

Key facts

- AmicusHorizon is a large housing association operating in London and the South East that used resident involvement as a key part of its governance reshaping following regulatory difficulties in 2009
- since 2009, residents have contributed significantly to producing over £2million in existing or projected annual costs savings for AmicusHorizon
- the methodology to assess these cost savings is potentially indicative for other large housing associations
- cost savings have been achieved alongside improvements in services (such as better and earlier resolution of complaints; improved contracts, services and contributions to the local community)
- service improvements have been mirrored by increasing satisfaction

Residents have had a significant impact on how AmicusHorizon has developed since 2009. Owning and/or managing just under 28,000 homes, AmicusHorizon has assets of £1.25 billion and an annual turnover of £157m. It is a member of the G15 which represents London's 15 largest housing associations, and has a significant programme to build new homes across London and the South East.

AmicusHorizon's work since 2009 to involve residents shows not just that it is possible for large housing associations to work together with residents to shape a large scale housing business, but that it gives the organisation a competitive edge.

Background

Back in 2009, AmicusHorizon was an incoherent and inconsistent group of six subsidiary housing associations, loosely structured around a parent Board that struggled to maintain effective control over its subsidiaries. Inter-group squabbles meant there was little interest in or focus on what residents wanted. The group's dysfunctionality resulted in supervision by the Housing Corporation, the regulator at the time, and statutory appointees to AmicusHorizon's Board. This Board and the Senior Management Team decided that ongoing governance and operations should be shaped around resident needs and aspirations.

The structure established in 2009 which has operated since then included:

Groups	Purpose
A Residents' Council with 2 resident nominees from each Area Panel	Holds the Executive and Board to account; approves all customer facing policies and strategies; instructs organisation wide scrutiny projects; works jointly with the Board on corporate strategy and budgets
8 Area Panels for about 3,500 homes each – incl. 8 residents, 4 independents and 1 Board Member <i>Link</i>	Hold AmicusHorizon to account for local service delivery; scrutinise local services; agree and monitor Area Plans; govern some local resources eg. Local Improvement Funds
Kent, Sussex and London Repairs and Maintenance Panels (RAMPs)	Work with relevant staff to oversee delivery of the repairs service – an area where previously there had been particular dissatisfaction
Various dedicated task groups and forums	Various association wide groups, such as the Customer Service and Complaints Group and the Value for Money Group. Area Panels also establish forums to engage, such as forums for young people, older people and open forums

The Residents' Council is described as a “less formal version of the Board”. Meeting bi-monthly and serviced by the Governance Team (that also services the Board), it receives many of the same papers that the Board receives and it considers and approves all customer facing policies before they go to the Board. The Residents' Council has its own annual awayday followed by a joint Residents' Council/Board awayday which considers AmicusHorizon's annual budget and operating plan. The Residents' Council Chair and Vice Chair attend AmicusHorizon Board meetings as observers.

The Board has also developed links with Area Panels, through Board *Links* – Board Members who are allocated to each of the Area Panels who support their resident chairs and help them to develop their skills. For the Board Member, this helps them to get a *reality check* of the performance information they receive on the Board, and generally it has helped to build trust between the Board and residents.

Scrutiny reviews have taken place either through the Residents' Council or through Area Panels, and have included a review of complaints handling, local improvements, use of community spaces and estate halls, responsive maintenance, and resident governance – the last of which firmed up an effective base for the resident governance structure (ie. by clarifying ways of working, terms of reference, a single code of conduct for all involvement activities and many other matters).



Matt Bromley, Chair of the Kent Gateway Area Panel said that “I was sceptical when it was originally proposed to shut down the subsidiaries. But the resident involvement that has come about as a result of us becoming one housing association has been like a comparison between a Robin Reliant and a Rolls Royce. AmicusHorizon really bought into involving residents”.

Financial savings

AmicusHorizon has made financial savings as a result of involvement. Whilst it is not easy to attribute cost savings, the outcomes listed below would not have happened in the same way if residents had not been involved. Financial savings that AmicusHorizon has been able to identify include:

- a) **Complaints handling** – a *Taking the Temperature* report in 2009 showed problems regarding the speed with which complaints were responded to, the number of enquiries that were not being resolved at the first point of contact and were escalating to become formal complaints, the number of complaints made and satisfaction with complaints handling. Both the Residents' Council and the Board wanted steps taken to deal with this and a Complaints Working Group consisting of four residents and a lead officer was “locked away for two days” to revise the policy, procedure and accompanying letters. Its aim was to tackle what was perceived to have been an officer driven approach to complaints and to end up with



a fair and consistent policy and procedure which was approved by the Residents' Council and Board towards the end of 2009.

The review resulted in the number of complaints made to AmicusHorizon dropped from 2009/10 to 2013/14. The cost savings made are based on each formal complaint requiring 7 hours of officer time at £17.28 per hour:

Formal complaints		2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
a	Actual formal complaints received	1186	549	265	217	216
b	Resolution costs	£143,459	£66,407	£32,054	£26,248	£26,127
c	Costs if 1186 complaints had been made	£143,459	£143,459	£143,459	£143,459	£143,459
Monetary saving Difference (b) & (c)			£77,052	£111,405	£117,211	£117,332

- b) **First point of contact** – following consultation with residents through panels and through surveys, AmicusHorizon launched a *customer experience strategy* in 2011. Residents identified in the consultation a need for improvement in call handling with regards getting queries resolved by the person who first picked up the phone. Repeatedly being transferred between staff and inconsistent calling back were particularly considered drivers for dissatisfaction. AmicusHorizon responded by introducing a Customer Relationship Management software system, creating a knowledge base for staff, and by carrying out staff training. As a consequence, since then more queries and concerns have been dealt with on the first point of contact and fewer issues that require additional calls. This equates to financial savings as follows:

First time call handling		2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
a	Total calls	108,144	181,362	174,847	164,512
b	Actual calls dealt with first time	82,879	160,722	158,062	149,476
c	Percentage first time	76.64%	88.62%	90.40%	90.86%
d	If first time calls had remained at 76.64%	82,879	138,996	134,003	126,082
e	Difference between (b) & (d)	0	21,726	24,059	23,394
Monetary saving (e) x £16.34 x ½ hour			£177,503	£196,564	£191,129

This table sets out, on the assumption that second calls would have used half an hour of officer time at £16.34 per hour, that had the number of

enquiries requiring a second call remained at 23.36%, this would have cost an additional £191,129 (in 2013/14).

- c) **Gas safety and boiler replacement contracts** – residents sitting on AmicusHorizon's Gas Contract Project Teams participated in amalgamating boiler maintenance and replacement into a single contract for which they helped to design the specification and requirements. This contract was procured through a South East Consortium that brings together social housing organisations to enable efficiency savings. AmicusHorizon residents helped shape tender criteria and questions and participated in SEC's evaluating panel. Residents particularly added questions about customer satisfaction and contractor contributions to the local community, but they also participated in discussions about reducing the numbers of contractors used and in the amalgamation of the contracts.

Per annum contract savings	Kent	Sussex	London	Total savings
Servicing	143,914	171,648	Individual totals not known	
Communal	+20,885	6,640		
Installations	84,222	305,426		
Total savings	207,251	483,714	384,413	1,075,378

As well as these savings, the “Contractor Give Back Scheme” is realising over **£100,000** a year of cash or non-cashable support to community initiatives, training or development programmes. This particularly resulted from resident input into the procurement process.

- d) **Kitchen and bathroom replacement contracts** – AmicusHorizon's Repairs and Maintenance Panels were influential in shaping the procurement process for kitchen and bathroom replacement contracts. Their priorities included minimising inconvenience to residents, ensuring tidiness in contractor work, collecting a minimum of five references from other companies currently or previously procuring services from the suppliers under consideration, and value for money. Three AmicusHorizon residents were party to evaluating questions in the procurement process.

