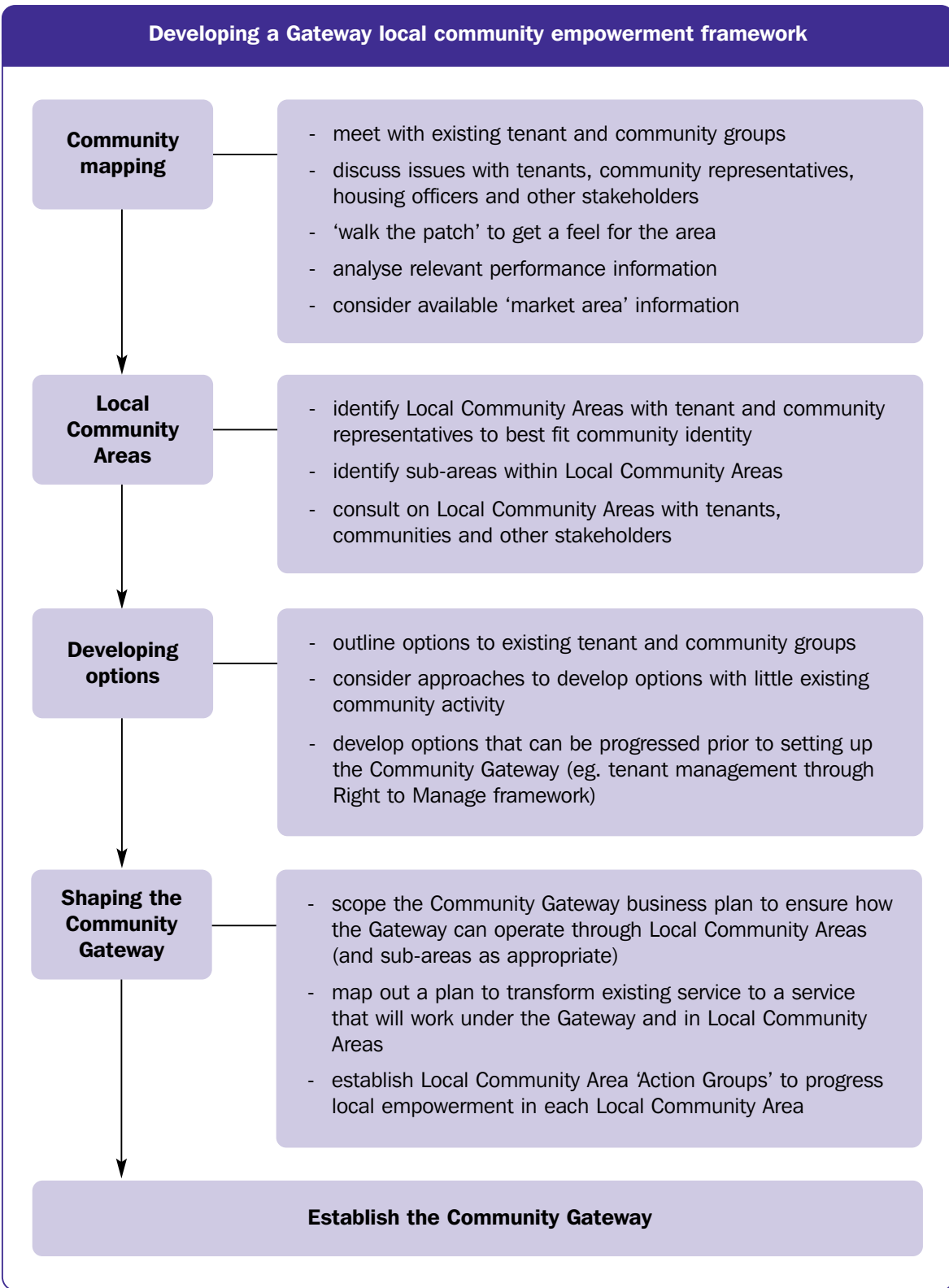
Where tenant groups are interested in tenant management, help them to progress through the Right to Manage process.

