

Blog

The Housing Quality Network

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We have a real opportunity to rethink how we work and deliver services

By Karen Cooper, Chair of G320

2020 was certainly an interesting year to say the least and, lets be honest, none of us really saw it coming! Covid-19 wasn't on most of our risk maps and so we have all had to think on our feet and adapt quickly. Generally, we responded remarkably well and showed our true resilience.

For many of us, the pace of change has been dramatic as we have had to rethink the way we work, communicate, collaborate and deliver services. Smaller associations have always been pretty light on their feet but this has definitely tested us all.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way we live, work, socialise, travel and communicate and not all of this has been negative.

If you had asked me in January if we could deliver a service from home I would have said no. If you had told me that we would hold Board or G320 meetings by zoom, I would have laughed! In some ways the pandemic has enabled us to drive forward our programmes of change in a very condensed period, particularly in regard to digitalisation and agile working.

At PCHA we pride ourselves on being a community organisation with a strong relationship with our residents but even we have seen an increased level of positive engagement with residents during lockdown, in spite of not being in the office!

This has challenged our thinking about service delivery and ways of working and indeed what it means to be "local". We have recognised that positive engagement does not need to be linked to a traditional office model and in fact over 2020 we have made contact with residents with whom we had limited contact previously.

Therefore, we have a real opportunity to rethink how we work and deliver services to our residents and one thing is absolutely clear: we must be more agile and responsive in the way we work in 2021 and beyond.

In 2021 there are likely to be two keys areas of focus – increasing poverty/unemployment and an escalation in mental issues. Whilst these have always been a part of our work, I think we will all need to put additional resources in supporting residents (and in the case of the latter, staff too) in these two areas.

The pandemic has refocussed the sector as a whole on resident welfare and the White paper endorses this shift. Of course most smalls have always had this focus but that is not to say we should be complacent.

The White Paper, in the main, contains few surprises and the devil will be in the detail! However, this detail will take some time to emerge so we shall wait and see how some of this plays out.

Clearly building safety is one of the greatest challenges for the sector as a whole and whilst many smaller associations may not have an abundance of tall buildings this does not let us off the hook! Keeping our residents safe must be our priority but the Government must recognise the price tag attached to this and the impact this may have on our ability to develop affordable homes.

Customer service and resident engagement are at our very core and we welcome greater transparency and the return of more proactive consumer regulation. Residents should be able to hold us to account and so the removal of both the serious detriment test and the democratic filter is good news for residents.

One of the challenges in terms of the RSH measuring performance will be for the Regulator to develop consumer metrics that are meaningful to residents, measurable, achievable and relevant to the sector as a whole.

2021 and beyond will present some real challenges for the sector but it also presents a fantastic opportunity to review how we work with a view to making a real difference to our residents. Bring it on!