Value for money was particularly achieved through partnering again through the South East Consortium with two local councils, but cost savings



were balanced with minimising residents' service concerns, resulting in agreed evaluation criteria of 70% quality and 30% price. It was also agreed to cap maximum points to those offering a 5% reduction from known contract costs (because AmicusHorizon did not want cheap and potentially unachievable prices that would not deliver quality). This approach has delivered a reduction from the previous contract of £350,000 over five years, an annual saving of **£70,000**.

Subsequently, RAMP members expressed strong concern that AmicusHorizon was receiving a poorer service where main contractors were subbing all their work. The Sussex RAMP was particularly vocal and challenged AmicusHorizon staff to take on a greater role. As a result of this, following discussions that progressed through the RAMPs, to the Home Task Group, to the Residents' Council and then to the Board, it was decided that AmicusHorizon needed to have greater control by directly managing the installation contractor, do resident liaison itself rather than through the contractor and save money by removing a layer of administration.

As well as delivering service benefits, it is anticipated that this will result in annual savings from April 2015 in the Sussex region as follows (AmicusHorizon has not yet analysed potential savings in other regions):

	Current	2015 model	Difference
Contractor costs	£2,959,659	£2,293,362	-£666,297
AmicusHorizon costs	£93,836	£364,960	+£271,124
Annual cost savings	£3,053,495	£2,658,322	£395,173

- e) **Grounds maintenance contracts in Sussex** – the Sussex Repairs and Maintenance Panel had raised concerns that, whilst AmicusHorizon's grounds maintenance standards were high, there were not similar high standards on grounds maintained by the local councils in the areas concerned. These areas were intertwined with AmicusHorizon areas due to previous local authority stock transfers, but caused concern for local AmicusHorizon residents who would have been unaware who was responsible for them.

In 2011, residents from the panel worked with AmicusHorizon's Procurement Team to develop a partnership between AmicusHorizon, Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council to design, procure and evaluate a grounds maintenance tender for all three organisations. Resident priorities were both to deliver cost savings as well as ensuring a joined up grounds maintenance service. A team comprising representatives from the three organisations, including two AmicusHorizon residents, evaluated nine tenders, and the AmicusHorizon residents played a strong role throughout the day to ensure submissions were scored against scoring criteria.

The outcome of the process was a £5 million saving on the contract to the successful tenderer over a ten year period for the three organisations and an average annual saving to AmicusHorizon of **£100,000** per annum.

f) **Reduction in communications costs** - reviews, participated in by residents, resulted in residents expressing concern about costs relating to communications. In particular, the following savings were realised as a result of the reviews, with both items agreed by the Residents' Council:

- Reducing from quarterly to bi-annual rent statements – reduction of annual costs by **£24,000**. Residents can still request a rent statement at any time and can access statements on AmicusHorizon's website
- Reducing newsletters from quarterly to four monthly – reduction of annual costs by **£20,000**. This reduction having been discussed at Area Panels, the Communications Group and Residents' Council, 95% of 688 surveyed residents agreed with various cost saving approaches. Residents have also suggested further savings by enabling them to access the newsletter online.

Areas of resident influence	Total annual savings
Formal complaints reduction	117,332
Reduction in second calls	191,129
Gas contracts	1,075,378
Boiler Contractor Give Back Scheme	100,000
Kitchen & bathroom contracts	70,000
Kitchen & bathroom contracts (from 2015)	395,173
Grounds maintenance	100,000
Rent statements	24,000
Newsletters	20,000
Totals	£2,093,012

NB. annual savings are based on costs in 2013/2014 except where projected in advance.

These savings are indicative. In some cases, the figures also do not include cost savings for all three of AmicusHorizon's regions. It is also not the case that cost savings can be attributed solely to involvement activity because they came about because residents worked alongside staff to realise them. However, in some cases, residents highlighted key value for money areas that needed to be addressed, and in others, they participated in teams that chose value for money outcomes. It is difficult to separate their particular contributions, and clearly residents would have highlighted other issues than just what they wanted to achieve regarding value for money.

We asked AmicusHorizon staff what would have happened if residents had not participated and we were told that "potentially we would have selected

contractors who would have delivered lesser value for money, who wouldn't have met resident requirements and who wouldn't have offered benefits to local communities. Residents were part of teams determining specifications, questions and evaluating tenders. They were vocal, and each element of existing specifications was reviewed with them".

Service benefits

It might have been the case that the cost savings set out above might have been achieved at the expense of quality of service, but resident involvement has played a significant role in ensuring this has not been the case. Resident involvement has largely been about ensuring that quality remains the same or improves and that the service becomes more focused on issues of concern to residents.



For example, the Complaints Task Group has constantly *tweaked* complaints handling since 2009 to ensure quality and value for money of the service. Residents were arguing that queries should be resolved quickly and efficiently to prevent them escalating so better value for money could be achieved.

The table below shows AmicusHorizon's transition from formal to informal complaints handling.

Complaints received by type and year	Formal complaints	Informal complaints	Totals
2009/10	1186	13	1199
2010/11	549	709	1258
2011/12	265	1403	1668
2012/13	217	1562	1779
2013/14	216	1614	1830
Totals	2560	5302	7862

Following changes introduced from 2009 onwards, AmicusHorizon fully analyses complaints received (monthly through its Operational Performance Team, every six weeks by the Complaints Task Group, and quarterly by the Chief Executive) and information from complaints received informs service improvement. Whilst there have been some tweaks to what is considered to

be a complaint, “these would have made a minimum contribution to reducing complaints. The real reason for the reductions is having a central complaints team administering via our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system so nothing gets lost and every reply is quality checked”. Alongside this, AmicusHorizon has devoted resources to staff training and development to ensure that the Residents' Council's concerns about complaints handling were dealt with properly.

Similarly, whilst residents wanted value for money consideration of kitchen and bathroom contracts, they were also keen to see many previously identified service problems resolved. For example, they prescribed a replacements procedure and also insisted contractors offer:

- a detailed programme of works – specifying times and dates, and clarifying resident and contractor responsibilities
- daily communications with residents
- names of operatives who will carry out works
- a single point of contact
- clear intentions to “Give something back” to the local community
- consideration of the size of baths installed as part of upgrades
- instruction to residents for appliances they may not know how to use

Similarly, Residents' Council notes on the grounds maintenance contract lead with the statement that “grounds maintenance is a highly visible area of work. It is essential we get this right” and this led to a year long consultation programme with residents on grounds maintenance and cleaning contracts to identify issues of importance to residents.

Tenant satisfaction

AmicusHorizon's journey has also been marked by increasing satisfaction statistics. These have been gathered in accordance with industry standard methods. A general satisfaction survey was carried out with 3,750 residents during 2013/14 (3,714 of whom gave a valid response), representing roughly 16% of the resident population. The sampling error was 1.47%, just within AmicusHorizon's 1.55% target.