Good practice note

Consider how the Council's existing tenant participation structures will be adapted to fit in with Gateway proposals.

10. Tenant Empowerment Worker Training programme

Some limited work has been done to explore how a programme might be set up to train tenants who may wish to become employed as tenant empowerment workers, including some initial dialogue with local colleges. However, this work was not seen to be a priority by tenants and remains in progress. A further report will be made on progress in the Autumn.



This section outlines the key work being undertaken through the ongoing work programme:

1. Building the membership

The work to develop the membership of the Tenant Steering Group has taken place under the second programme, and this work will continue. Key features have included or will include:

- holding a series of Preston-wide tenant meetings. The first meeting included general discussions on how tenants wanted to see the Gateway develop, particularly including issues that were included in the Gateway “specification”. The second meeting, also involving staff, is planned to include discussions on policy issues, and on the Gateway’s “Mission Statement”
- holding meetings in Local Community Areas
- publicising the opportunity for tenants to become members through the “Gate” newsletter
- inviting Tenant Steering Group members to participate in policy discussions

Good practice note

Developing the membership will be an ongoing programme and needs careful consideration.

2. Developing the committee

Work has progressed on developing the skills and abilities of the Tenant Steering Group Committee, both through informal work on a range of issues, and through a training programme being carried out, that includes the following subject matter:

- Committee roles and functions
- Working as a team
- The Gateway business plan
- (Co-operative) values & principles
- Equal opportunities & diversity
- Overview of the housing sector
- Empowering communities
- Negotiation skills
- Business planning



Good practice note

Do what is necessary to develop the Gateway tenant committee as an independent and effective tenant representative group.

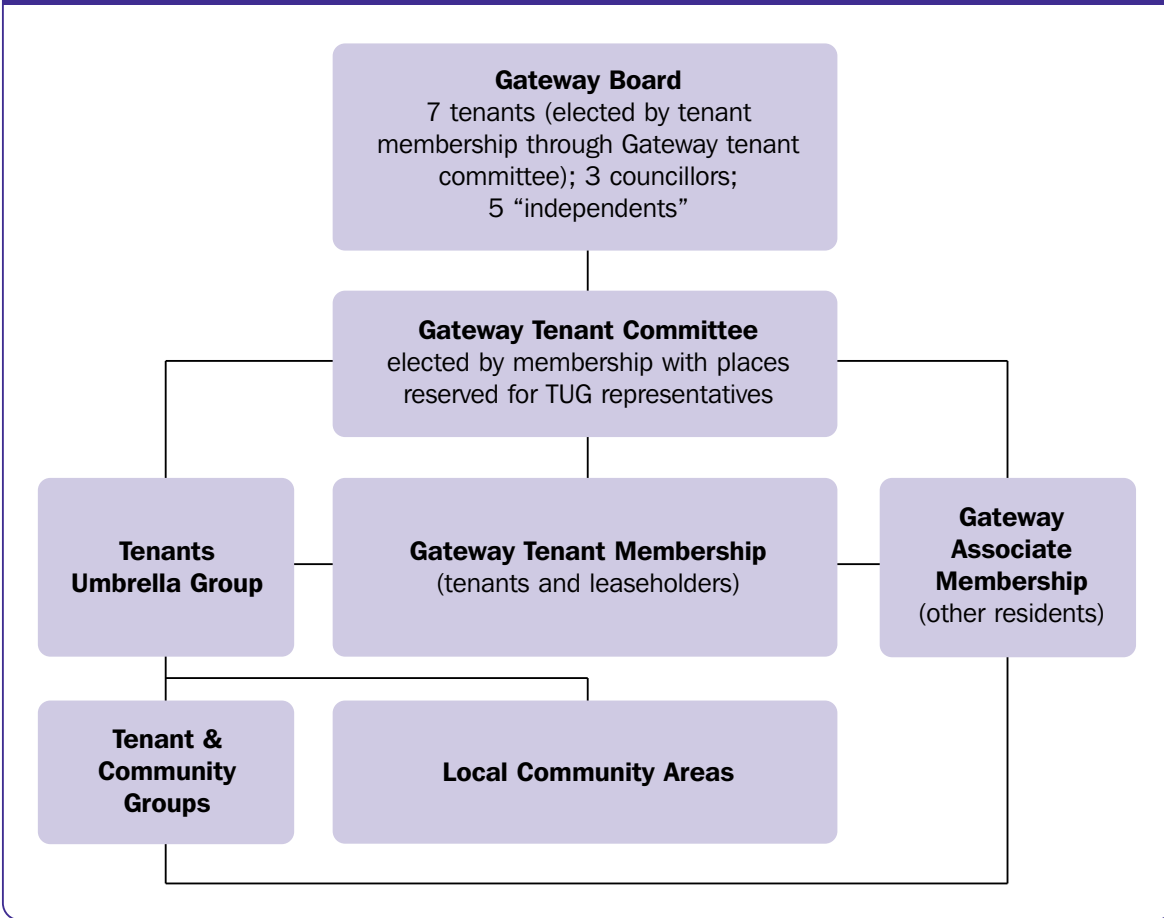
Discussions are ongoing as this report is published on the longer term role of the Tenant Steering Group Committee. It is anticipated that the committee could become an elected Gateway Tenant Committee that:

- becomes an electoral college that nominates the tenant board members
- tracks the work of the board
- becomes the means by which the Gateway tenant membership can submit proposals to the board

Good practice note

Carefully work out the right relationships between the Gateway Board, the Gateway tenant membership and the Gateway tenant committee.

The following tenant representative structure has been discussed between the Tenant Steering Group Committee and the Tenant Umbrella Group (the group that represents existing tenant and community groups to PCC):



3. Tenant board member elections

As part of the ongoing programme, the Tenant Steering Group discussed how the CGA tenant board members would be recruited. An approach to the recruitment of tenant board members where tenants are assessed according to their skills would clearly have been alien to the Community Gateway proposals.

Nonetheless, in order to get the best tenants for the job, there was a suggestion in some initial discussions that the tenant board members could be selected by the Tenant Steering Group Committee.

However, this approach was discarded following an open tenants meeting in January 2004 where it became clear that no approach would be seen as acceptable to Preston tenants if it did not involve an electoral process which all tenants could potentially participate in.

Good practice note

Ensure that initial tenant board members are elected in tenant elections that all tenants can participate in.

Therefore an approach was taken where a range of general abilities, attitudes, commitments and personal qualities seen to be essential for all board members were defined, and candidates for election were asked to confirm that they had the relevant qualities. Other, more formal, qualifications and experiences were listed as desirable, but not essential⁹.

9. An example board member application form used elsewhere considered in the process as an example listed 3 years experience as a housing manager or similar as essential. Clearly such an approach would be off putting for tenants wishing to apply (if not for other potential board members!).

The following criteria were considered to be essential for all board members:

General abilities	Attitudes
Team working Able to assess plans and policies Strategic thinking Ability to assess paperwork Understanding of figures A confident & constructive approach	Respect for the view of other board members Positive support for board decisions and for the Community Gateway An understanding of the need for accountability, effective governance, value for money and good performance A non-discriminatory, non-judgemental, fair and balanced approach
Commitment	Personal qualities
Commitment to the Community Gateway principles and to promoting community empowerment Commitment to publicly funded housing Support for Preston City Council's stock transfer & Gateway proposals Commitment to equal opportunities and diversity Willingness & ability to attend meetings and training sessions Willingness to take on the responsibilities of being a CGA director	Communication skills Sound judgement Decisiveness Integrity & honesty Reliability Tolerance Support and respect for others Being unflustered and having an ability to remain calm under pressure A good sense of humour

It was considered that knowledge and experience in the following issues would need to be represented by some board members:

- Involvement with tenant & community groups, particularly those in Preston
- Community empowerment and tenant participation issues
- Housing associations, social housing policy issues
- Management of general housing and of sheltered housing
- Housing design and management of building construction programmes
- Housing and other legal issues
- Management of strategy
- Business planning, finance management, capital financing and banking
- The private sector
- Staffing & human resources
- Public relations
- Equal opportunities & diversity
- Community & economic regeneration

The full board member information pack and application form can be downloaded.

