

The background features a dark blue gradient with faint, semi-transparent graphics. In the upper left, there are two donut charts; the larger one on the left has segments labeled 10%, 17%, and 13%, while the smaller one on the right has a segment labeled 13%. In the lower right, a portion of a computer keyboard is visible, showing keys for 'caps lock', 'shift', 'control', 'option', 'command', 'z', 'x', 'a', 's', 'q', and 'w'.

The Residents' Network – April networking groups

WOLVERHAMPTON HOMES

Monday 16 April 2018

The group had eighteen people attend on the day, along with two HQN staff. There were eleven organisations represented. These were:

- Home Group
- Rooftop Housing Group
- Shropshire Towns and Rural Housing
- Solihull Community Housing
- Stonewater Ltd
- The Community Housing Group
- Wolverhampton Homes
- Wrekin Housing Trust

There were six residents at the session.

During the introductions, delegates were asked what topics they would like to cover/are interested in. The following themes were raised:

- Interest in insight into the green paper
- Interest in best practice
- A couple of delegates had set up customer voice panels and wanted to share information
- Some wanted to hear about the expectations of residents' voice, at a board level

Notes

Resident involvement/engagement?

- The average rating given for the state of resident involvement was 3.5
- One delegate thought that their organisation was very good with involvement, but said they struggled with getting more residents to participate. They said they were “lacking the feet on the ground”
 - When asked why, they said this was due to apathy and a lack of advertisement
 - Another delegate challenged this – they said it wasn’t about having more people; they just needed more views
 - Another delegate said they always seemed to get “the same old faces”
- The demographic of engaged residents was seen to be older residents
 - There’s an issue with getting younger people to engage
 - When asked what ‘young’ was, delegates said 20-40
 - A delegate who was introduced as ‘young’ and was a scrutiny panel member said that they were convinced to engage by their housing officer. It was achieved through a personal relationship. They believed they were spoken to in ‘the right way’
- It was understood that not everyone has the time to attend meetings – digital hubs can help with this
 - Examples were given about online forums – landlords said they work. They are used to discuss issues, but also to foster communities. It isn’t just for moaning. It’s also used by staff, who talk in a ‘human’ way
- Scrutiny is still respected in some organisations – a delegate said it was vital that this group had senior buy in
- An example of ‘estate champions’ was given. These individuals can interact with residents, while being residents themselves. It keeps feet on the ground
- One landlord highlighted the issue that despite their large size, they only have 2 people working in engagement. These individuals must cover a national remit
- One organisation said they use Facebook as a tool to work out what its residents want
- People enjoy online engagement when it retains a human feel
- Residents want to know when their feedback is listened to – they need to be told

- “It’s about showing you care and involving people so that they actually feel involved”
- One landlord said that they have residents who go through their publications to remove unnecessary jargon
 - Another has an annual calendar that they share, so that their residents know what’s happening
 - Another issue feedback cards and phone numbers to residents that have had workman attend their house. If they leave feedback, they are rewarded. The workmen have KPIs based on satisfaction
- A key issue with involvement is that you get the same faces attending each group
 - Free lunches etc seem to help here
- The data gained from call centres needs to be used as insight
 - This should be used in conjunction to engaged resident groups
- One landlord gave the example of their ‘get togethers’
 - These are events in which around 50-60 residents spend an evening with staff. They can chat about issues that are concerning them
 - Free transport and childcare is provided
 - Feedback is recorded, and any actions are reported online for residents to see
 - Currently they advertise these sessions via mass emails – however they are changing this due to GDPR. They also send texts.
- There is difficulty in recruiting people to focus groups
 - Someone suggested using goodie backs as an incentive
 - Another suggestion was using Facebook as a promotion tool, over phone calls
- Delegates were asked if budgets have been cut
 - Most people agreed that they have
 - Some said it was only by a small amount
 - Engagement has been cut because it wasn’t seen as important – there have also been staff reductions
- Leaflets etc are being translated to make sure that residents have access to them
- One of the landlords said that they used to do a lot of community involvement work – this was done by their housing officers
 - However, mergers and staff reductions have stopped this