Survey	Population	Completed	Response rate	Error target	Sampling error
General satisfaction	22,733	3714	16%	1.55%	1.47%

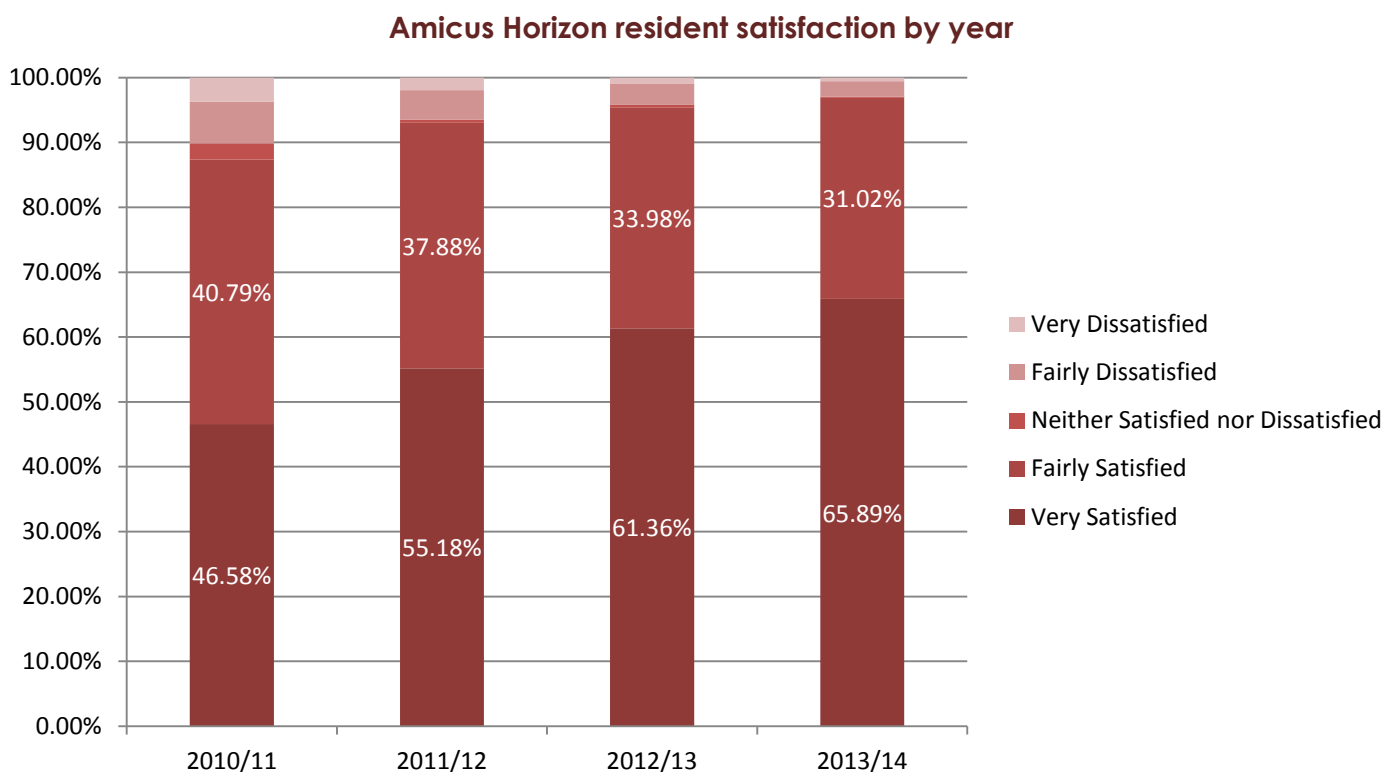
Residents were selected from across AmicusHorizon's resident population using a random sample stratified to ensure proportionate representation across its three geographical regions (Kent, London & Surrey, and Sussex). Residents were contacted over the phone by the Survey Team. The sample is

checked retrospectively each year to make sure it reflects the diversity characteristics of the resident population.

Satisfaction trends (carried out using the same methodology) are as follows:

Response	Year of Survey			
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Satisfied	87.37%	93.05%	95.34%	96.90%
Very Satisfied	46.58%	55.18%	61.36%	65.89%
Fairly Satisfied	40.79%	37.88%	33.98%	31.02%
Neither	2.52%	0.47%	0.47%	0.19%
Dissatisfied	10.11%	6.47%	4.19%	2.91%
Fairly Dissatisfied	6.43%	4.56%	3.31%	2.34%
Very Dissatisfied	3.68%	1.91%	0.88%	0.57%

These figures show a year on year trend towards satisfaction, increasing numbers very satisfied, and fewer both fairly and very dissatisfied.



Improvements in satisfaction have come about through a range of reasons. As well as AmicusHorizon’s resident governance and general resident involvement work, they also identify the following as contributory factors (although each of these would have been discussed and debated with the Residents’ Council and residents would have contributed to them):

- building a *One Team* spirit between board, staff and residents

- significant investment in training and culture change to improve customer service, written communications, staff confidence and ability to overcome self-limiting beliefs
- settling down after rationalisation of AmicusHorizon's structure in 2009
- setting a clear and unambiguous goal to be the best performing large landlord in the UK by March 2016. The five performance measures to determine this, set in conjunction with residents, include overall satisfaction.
- a heavy emphasis on performance through target setting, benchmarking and staff bonuses linked to achieving corporate goals (one of which is resident satisfaction)
- looking outside the sector to emulate best practice – staff have helped identify companies they perceive to be great and the actions they can take to match them
- use of customer insight to tailor services to different customer groups

Conclusions

AmicusHorizon has set ambitious targets to reduce costs by 2016. Chief Executive Paul Hackett commented that “we need to know what our customers think regarding which costs can be taken out. We need to have constant dialogue with them to know what they value”.

Residents' Council member Linda Scamp said “if there was no dialogue with residents, AmicusHorizon would not build trust with us. It's about AmicusHorizon having a grown up conversation with residents and we have responded by being interested in the needs of the business as well as the needs of residents. Until residents understand what things cost, they will only be interested in the things that directly affect them”.

Area Panel member Matt Bromley added that “AmicusHorizon is right to use the brilliant skills of residents. It makes us feel really valued – and it empowers us to do other things. Involving residents is a very powerful tool”.

Paul Hackett concluded “it's a cultural thing. Staff are reminded every day that we are here for the residents. It's there all the time. Because they see the hard work residents put in, this inspires them to go the extra mile for the residents – and it produces a virtuous cycle of added value. Throughout the organisation, everyone is polite and friendly and residents and staff support each other. Everyone now knows how vital resident involvement has been to the big changes and ambitions we have for AmicusHorizon”.

Key facts

- Community Gateway Association is a 6,000 home housing association in Preston, owned by tenant and resident members, and with a member elected Gateway Tenant Committee (GTC) integral to decision-making
- GTC members participated in making decisions to bring CGA's repairs service in house, resulting in annual savings of £1m; tenant scrutiny has also led to the grounds maintenance service being brought in house which will lead to further savings
- scrutiny exercises have particularly led to improvements in developing a right first time repairs service and in welfare benefits communications
- with the GTC integral to decision-making, CGA considers that tenants have had an impact on increases in tenant satisfaction
- CGA considers that tenants have made other contributions, including creating a family culture, inspiring staff and Board members, participating in developing a community minibus service, a youth inclusion strategy, and developing new community-led homes

Community Gateway Association is a stock transfer housing association set up in November 2005 to take ownership of the 6,000 homes formerly owned by Preston City Council. It was the first housing organisation based on the membership based Community Gateway model, through which only its tenants and leaseholder members own the organisation and have legal control over its rules and structure (currently there are 2,537 tenants and leaseholders members). Other residents over 16 can register for associate membership (currently there are 1,313 associate members) and anyone under 16 eligible for Under 16s membership (currently there are 183), which entitles them to participate but not vote.

“There is a huge cultural effect of having tenants around all the time and working closely with staff at all levels in the organisation. It contributes to a *family* culture where everyone sees each others' point of view. Staff are very aware of resident expectations and this leads to higher resident satisfaction but also to higher staff satisfaction with us as an employer.”

Background

The decision to use the Community Gateway model was integral to ensuring tenant support for Preston City Council's proposals. How it would operate in practice was developed and agreed between Preston tenants and staff from 2004 until the transfer in 2005.



Under the model, full members can stand for election to the Gateway Tenant Committee (GTC) which has up to 30 members and is the main committee under the Gateway Board. GTC members can stand for election to the Board,

which has 11 members of whom five are tenants. The GTC meets formally ten days in advance of every Board meeting (and informally as necessary) and receives the majority of Board reports. Any issues or recommendations members make are highlighted to Board. The 25 GTC members who aren't Board members form CGA's scrutiny panel which looks in detail at key service areas. Scrutiny is also carried out through service specific groups where tenants and staff monitor performance and make service improvements.