 **download**

Good practice note
Ensure that board member specifications are written in a tenant orientated fashion.

It was considered important that the 7 tenant board members would be geographically spread throughout areas in Preston, although area-based elections were not seen to be desirable. Therefore it was decided to hold the election amongst all tenants in Preston, but to limit the number of tenant board members in each Local Community Area to one.

7 tenant board members have now been elected, from a total of 11 candidates. Interestingly, amongst them and the three PCC nominations to the board already happen to exist a wide range of skills and experiences that will be pertinent to the CGA board.

For example:

- most of the tenant board members have existing experience of participating in local community groups in Preston and in Preston's tenant participation activities
- one of the tenant board members is a board member of the One Voice Regeneration Programme and Preston's Community Forum and is chair of the Moor Nook Estate Management Board
- one of the tenant board members is an ex-Preston councillor and Mayor
- one of the tenant board members has experience as a union convenor
- two of the council nominated board members have extensive business experience, one within the co-operative movement

Good practice note

Don't assume that the "independents" will be the only people on a board to have skills.

4. Board development

As with all other parts of establishing the CGA, the approach to board development will need to be radically different from other similar processes. In particular the process will need to:

- be fully conversant with what the Community Gateway is and how its approach will be different from existing housing associations. It is intended that discussions on the Community Gateway approach will be part of the board's early meetings.
- ensure that the board makes its decisions in the knowledge of the wishes and aspirations of the emerging CGA tenant membership. It is intended that membership meetings will be held where key policy issues are debated.
- ensure that the board makes its decisions following debates on (non-confidential) issues with the Tenant Steering Group Committee. It is intended to hold joint board and Tenant Steering Group Committee meetings to discuss issues on forthcoming board agendas.

- at the same time the board will have to function as an independent, cohesive and effective governing body. It will need to take decisions on the basis of what is right for the business, and in some cases, the board may have to take decisions that run counter to the views of the Tenant Steering Group and its Committee.

Getting the balance right between these different points will be critical to the success of the Community Gateway. Ideally what will happen is that the Gateway approach will ensure that, from the outset, an "us and them" culture does not emerge and that the board develops a genuine understanding of the need for it to account for its decisions, particularly the more difficult decisions, to its tenant membership and to other stakeholders.

Good practice note

Take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that there is no us and them culture between the board and rest of the Gateway.

Good practice note

DON'T overemphasise the role of the tenant board members. In a Gateway, they will be only one feature of the community empowerment strategy.

5. The business plan

Some of the more difficult decisions have become apparent to members of the TSG committee as they have started to consider the emerging Gateway business plan and the outputs of PCC's stock condition survey - not least the "funding gap" that has been identified in Preston between projected income and expenditure over the 30 year business plan. Discussions are taking place between PCC and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on these matters.

The TSG committee has very quickly developed a strong understanding of some of the complex issues within the business plan, and lively and constructive debates have taken place on a number of these issues. What is emerging from discussions on the business plan within the TSG committee is a desire amongst the tenants involved to participate in and take responsibility for the big decisions that will affect the future of Preston and a growing ability to be able to do so effectively.

What is particularly encouraging is that the level of debate and scrutiny that is likely to take place amongst tenants on the business plan is ensuring that the officers and consultants, including BCHS, will be rigorously held to account for their work, where accepted ways of doing things are thoroughly questioned and will only be accepted if they are the right approach!