- We publish an impact bulletin showing residents what actions are taken after we've received complaints
- One landlord said that when they hold get together style meetings, they've had to remove the 'issues' part of the agenda. This is because the sessions get bogged down with complaints
- One of the ALMOs in the room said that from their point of view, HAs do more than them – this is because they have bigger budgets
 - They feel pressured to do more for less
- Resident involvement needs to be embedded into all elements of a business – it's a priority
 - This is largely due to the Grenfell Tower Fire
 - Boards are panicking due to Grenfell
 - They are asking if they do enough to listen to residents – what's surprising is that they do not already know what they do
 - There were mixed responses as to if this will happen. This was due to uncertainty around budgets being increased
 - Some organisations are waiting on the Green Paper before making changes
- There were some organisations and residents in the room that said their boards are being changed in response to the changing climate around resident engagement
- Residents were asked if they prefer the term 'tenant' or 'customer'
 - Some said tenant, as customer inferred that they had a choice
 - Some said customer because they pay rent and therefore expect to be treated in a certain way
 - Others said they prefer the term because there are also non-tenants who use the services of a landlord i.e. leaseholders. Customer serves as an umbrella term
 - "It doesn't matter what you call us – it's about how you treat us"
- Rent needs to be 'fair'
- The rent increase should result in better homes
 - But there is no trust that the money will come through to improvements – instead it will just go to building new homes

- If the green paper is used to improve regulations, it will be worth it. If not, it's just a token gesture
- People preferred the old approach using KLOEs
- There was talk about bringing back the old approach of proper inspection and regulation
 - Organisations need to be inspected on how they capture feedback and what they do with it
 - It needs to be in a similar style to OFSTED, with all consumer standards being properly regulated
 - There were some calls to return to a TSA level of regulation
- Some residents were unsure about how they could fit into a new regulatory system, as often regulations are too broad
 - They aren't sure how they can actually help report on everything
- How can the tenants' voice be regulated?
 - Tenants should be able to speak to the regulator as a whistle blower – they shouldn't have to go through the Ombudsman
 - Train more customers to get involved. Get them to do things like assess
 - There needs to be standards relating to listening and the regulator needs to check that this is being met
 - There needs to be a National Tenants Voice which is independent – not paid. It needs to be recognised by the regulator and 'given teeth'
 - There are questions as to if people would want to be involved with this
- One landlord said that they were not happy with their current engagement structure
 - They don't think that they do enough on customer insight
 - They stopped asking for insight because they're concerned about the work involved in acting on the information
- At present, I don't feel that residents drive change
- Resident engagement staff have been massively reduced in numbers
- Some organisations need to go back to basics – it's fine to develop but don't forget the basics
- Organisations should not be undergoing large mergers. It just created mini-local authorities which just waste money. It doesn't always help with procurement

- At present, HAs are taking things more seriously than ALMOs and councils – this is down to senior management teams
- Boards and executive teams need to put the customer at the top – they need to set an example with a customer focus
- One organisation is engaging young people by offering internal apprenticeships
- One set of residents had formed a cleaning service where residents could volunteer their time to be 'block champions'. They recruited people to help through a survey which obtained insight on what sort of volunteering people were interested in
- One organisation arranged for a van to tour estates with a gazebo. These were advertised as summer pop ups where residents could come and talk to staff in person.

Digital

- 'Going digital' has also had a negative impact on community involvement work
- Some said that digital engagement did not beat face to face work
- When asked if digital was a cost cutting measure:
 - One person said it depends on the audience
 - One person said they use online services as a gateway to conversations i.e. phoning people 24 hours after negative feedback
- Older people do engage online
- Lots of organisations have formed skills hubs and online platforms
- One organisation's forum has a very light touch approach in which the only rule is to be kind. This has created a chatty, nice atmosphere where people do more than just complain.