“Having tenants as such a significant part of our Board and governance brings a different feel to the Board room with Board members really focusing on resident satisfaction and Value for Money. Some of our independent Board members with experience on other boards have confirmed this using the word *inspiring* to describe the tenant contribution.”

The model and CGA's rules also requires CGA to have a community empowerment strategy which details how it involves residents, both in governance and in ten local community areas where residents are supported to form community groups or to run projects, activities or events that will produce positive social, economic or environmental outcomes.

Financial benefits

CGA has particularly identified £1m savings made through the transfer of its repairs service to an in-house Gateway Property Care (GPC). Whilst CGA does not claim that this decision was solely because of tenant involvement, concerns raised and discussions in the GTC about the repairs service were major contributory factors to CGA's decision in 2011 to transfer the repairs service in-house.

Savings have been made in GPC's first year of operations (it is too soon for them to be able to predict future annual savings) and are detailed in the CGA's VFM statement and budget and consist of savings on VAT and some structural/performance savings. Through their monitoring and scrutiny roles in the GTC, action groups, and the corporate planning process, CGA tenants had long been expressing concerns about the performance, flexibility, consistency and VFM of CGA's former repairs arrangements.

CGA has more detailed information from scrutiny reports to demonstrate the link between tenant involvement and the more recent decision to bring the grounds maintenance service in house. This decision came from the GTC's scrutiny arm carrying out an Estate Environment exercise which led them to propose that grounds maintenance should also be taken in-house, which has led to a Board decision to set up Gateway Green Care in 2014. CGA considers that cost savings will also result from this decision, but it is too soon to quantify them.

A CGA Board report says "initial investment required to bring the service in-house is anticipated to be offset by future savings in landscaping and other estate works which will be delivered using additional capacity within the new team. Value for money will also be achieved by VAT savings. We also expect that customers will receive a higher level of service without any additional expenditure and we expect to utilise the new skills, within the team, to provide services to other departments, such as landscape design, which will reduce the costs we currently pay external landscaping consultants."

CGA has also supported local groups to obtain external grant funding. The Ingol Youth Forum, developed through local community action, was successful in obtaining £85k of external funding from Biffa, Lancashire Environmental Fund and Lancashire Housing Partnership to create a new play park for their local community.



Service benefits

CGA's tenant scrutiny arrangements have particularly resulted in service benefits. Examples of benefits include:

- a VFM scrutiny review in 2012 made particular right first time recommendations to reduce expenditure and inconvenience of repeat visits. Updates to the scrutiny group and Audit and Risk Committee in late 2014 refer to *significant progress* in that 99.5% of all repairs were completed within timescale and the restructured GPC resulted in a reduction of follow-on jobs. The service improvement is also reflected in increases in satisfaction with the repairs service (from 85.0% in 2012 to 87.1% in 2014).
- a 2013 Welfare Reform scrutiny review made recommendations about communications with tenants and specifically requested that CGA ask, through the STAR survey, how effective tenants considered CGA had been in providing information about welfare benefits. These recommendations contributed to increasing satisfaction with information, advice and support received regarding claiming benefits (from 74.6% in 2012 to 85.3% in 2014); regarding managing finances and paying rent (70.7% in 2012 to 81.8% in 2014); and with regard welfare reform changes (from 57.7% in 2013 to 69% in 2014). Another outcome has been securing additional benefits of over £1.8m for tenants "helping to sustain tenancies and contributing to tenants' continued financial and social wellbeing" – and an increase on assumed CGA income collection (from 96.5% to 99.7% rent debit).

Tenant satisfaction

CGA reports increases in tenant satisfaction as follows:

Satisfaction rating	2014	2013	2012
Overall satisfaction with services	90.0	90.2	88.6
Satisfaction with quality of home	90.3	88.4	85.2
Satisfaction with neighbourhood	86.4	86.2	81.1
Satisfaction with value for money for rent	84.5	83.3	81.3
Satisfaction with repairs	87.1	85.2	85.0
Satisfaction that views are taken into account	76.1	72.0	70.9

Overall satisfaction has risen from 76.9% in 2006 to 90.0% in 2014. CGA reflected that "we can't prove that satisfaction levels are as result of tenant involvement, but we work in a co-regulatory way. The GTC in particular is integral to our day to day decision making processes and we are also accountable to our members".

Other benefits

CGA also records other social and community benefits:

- in 2005, the GTC was instrumental in CGA setting up a community minibus service. A social value assessment of this service carried out in 2014 reported a social value return of £6 for each £1 invested in the service. Feedback from some of the users of the service included that it had helped to build new friendships, to improve confidence, it had been a lifesaver, it had enabled access to outdoor events and social outings, and it had led to greater trust and more freedom.
- the GTC were instrumental in working with CGA to set up Purple Pathways – training and development opportunities for tenants, staff, and board members. Two CGA tenant board members have completed ILM governance training – “having involved residents means we have a significant responsibility to help develop their skills and knowledge. I have achieved qualifications through Gateway that I never thought I would have the opportunity to do”.
- the GTC particularly promoted the introduction of CGA membership for under 16s and ensured that the CGA developed a Youth Inclusion Strategy which they approved in early 2014. Since it was introduced in 2012, U16 membership has grown to 183, partly from existing youth groups – the Ingol Youth Forum, Moor Nook Young Voice and Acorn Community Group. A Young Gateway Action Group has also been established for people aged between 16 and 25, which is working on a supported housing project to kit out a new home on a limited budget; an It's a Knockout Event for young people; a project to advise the Museum of Lancashire on how to improve their offer for young people and on presentations. Work to help young residents with employability skills has led to 9 young people becoming employed, 1 going into further education and 2 into job search.



- a joint resident and staff group the Employment and Skills Action Group has overseen projects that have created several jobs, placements, apprenticeships and work experience within CGA, arranged job clubs and provided interview support, provided IT drop in sessions, and ensured training and development support through Purple Pathways. Overall this programme has benefitted several hundred adults and young people, with several people helped into work, and many more helped to build their confidence and self worth.
- the welfare reform scrutiny exercise also recommended that CGA should offer tenants greater financial education and help with digital inclusion. This has led to the setting up of tenant and staff digital buddies – helping people to access the internet and social media and to provide advice at CGA jobclubs on e-mail and internet skills. Outcomes from this work have included increased employability, improved wellbeing and less social isolation.
- CGA used a new homes development opportunity to build a new community on a derelict garage site in the Larches area of Preston. The Overton Road Group, made up of local residents, was developed as part of the community-led development – they discussed the scheme at an early stage with the Homes & Communities Agency and local Councillors; they engaged with the planning process; they worked with the scheme architects and contractors to develop the plans; held open events to promote what they were doing and are now working on the lettings process for the new homes – to be let in early 2015. The scheme has generally increased local skills and knowledge of the development process and has and will increase community cohesion.



Key facts

- Hull City Council owns 25,300 homes in Kingston upon Hull in the Humberside area
- Hull's investment in tenant involvement has been a key element of it turning around what was considered a failing housing service in 2003
- tenants have particularly had significant impact on improving Hull's voids performance, the contact centre, anti-social behaviour handling and standards in multi-storey blocks
- Hull considers that its tenant inspection programme has had a significant impact on increasing tenant satisfaction from about 50% in 2003 to 80% in 2014
- Hull's tenant involvement has led to individuals improving their confidence, skills and employability, and to an improved staff culture

Hull City Council owns about 25,300 homes in the city of Kingston upon Hull. Hull operates its housing service under a set of eight involvement principles that include open information, tenants deciding their own depth and degree of involvement, everything in housing open to influence, involvement being everyone's business, early enough influence, getting everyone involved, demonstrating that everyone's views have been taken into account and providing feedback, and planning for successful involvement.