Good practice note

Ensure that tenant representatives are involved in the big decisions. DON'T assume that tenants won't understand or won't want to be involved in financial issues.

The Scoping Report referred to in Section 3.7 identified the need for extra resources to implement the Community Gateway element of the business plan. Whilst further work will need to be done at a later stage on how this work will be done, the business plan has currently identified £400K per annum expenditure on community empowerment. This will need to include:

- specialist community empowerment staffing costs
- tenant training
- independent advice
- premises expenses
- other running costs and expenses
- communications costs
- CGA board and membership costs
- tenant representation costs

Good practice note

Identify and build into the business plan the resources needed to implement community empowerment. Within the scheme of things they won't be that much, but they need to be there!

6. Landlord Choice

A key early decision that needed to be made was what type of landlord the Community Gateway would be – ie. a stand alone independent association or set up in partnership with an existing association. Based on the ODPM's guidance on Landlord Choice, it was decided to set up a sub-group to the Tenant Steering Group to consider the issue and make recommendations to PCC. Each of the three main political parties were invited to submit councillor nominations to the sub-group.

The work of the *Landlord Choice* group included:

- general consideration of the merits of independent and partnership options
- examination of the effects of partnership on the Community Gateway principles
- development of a **Community Gateway Specification**, setting out the key requirements of the new landlord (based partially on feedback from the tenant conference held in January 2004)

 **download**

- general exploration of the housing association sector through a meeting with a representative from the **National Housing Federation**
- informal presentations from three housing associations (one an independent stock transfer housing association; one a group structure stock transfer housing association; one a national housing association with some stock transfer subsidiary associations)

A particular factor that may have influenced the Landlord Choice decision was whether a partnership option would have minimised the “funding gap”. However, it became apparent from the informal presentations from associations that no association would bring financial resources to the table, and Preston's lead consultant confirmed that any savings through rationalised management would be marginal.

Good practice note

Let the Gateway tenant group lead on a key issue like the Landlord Choice debate. Ensure that considering whether a potential partner will support the Gateway principles is a key part of the debate.

Following the work of the sub group, the Tenant Steering Group Committee concluded, on an interim basis, that:

- the final decision on Landlord Choice should be deferred until more work had been done on the business plan and the stock condition survey
- mindful of the need to reach a conclusion that Preston tenants would support, the “default” position for tenants would be the “independence” option
- the associations giving informal presentations were not clear about the Gateway proposals and their potential role in them. Therefore the TSG committee did not consider that any potential benefits from partnership would outweigh the potential threat from a relationship with an existing association to the Community Gateway principles, central to the unity between tenants and Preston members
- that the Gateway should be pursued using the independence option, with the proviso that an association “beauty contest” could be held at a later stage if it were shown that there would be benefits to partnership, or that a partnership would be necessary

These recommendations were supported by two of the three Councillor representatives in a personal capacity (with one particularly proposing the need to start the empowerment process by supporting Preston’s tenant representatives’ decision), whilst the third felt that the group should investigate partnership further. These views were presented to PCC’s Gateway Committee on 22nd June and they supported the views put forward by the TSG committee.

 [download](#)

7. The Housing Corporation

The Housing Corporation had been active participants in the *Empowering Communities* report, and had supported its conclusions. The emerging Preston Community Gateway will be a different type of housing association, but the structure has been developed in such a way to ensure that the Housing Corporation will be able to register the organisation. Whilst some consideration has been given to how to bring the views of tenant members into the decision-making process, what this will be in practice will be a thorough approach to ensuring that the views of key stakeholders (ie. tenants) are taken



into consideration when the Gateway Board makes its decisions. The membership will not have a formal power over the Board and the Board will be the independent ultimate authority within the organisation.