Social Housing Green Paper

- No one in the room said they'd heard much/knew much about it
- There were calls to address the growing issues associated with an aging population
- There needs to be more done to tackle homelessness
- The overall quality/standard of homes needs looking at

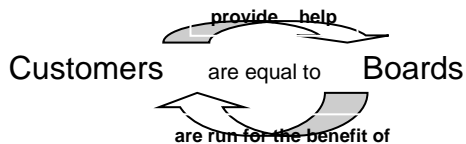
- The standard of UK housing was seen as poor
- The Decent Homes Standard is hard to interpret and is too open to different interpretations
- There needs to be legally binding requirements to listen to residents
- There needs to be real affordable housing that meets the needs of communities
- Right to Buy needs to end – this was called for at Ministerial Road Shows
- The lack of social housing needs to be addressed
 - At present, social landlords seem to focus on building for shared ownership or for sale
- The Green Paper is seen as a good thing – but tenants want an input
- “We need regulations to be enforced for real change to happen”
- The green paper needs more coverage of safety – landlords need to be able to guarantee safety when it comes to things like cladding
- Residents feel like landlords are reassuring them when it comes to safety
 - But there is still heightened anxiety when it comes to things like cladding
- Some are very sceptical of the green paper because of the moving publication date
- A customer-first approach needs to be driven out on every level
- There’s room for innovation – but at least KLOEs gave a guide with no room for interpretations
- “At the moment, we’re going backwards – not forward. So far Grenfell hasn’t made a difference to us”
- “We’ve gone back since inspection stopped.”

Development

- At present, development seems to be the priority. It feels like landlords are so bothered about new homes that they’ve forgotten about the ones they already have
- One resident said that their landlord is currently redeveloping an estate. They are asking the residents what sort of houses they want to see
- We should encourage more council houses to be built.

Residents on boards/scrutiny panels

- Tenants should be trained to inspect what their landlord is doing and be trained so they can be involved with boards
- There were calls to link scrutiny panels together – this is something HQN could help with
 - There were also calls for an FAQ on scrutiny
- The following model was outlined on how boards should operate:



- Scrutiny panels work well at a strategic level
- One landlord has rebranded and focused their scrutiny panel into a 'Customer Assurance Panel'
 - Each individual on the panel takes a set standard and reviews it with an officer. Tenants are asked to rate the standard using a traffic light system. If an amber or red rating is given, recommendations are made
 - "We as tenants 'rule the roost'"
- For councils, it seems that councillors do the scrutiny work without updating tenants
 - Challenge groups were set up for tenants – but they did not have the confidence
- One organisation reported difficulty with scrutiny – this was because staff were choosing the subjects it covered and were writing the reports
- There is a struggle with continuity – people leave the panel too regularly
 - Incentivisation is being introduced, but there is resistance to this idea
- One organisation said that they use staff to facilitate scrutiny. They use a special scoring matrix to support residents with the task
- One of the landlords allow residents to pick areas of the business that they're interest in and set up focus groups accordingly
- Another landlord mentioned that they're running a review on voids. They've met internal resistance about consulting residents
- A council mentioned that they put on minibuses for councillors to review things, but don't offer the same for residents.

Loneliness and society

- “I think it’s very negative how tenants are treated. I hate the term social housing – it’s just a house that you don’t own. You feel like a second-class citizen. It’s made worse if you’re on benefits. It’s one knock after another.”
- Those in the room felt that there is still a lot of stigma surrounding social housing
- Planning was seen to divide social and non-social housing
- Landlords focus their efforts on improving the inside of properties, but not the outside. This does not help with stigma
- Have mixed tenure estates worked?
 - No – they stick social housing in one, contained corner
 - Taking away community workers has made things worse
- Councillors want to represent residents – they don’t want to see residents representing themselves

Social housing stigma

- We need to stop putting Channel 5 style documentaries out
- We need more positive press
- There’s too much of a paternal relationship at the moment
- Residents sometimes see landlords as a forth emergency service

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