Background

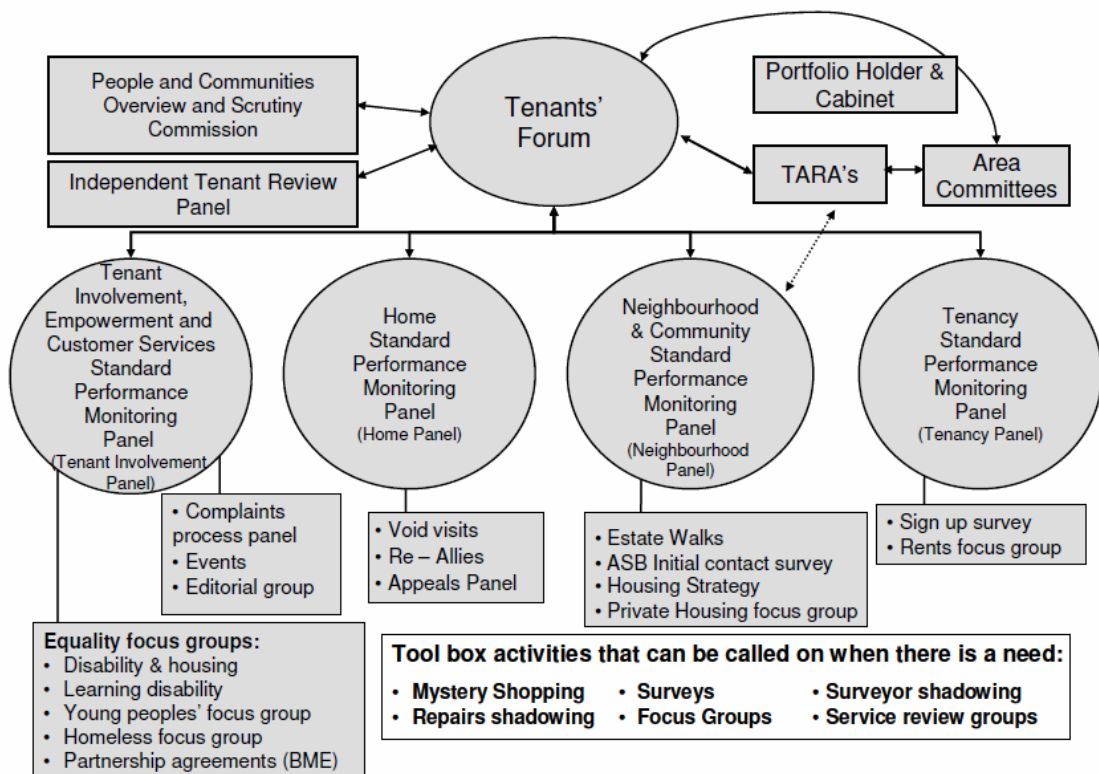
Hull has been on a journey to arrive at its current tenant involvement strategy. In 2003, Audit Commission inspections into Hull's housing service concluded that services were poor. Tenant involvement mechanisms were weak and overall tenant satisfaction and satisfaction with opportunities to influence the service were both about 50%. Significant changes needed to be made.

The introduction of a Tenants Forum in 2004 as a city wide hub for involvement with the housing service - linked directly to relevant Portfolio Holders and the Cabinet and to local tenants groups – was a key part of Hull's change process. However in 2009, the Audit Commission were still reporting key weaknesses with services including variable responses to customer queries, service standards not comprehensively measured, poor property conditions, slow delivery of the Decent Homes Standard, poor voids

performance and poor decision-making regarding difficult to let and non-traditional properties, and poor provision of aids and adaptations.

Further work was done with tenants to develop a structure for tenant involvement set out in a “key to our future” compact agreement in early 2011. This linked the Tenants Forum to an Independent Tenant Scrutiny Panel and four Performance Monitoring Panels, with the Tenant Involvement Panel being responsible for monitoring the “key to our future”.

The Tenants Forum meets monthly, is well attended by tenants and often attended by Portfolio Holders. It is in a position to delegate issues of concern to one of the Performance Monitoring Panels which in turn can address issues through standing groups (particularly a set of equality groups) or task and finish groups – all of which involve tenants.



Hull's developing tenant involvement structure has played a significant role in resolving Hull's earlier service problems and developing service performance.

Financial benefits

Specified financial benefits were not identified as part of the case study. However Hull considers that use of tenant inspectors saves on officer resources and consultant fees.

Service benefits

Hull reports a number of key service benefits that have developed in partnership with tenants:

- voids performance, a service area that the Audit Commission had particularly found weaknesses in, has been substantially turned around. Tenants directly input into the relet standard, leading to relet times falling since 2011 and new tenant satisfaction with their home increasing to 94%. Tenants set and monitor voids performance indicators and survey incoming tenants. In shaping relet arrangements, tenants have also played a major role in enabling 20 empty bedsits to be brought back into use and bungalows being remodelled to make them more desirable – again an area that the Audit Commission had identified weaknesses in.
- the Multi Storey Living Focus Group has developed monitoring standards for communal cleaning services based on the Great Britain Tidy Standard. This has led to a marked improvement in cleanliness. They are also producing a guide for residents on multi story living and are working with Hull to expand an initiative to assist first time and younger tenants do basic DIY.
- the Tenant Scrutiny Panel has assessed the contact centre, anti-social behaviour and recharges to the Housing Revenue Account during the past two years, leading to a range of service improvements.
- tenant identification of a mismatch between data on keeping appointments and fixing first time has led to a current focus on contractor repairs reporting which has led numbers of appointments kept increasing to 99.7%.



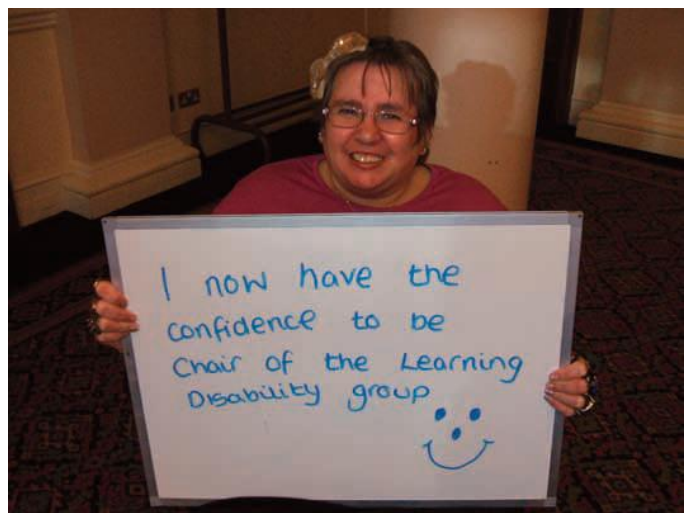
Tenant satisfaction

Tenant satisfaction has increased substantially since Hull's 50% low points in 2003. Overall tenant satisfaction is now at 80% and tenant satisfaction with repairs has increased over time to a current 98.1% - which Hull tenants and officers attribute particularly to the full and frank feedback that tenants give to Hull's tenant inspectors.