At this stage, the only issues that the Corporation has raised have been:

- the inclusion of “community empowerment” as an objective in the Gateway’s rules, as envisaged in the model rules in the *Empowering Communities* report. It is seen that this would contravene the 1996 Housing Act. Given that “community empowerment” can be included into the powers of the Gateway, it is not considered that it would be a major problem to remove “community empowerment” as an object (although perhaps this is not desirable)
- the model rules in the *Empowering Communities* report envisaged that a Community Gateway would have a tenant-only membership. At this stage, there is a need to work through the implications of a tenant-only membership with the Housing Corporation and they have raised this as an issue to be considered.

Good practice note

Make sure you set your Gateway up as an organisation the Housing Corporation can register. Discuss your Gateway proposals with the Corporation at an early stage.



It is strange to write a section in this report headed “conclusions” when as yet, there has not been a tenant ballot in Preston, the Preston Community Gateway has not been registered with the Housing Corporation, and the financial mechanisms that will enable the Gateway to start in Preston haven’t been fully arranged as yet.

However what has been achieved in Preston is the establishment of a Gateway framework that will enable widespread tenant and community empowerment opportunities, and tenants have starting to participate in that framework.

What has been demonstrated through the work in Preston is that the community empowerment aspirations in the Community Gateway Model can be delivered in practice, and that the Community Gateway package is attractive to all stakeholders, particularly tenants. What is happening in Preston is beginning to make a reality of the Government’s active citizenship agenda – the establishment of a vibrant and exciting tenant democracy that will lead to the development of strong sustainable communities.

“Its been hard work, and we anticipate more hard work, but it has been and it will be worth it. We want to see a Preston in the future where people live in good quality homes, and where local communities make welcoming neighbourhoods that people want to live in. You don’t get those things if people don’t put in some effort to get them.”

Christine Winstanley

Preston Tenant Steering Group & one of the 7 elected tenant board members

Appendix A

Background information

Various background information from the programme is available at www.preston.gov.uk and www.cch.coop including:

- initial brochure to tenants on the Gateway proposals
- the PCAT Scoping report
- the Community Empowerment Strategy
- protocol on community empowerment
- Preston Community Gateway Association specification
- Membership Matters news sheets to Tenant Steering Group members
- board member information pack and application form
- Landlord Choice interim statement
- option study reports

Other information will be added to these websites as the programme progresses. Where tenants are not able to download this information, copies are available from BCHS.

Appendix B

Option study report format

This appendix shows the generic format used for options study reports for each Local Community Area in Preston. The full option study reports can be downloaded.

Area X – “X” estate

This is a area covering 659 Preston City Council homes in North Preston, largely consisting of “A” estate, an area in need of some major investment. Preston estate agents identify “A” as having a poor reputation in Preston, but the area does not particularly suffer from low demand. The “Z” regeneration programme includes the “Y” area.

Sub-areas

Sub-area A – a large estate of 302 PCC homes, consisting of 1950s low rise flats, houses and bungalows. The estate is relatively popular with low density and extensive open spaces and green areas. It is also reasonably well-maintained but with little major investment.

Sub-area A is represented by **K Community Association**, who carry out a wide range of community activities including, youth clubs for children of all ages, theatre workshops, DJ and MC groups, parent and toddler groups, an over 50s group, computer classes & advocacy and advice provision. The group has developed an estate agreement with PCC and is keen to see this agreement implemented under the Community Gateway.

Sub-area B – a smaller area of 60 reasonably well-maintained 1960s properties. This area is again relatively popular and includes the **L sheltered scheme**.

Sub-area C – a desirable area with higher value predominantly Right to Buy homes that includes 7 long term occupied PCC homes.

Sub-area D – an area with 87 non traditional BISF houses built just after WW2, which has received some modernisation (new windows and roofs), but which has been identified as needing improved thermal insulation through external cladding. The area is well-maintained but its non-traditional nature requires high repairs expenditure. The estate has a number of short term tenancies, with a high number of transfer requests, and a low waiting list.