Other benefits

Hull tenants and staff also consider the following to be benefits of tenant involvement:

- direct tenant involvement in the development of communications materials (including posters and currently road testing new digital services) has resulted in time and resources not being wasted on communications that are not tenant focused or friendly
- staff sickness and longer term absence have reduced substantially – only 3 out of 447 employees have taken time off for stress related matters in the past year. This is partially attributed to the positive working relationship with tenants, where more tenants are participating in Hull than ever before with a strong collective desire for further progress, resulting in happier staff
- individually, tenants trained through Hull's training academy raises tenant expertise and provides them with back to work options (two of the current tenant involvement staff team began as tenant volunteers). Generally, Hull's growing tenant involvement culture has resulted in strengthening of confidence and skills – "it has made me realise I am far more capable than I first thought – I have a new level of confidence"



Key facts

- Leathermarket Joint Management Board (JMB), a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) managing 1,419 homes owned by the London Borough of Southwark, enables local residents to make decisions about how their homes are managed
- set up in 1996 following local discontent with housing services, tenant involvement through the JMB has led to improved repairs, rent arrears, communal cleaning, gardening and other services. In 2011, 92% of residents voted to continue JMB management (on a 68% turnout).
- for the last four years, the JMB has made 3% efficiency savings (£148K in 2013) from its budget in order to clear a backlog of historic major repairs
- the personal relationships the JMB has with its residents means that it performs well in areas such as tackling unlawful occupation, fire safety issues, and in supporting vulnerable residents
- the JMB's local support is enabling them to build much needed new local homes

Leathermarket Joint Management Board is a TMO that has managed 1,419 of the London Borough of Southwark's homes in London since 1996. About two thirds of the JMB's homes are tenanted, with the other third leased as a result of Right to Buy sales. The JMB is a strong example of what can be achieved where residents take responsibility for the delivery of services. Its main focus to date has been providing high quality services to meet the needs of its residents. This is largely through having an intimate knowledge of the estate's residents – what they want and what problems they face, and through effective systems of control. However, the JMB's recent decision to take responsibility for the local authority's Housing Revenue Account for the estate has freed them to explore other areas.

Background

In the early 1990s, growing tenant discontent in the area with Southwark's services, particularly repairs, grounds maintenance and cleaning, and a desire amongst local Leathermarket residents to take action coincided with a Southwark policy to devolve management to local areas and the appointment of a housing manager for the area who was particularly keen to support residents taking control. This led in 1994 to a feasibility study under

the Right to Manage regulations, and subsequently to a well supported ballot and handover of management responsibilities to the JMB in 1996.



The JMB has always had responsibility for most housing services, but in 2013, Southwark demonstrated their support for the JMB by agreeing to transfer responsibility for the Housing Revenue Account for Leathermarket's homes to the JMB, giving them full responsibility for decision making over their homes (to the extent that the small number of

services that the JMB considers would be best delivered by Southwark are now bought back from the Council).

The JMB is a membership organisation, where local residents and leaseholders are entitled to become members. They ratify the ten tenant directors on the JMB at the JMB's Annual General Meeting from two nominees from five independent Tenants & Residents Associations that predate the JMB. Between 60 and 70 people are involved through the five Tenants & Residents Associations which tend to attract about 30 people to their Annual General Meetings. The resident directors choose three additional co-opted directors on the Board (current co-optees bringing finance, housing management and regeneration skills). The Board meets four times per year and holds an annual strategic planning awayday. Resident directors chair five JMB sub-committees on finance, staffing, performance, social and major works, which enable the involvement of other JMB members. JMB Chair John Paul Maytum MBE said that "the Board considers strategic issues like our capital plan, and everyone understands that if we haven't got the money, then we are bugged, but the main focus of the elected residents on the JMB is how do we help and support people. That means that the Board tends to also focus on a lot of practical operational matters, such as, at the moment, the heating contract".

"Discussing which benefits have come from resident involvement is not straightforward because we see it all as a partnership between residents and staff. We all work together and residents and staff talk to each other regularly on a day to day basis."

Financial benefits

Carrying out a backlog of major repairs work has been a priority for the JMB over several years and a commitment was made four years ago to top slice 3% of the JMB's annual budget each year to provide additional funding to carry out this work. Since taking responsibility in 2013 for the Housing Revenue Account for the Leathermarket estate, 3% of the JMB's annual budget has been £148,000.

Having taking responsibility for the HRA has resulted in the JMB having increased expenditure available for its major repairs activity (an increase from £1.4K to £1.9K), but this has also resulted in a significant increase in responsibilities and workload which the JMB has decided will be absorbed within existing staffing resources in order to ensure the backlog of major repairs is tackled sooner. The resources that the JMB has saved over several years have meant that the JMB is in a position to release a further £815K to increase spend on major repairs.

The JMB ability to make these savings is primarily as a result of efficiencies due to the way that the JMB carries out repairs – “we measure the value: cost relationship of our repair team in the same way as our external contractor, whose charges are very competitive, but our own team was 18% less”. The JMB has made efficiencies through “better contractors and better control”.



“Even where we buy services from Southwark, we get a more cost efficient service because they know we will scrutinise what they do. It's a cultural thing. People living in Southwark's homes think poor service is *just what happens* and so problems often don't get reported. This results in contractors being called back again and again and repairs being patched up. The JMB has lifted expectations for

residents and so we know very quickly when things are not right and contractors know that they have to deliver us good value for money”.

Service benefits

As a Tenant Management Organisation, the JMB has to have an annual vote amongst its members and a five yearly ballot amongst all residents and leaseholders to enable its management agreement to continue. This means that the JMB particularly aims to ensure high quality for its residents,

particularly in the areas identified by residents as its main priorities - responsive repairs, estate cleaning and gardening and tackling anti-social behaviour.

Responsive repairs - a measure of success in a Local Authority TMO is being able to move on from the culture of most responsive repairs being emergency or urgent. The efficiency of the JMB's repairs service, together with it starting to operate a long term asset management strategy, has resulted in most repairs now being carried out within target times for routine repairs. The JMB checked the quality of 42% of the 6,482 repairs carried out in 2013/14 (either through a repairs inspector or through ringing the resident) with 97.31% of these repairs being carried out to a high quality.

Estate cleaning and gardening - the JMB has agreed its cleaning and gardening standards with residents and these standards are widely advertised across the estate. The JMB's Estates Services Manager spends Thursdays doing formal inspections of these services, with residents invited to them, and on the agreed JMB scoring matrix between 1 and 6 cleaning scores range between 4.8 and 5.3 and gardening between 5 and 5.3 (with 4 being acceptable and 6 excellent).

Tackling anti-social behaviour – in 2012, the JMB set up an ASB working group to review how it tackles anti-social behaviour. The JMB performs well on ASB issues. In 2013/14, the JMB managed 98 formal ASB cases, with the JMB working with Southwark to ensure that 26 residents signed Acceptable Behaviour Contracts. They also worked with Southwark to combat drug dealing in parts of the estate, and used mediation to resolve other issues. The JMB's review in 2012 aimed to "complete the loop" by ensuring that resolutions to ASB problems were reported back to residents.

Potentially of more importance to local residents are the many incidents that would end up being considered ASB in most housing providers, but which the JMB resolves immediately as part of its day to day operations - "things are resolved at source as people raise them. This means that staff often don't have to go through mechanical processes to respond to them". This means as well that it is very rare that formal complaints are made.



The JMB creates a framework in which local knowledge and personal relationships develop which prevent ASB occurring. Starting from when new residents are allocated by Southwark to the JMB's empty homes, the JMB seeks to establish a positive

relationship with residents through JMB local directors meeting them to induct them into the community. The JMB also initiated a gardening and sculpture project which brought together local young people, encouraging them to have a sense of self-worth and to take *ownership* of their environment.

“The JMB knows everyone personally and the residents all know the manager and senior staff. When we are working on something – we know our people and how they will respond to something and we plan our work accordingly”.

This local knowledge of the resident constituency and personal relationships that have developed has led to a number of practical benefits:

- the JMB were able to hold a **Better Fit** dialogue with 80% of its residents to assess their personal needs (ie. whether they needed larger or smaller homes) and people who wanted to move. Through this, seven residents were rehoused into smaller homes freeing up larger homes for Southwark’s register.
- **fire safety** is a major issue in Southwark, and the JMB’s personal relationships has meant that residents are willing to do the things they need to do to make their homes safe (ie. such as keeping fire exits clear and removing the metal grills that had been put up in former times when the estate had a reputation for being less safe and secure) – “we don’t just tell people what to do. We inform people why they need to do them and we build good relationships. It’s this soft and fluffy side that leads to our residents being happy to do these things”.
- the JMB works hard to tackle **unlawful occupation**. Each year, the JMB carries out formal checks of more than a third of its residents to ensure that the resident is still occupying, and as a result of this, it took focused action regarding 20 tenancies (with 7 properties repossessed and 5 court cases pending) – “people trust the JMB. We get personal tip offs – and we know everyone. We soon know where things are not what they should be”.
- the JMB is particularly able to provide **support for vulnerable residents**. It knows 77 residents where it ensures that, either the JMB, their carer or support worker, keeps in close personal contact with them. JMB directors organise Christmas hamper deliveries for some residents. The JMB also particularly identified four residents in danger of self harm as a result of welfare reform and took steps to mitigate these risks.

The JMB’s knowledge of its resident constituency also puts it in a strong position to perform well in others, such as:

- the JMB collected 100.8% of **rent arrears** in 2013/14, with a 2.2% rent arrears percentage (compared to Southwark's 4.8%) – “there was a clear focus from the Board on rent collection. We particularly highlighted the need for early identification and good support for residents, and we built our strategy around that”.
- the JMB also performed well in relation to letting and collecting rent from **garages** – a major problem issue in Southwark, where more than half of council garages in the borough remain empty – “we took a pragmatic approach to renting garages and nearly all of them are now occupied. Whilst the council only collect 72% of the rents from the garages they are able to let, we are now collecting 94%”.
- through their local focus, the JMB has also been able to *fine tune* its **empty homes** procedure, advertising homes through Southwark's choice based lettings when it is known that they will come vacant, resulting in a void turnaround time of 19 days.

Building new homes



The JMB's local knowledge has also enabled it to work with the local community to progress the development of new homes on the estates that the JMB manages. Through the independent Leathermarket

Community Benefit Society, the JMB is building 65 homes on two sites in partnership with Southwark that will go to TMO residents who had been identified as needing different sized homes in the *Better Fit* survey (again freeing up their homes for letting through Southwark) – “getting local residents involved unlocked the sites. It made those people supporters of the schemes rather than protestors in front of the bulldozers, and the homes would not have been built if it hadn't been for the JMB building this support”.

Resident satisfaction

Whilst Southwark carries out resident satisfaction surveys of all its residents and leaseholders, it identifies results for all TMOs in Southwark, which means that its data is not specific to the JMB. Satisfaction data from a survey carried out in 2013 showed that overall satisfaction with landlord services amongst Southwark TMO tenants was 78% as opposed to other Southwark tenants

which was 64% and the comparison between leaseholders was even greater (28% satisfaction for Southwark leaseholders and 49% for TMO leaseholders). However, the researchers identified a sampling error factor of +/-8% in relation to the TMOs due to poor turnout (attributed to either TMO residents being confused about whether a Southwark survey applied to them or lack of identification with Southwark).

More reliable was the JMB's last five yearly continuation ballot (held in 2011) in which 68% of tenants and leaseholders voted, with 92% of voters being in favour of ongoing JMB management (76% of tenants voted, with 93% being in favour of the JMB). Prior to this ballot, the JMB also carried out a sample survey (in which 173 residents voted) which showed that 86% agreed that the estate was well looked after; 73% felt that the JMB's services were better than Southwark's; 82% felt that a tenant managed service is important; and that 79% would recommend to a friend to live on the JMB's estates.

Conclusions

Leathermarket JMB is a community-led housing organisation in south London that measures its success on the basis of the practical benefits it provides to its residents and future residents. John Paul said that "delivering a service for 50,000 homes necessarily means there is a detachment from people".

"We make better, more refined, decisions; we have tighter scrutiny and better contracting; and we have personal relationships that all allow us to unlock behaviours and decisions that wouldn't happen otherwise."

Tenants Leading Change case study – Soha Housing

Key facts

- Soha Housing, owning and managing about 6,000 homes in areas around South Oxfordshire, was set up in 2005 with a strong tenant involvement structure
- in the last year, Soha has recorded £655K savings where tenants were involved in repairs and planned maintenance retendering exercises
- tenant involvement has led to considerable service benefits in relation to repairs, voids, complaints, improved services for disabled tenants, support and communications on welfare reform
- Soha considers that tenant inspections and face to face communications with tenants has had an impact on increases in tenant satisfaction since 2005
- Soha also considers that there are several other benefits that come from tenant involvement – particularly better communications and individual benefits for those involved

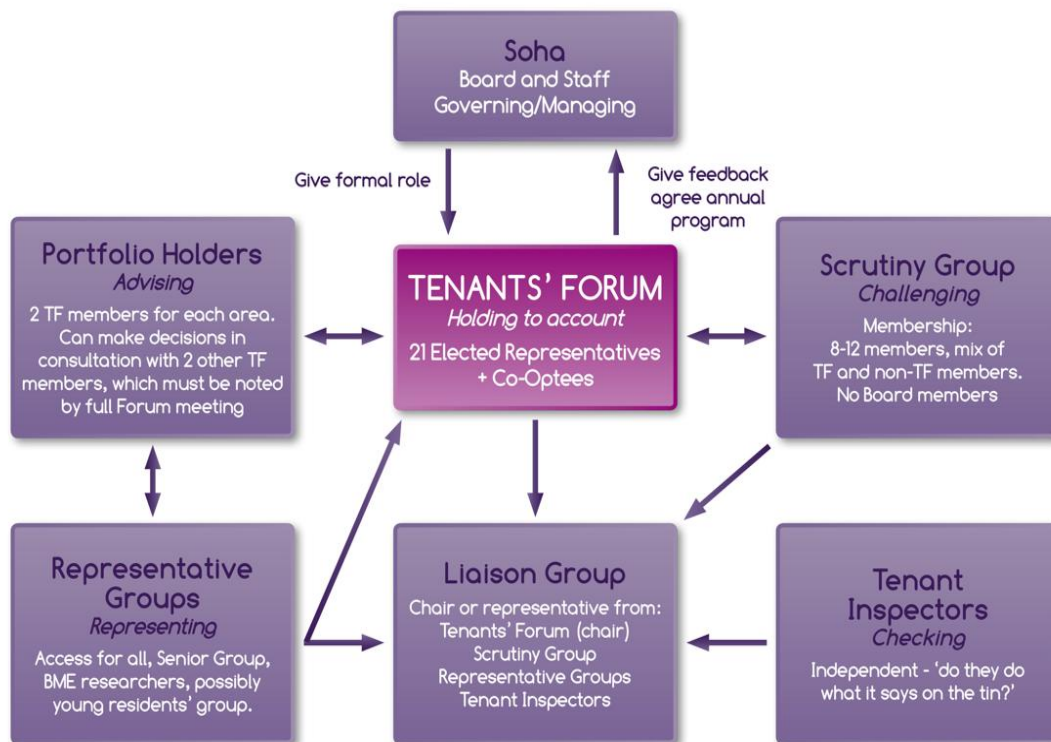
Established in 2005, Soha Housing owns and manages about 6,000 homes. With an annual turnover of £35m, Soha has a development programme building 300 new homes each year in Oxford, South Oxfordshire, Swindon, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire, High Wycombe and Cotswold District.

Background



Formed from stock transfer from South Oxfordshire District Council, Soha has been built on a strong tenant dynamic, including the five tenants on its 12 member Board. Soha lists having “highly satisfied customers” and “empowering and maximising the involvement of residents to make a difference” amongst its aims. Soha's involvement structure is

made up of an elected 21 member Tenants' Forum, a recruited Tenant Inspectors Group and a Tenant Scrutiny Group consisting of 8 to 12 representatives either from the Tenants Forum or elsewhere.