The area is represented by the **M Tenants & Residents Association**, a group established for 11 years, but currently suffering from a small number of active members. Their key priority is to maintain their group and to involve further active members. They currently operate a Local Lettings Agreement with PCC, and they anticipate that the Community Gateway will continue to support them in their current activities. In the future, the group may want to explore further Community Gateway options.

Sub-area E – an area of 203 well maintained and popular (annual void rate 8%) 1950s/60s low rise houses and flats with a large proportion of Right to Buys, including the N sheltered scheme.

Area E is represented by the **O Community Association**, a well established and strong organisation, with a good membership base. Through its office base provided by PCC, the group has arranged community drop in and advice sessions, with free internet access, health visitors, police representatives, citizens advice, local councillors and MP surgeries. The group has also worked with Surestart, set up a boxing club and is working on a youth project called Work for it. The group now wants to consider tenant management options.

Appendix C

Recommendations for local community empowerment work under the Community Gateway

Local Community Area	Sub-area	Nos	Community		Housing			Notes
			Full scale Community Options study	Community development including engagement with existing initiatives	General housing mgmt liaison	Estate agreements, Local Lettings Agreements etc.	Tenant mgmt options	
Brookfield	Ambleside Road	129		Yes		Yes		Devt. Estate Agreement from PEP options study
	Brookfield	530						
	Churchill Road	7						
North Ribbleson	Grange	360	Yes					
	Greenlands	278	Yes					
	Longridge Road	87			Yes	Yes		
	Munro Crescent	13						
	Sion Hill	29						
Moor Nook	Moor Nook	513					Yes	
	Burnslack Road	66						
South of Ribbleson	Callon	364		Yes	Yes			Partnership with Collingwood HA
	Farringdon	81	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	Thirlmere	125	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	Russell Avenue	11						
	William Henry St	22						
Inner Ribbleson	Delaware/Frome	82	Yes					
	Wilbraham St	45						
	Morris Road	59						
	Poets Estate	227	Yes					
	Trees Estate	218	Yes	Yes		Yes		Develop Estate Agreement
	Miller Road	108						
Deepdale	Dodgson Place	90						
	Gillett Street	107						Work with sheltered schemes
	Holme Slack	191	Yes					
	Porter Street	180	Yes					
	Ringwood Road	207	Yes					

Appendix C

Continued

Local Community Area	Sub-area	Nos	Community		Housing			Notes
			Full scale Community Options study	Community development including engagement with existing initiatives	General housing mgmt liaison	Estate agreements, Local Lettings Agreements etc.	Tenant mgmt options	
City Centre East	Adelphi	51	Yes	Yes				
	Windmill 1	189						
	Windmill 2	30						
	Windmill 3	70						
	Hopwood Triangle	91			Yes	Yes		
	Meecca	140		Yes				
	Plung/Deep	30						
	Pump Street	26						
	St Pauls	128	Yes					Work with sheltered schemes
City Centre West	The Filberts	93	Yes		Yes			
	Howarth	107	Yes		Yes			
	Marsh Lane	68						
	Swansea Street	46						
	Plungington	32						
	Other properties	78						
Ashton	Larches	443		Yes			Yes	
	Savick	385						
	Lea	3						
	Whinfield Lane	20						
Ingol	Ashdale	72					Yes	
	South Ingol	489	Yes	Yes			Yes	
	North Ingol							
	Worthing Road							

PRESTON COMMUNITY GATEWAY

Preston City Council

Housing Department
Gateway Team
Town Hall
Preston PR1 2RL
Tel: 01772 906484
Email: p.deacon@preston.gov.uk

Birmingham Co-operative

Housing Services
Fairgate House
205 Kings Road
Tyseley
Birmingham B11 2AA
Tel: 0121 764 3807
Email: stephenc@bchs.org.uk

Partners in Change

Regent House
Bath Avenue
Wolverhampton WV1 4EG
Tel: 01902 566442
Email: ed.isaacs@partners-in-change.co.uk