The Tenants Forum is the lead tenant body and the Board seeks their views of major issues like the Corporate Plan and policies prior to them being considered by the Board. Drawn from the Forum, a system of Portfolio holders enables tenant representatives to champion and work with service managers on particular areas of business.



Using robust systems (such as staff, tenant and manager interviews, desktop review, focus group and surveys and site visits), the Tenant Inspectors check Soha's delivery of service standards – “do they do what it says on the tin?”. The Tenant Scrutiny Group challenges Soha's Board and Management at a strategic level, asking “is it the right tin?” For example, they were instrumental in Soha's decision not

to issue flexible tenancies. The group decides with the directorate what they will review and reports to the Board. It has an action tracker to enable it to review implementation of its recommendations, with an escalation process for disputes and implementation delays.

Financial benefits

Tenants were involved in procurement decisions for repairs and planned maintenance contracts which led to savings of **£655,000**. The grounds maintenance contract went through tenant surveying and focus groups at an early stage to ensure tenant views were central to drawing up the specification. Specific tenant oversight of the process was through one of the Tenants Forum's Portfolio Holders, and specification and quality assessment of tenders was through a panel with an equal split of tenants and officers.

In general, Soha considers that it could not afford to resource the volunteer time that tenants give to the organisation. Soha has plans to cost these savings in the future.

Service benefits

Soha identified a number of service benefits that have developed as a result of tenant involvement:

- tenant involvement during tendering led to a number of improvements in the repairs specification, including school run appointments, resulting in a more customer focused service. Mystery shopping highlighted customer service areas for improvement, leading to training and improvements to the out of hours service
- a scrutiny review, based on survey research, improved Soha's complaints process. The resulting new procedure, reduced from three to two stages and introducing more tenant involvement and better early resolution, has halved the number of formal complaints. Tenants now get complaints dealt with promptly, bureaucracy is cut for tenants and staff, but Soha retains a robust process to put things right.
- both the Inspectors and Scrutiny Group insistently raised the need for informal complaints to be consistently logged. This led to a new *Voice of the Customer* project where problems are identified as runners (on going), repeaters (once a week issues) and rarities (one off issues). Feedback from tenants who call Soha is now consistently captured, empowering and enabling the Customer Services team to spot potentially serious issues and to raise less urgent but recurring issues.
- the Access for All Group helped develop the Disability Equality Scheme in 2007 which led to better information being held (profiling data held for more than 90% of tenants) and services tailored to best match tenant needs. Satisfaction with repairs for disabled tenants has increased from 74% to 87% since introduction of the scheme. The group has led to many other improvements, including a more accessible office and meeting

environment, better communication about events, and increased budgets for adaptations. The group is currently considering introducing part-time Occupational Therapist posts. Tenants contributed to Soha's Single Equality Strategy *So what's it got to do with you?* identifying priorities for different groups. Having been part of Soha's formal launch of the strategy, Access for All, the Seniors Group, and BME, younger and LGBT tenants feel an ownership of the strategy and continue to monitor its progress.

- through tenants being more likely to be open with other tenants, tenant inspections, such as post repairs phone contacts and void reviews have led to improved voids cleaning and procedures (for example, chimneys are swept, carbon monoxide tests carried out and fires lit in voids with solid fuel fires) and grounds maintenance performance.
- Tenants have participated closely in Soha's *we're here to help* response to Welfare Reform, including through a Standing Group established in 2012, a Tenant Welfare Champion, word of mouth research and information campaign and reviews by both the Tenant Inspectors and Scrutiny groups. Results from this approach have included falling and top quartile rent arrears, 52 tenants out of 310 affected by the Bedroom Tax transferred, and 88% of general needs tenants think Soha has done a good job in keeping them informed about changes to benefits.
- ASB complaints had risen in Berinsfield village following reduction of youth provision. Discussion with local residents led to Soha funding a short project of street sports. Youth input to the village plan and a short film setting out their aspirations and frustrations led to a successful ongoing funding application. The result of this activity is that there have been no further reported cases of street ASB or dispersal orders.

Tenant satisfaction

Since 2005 tenant satisfaction rates have increased significantly:

	2005	2006	2007	2010	2012	2014
% overall satisfaction	77	77	84	91	90	88
% satisfied that Soha listens	54	54	54	71	73	76

The question about whether Soha listens to tenants has changed, but has remained similar. Figures are accurate to +/- 3% with a 95% confidence rate

Soha considers that satisfaction improvements are linked to increasing tenant involvement, the introduction of Tenant Inspectors and tenant scrutiny – “overall satisfaction and satisfaction that we listen to tenants both increased significantly when we made a strategic decision to invest in and focus on Involvement. These figures had been stagnant for a number of years. A Board paper *Maximising Resident Involvement* from 2007 notes a number of measures that will indicate the success or otherwise of increasing resources to

a still modestly sized team. There is certainly a correlation with this step change and tenant satisfaction”.



Particular work has been done with tenants to understand a lower than average tenant satisfaction with quality of the home. This has included surveys, regression analysis of deeper phone conversations and input from involved residents. This resulted in changes that have included capping the lifespan of components and more and

better communication about what tenants can expect, including a photo diary showing new components being fitted. The outcome from this is that Soha's 2014 STAR survey shows satisfaction with home quality of home has risen from 83% to upper quartile 89%.

Other benefits

Tenants have played an important role in Soha's communications, including:

- tenants started producing Soha's Annual Report in 2008 – picking the agency to use, writing copy and generally telling the story, which immediately resulted in a threefold increase in feedback forms received back. Its engaging and informative nature means that it is read by tenants and improves Soha's accountability to tenants
- a similar approach is taken regarding Soha's Tenant Times – with similar outcomes
- active use of social media by some involved tenants presents a positive impression of Soha as a landlord
- media work by local groups, such as the Gainsborough Residents' Association in Henley, has led to positive news stories in papers that would only include information from local people rather than organisations. This group were one example of the success of Soha's Community Action Plans in their aim to tackle priority issues in individual neighbourhoods. Physical improvements delivered following consultation built resident confidence in their ability to get things done and, with Soha's support, their association was set up. It runs its own surveys, organises planting and physical improvements that have led to prizes for the appearance of the neighbourhood and holds community events bringing people together.

Satisfaction with the area as a place to live has improved and Soha's reputation is enhanced by its support for the association.

- the Seniors Group contributed to the development of Soha's Older Persons Strategy in partnership with Age UK, and now monitors its delivery. The strategy has resulted in new services and activities, such as chair based exercise, improving tenant health and wellbeing. The group also plays a role in communication with older persons (eg. hosting an older person health and wellbeing day and initiating a sheltered housing newsletter). It works closely with Soha to take decisions about unsustainable accommodation and have played an advocacy role with tenants living in schemes due to close, helping them to understand their options. This has resulted in positive moves and decants, with many people reporting an improved quality of life.

Soha considers that work, volunteering, self-confidence, digital inclusion and tackling isolation are part of its business. The following are cited as examples of impact in this area:

- on leaving Tenant Scrutiny Group in the last year, two members had joined Soha's Board, one since gaining employment, two others had gained employment and one had gone onto study at degree level and has since gained employment – “the credit that individuals give to their involvement is some demonstration of the potential impact on helping people achieve their aspirations”.
- “the testimonies of involved tenants as to what they get out of involvement are humbling. One woman talks about her volunteering as one way of asserting herself against lazy media stereotypes of social housing tenants and further her pride in seeing people have easier access (physically or through policy changes) because of a piece of work she's done”.
- “the growth in skills and confidence is quite staggering”. Several tenants have spoken in public for the first time through their involvement with Soha, including one volunteer who now regularly addresses national conferences.
- “the (justified) pride that involved tenants feel in their work, the friendships made and the formal and informal mentoring”.