

Hexagon Housing Association

Resident Involvement Policy 2014 - 2017

1.0 Policy Statement

- 1.1 Hexagon is committed to involving our residents and to capture their views and priorities in order to influence the delivery of the housing service. This Resident Involvement Policy provides the framework for ensuring that we work in partnership with our residents at all levels with the aim of improving the quality of services we provide.
- 1.2 Hexagon is committed to ensuring that all its residents have the opportunity to participate in shaping the delivery of the services they receive, and we will design and deliver involvement activities which are reflective of service areas and use the feedback, findings and results from these activities to drive forward continuous improvement in service provision.
- 1.3 The term 'resident' is used throughout this policy to refer to tenants (both directly managed and co-op or agency managed), shared-owners and leaseholders and anyone legitimately residing in a property where Hexagon is the landlord.

2.0 Regulatory Requirements

- 2.1 In April 2012 the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) published their new regulatory framework for social housing. This policy is developed in the context of the "bedding in" of the significant changes in the regulatory arrangements which saw the replacement of the top-down regulation approach. In its place social landlords are expected to develop a co-regulatory approach which embraces self-regulation, resident's scrutiny and the complaints process as the way to drive forward continuous improvement.
- 2.2 Co-regulation refers to social landlords being accountable to their residents on how they deliver the housing service. The expectation inherent in this approach is that social landlords subject their service delivery to resident's scrutiny. One of the foundations of co-regulation is being transparent to residents for services delivered and this in turn becomes the basis for designing involvement activities which allow residents to independently scrutinise services and policies and make recommendations to managers and the Board.
- 2.3 Residents Scrutiny is defined as a range of involvement activities whereby residents monitor service performance and thereby challenge examples of weak delivery or service failure in order to ensure that services reflect resident's priorities and deliver value for money.

3.0 Corporate Plan

3.1 Underpinning the 2014-17 Hexagon Corporate Plan are objectives which aim to:

- put residents and service-users at the heart of what we do
- change our ways of working to achieve maximum efficiency
- ensure that Hexagon continues to grow in a financially, socially and environmentally sustainable manner

3.2 Hexagon recognises that the effective involvement of residents is central to achieving the Corporate Plan objectives. In furtherance of that aim, this policy underpins

- how residents are involved in helping to deliver continuously improving services
- how we are accountable to residents by involving them in how we deliver the service

3.3 The Resident Involvement Policy sets out to support the Corporate Plan objectives by

- providing a range of accessible activities for residents to influence the service
- engaging with residents in the ways they are most comfortable with, and which reflect their needs and preferences
- embedding resident involvement across the organisation
- developing the capacity of residents so that they have the information, knowledge and confidence to become involved and influence decision making within Hexagon
- ensuring value for money and maximising outcomes from involvement activities
- developing new and innovative means by which residents can get involved

4.0 Related Policies and Strategies

4.1.0 Apart from the Corporate Strategy, resident involvement within Hexagon interrelates to a number of other policies, strategies and documents. These include:

4.1.1 **Resident Involvement Impact Assessment** – this is produced annually and examines the outcomes and impact of involvement activities and how these have helped shape the service. The findings from the impact assessment are used to design the involvement activities for the following year and also help inform the review of this policy.

- 4.1.2 **Local Offers** – these are a range of standards and commitments which reflect resident’s priorities for key service areas, which residents have previously identified as Anti-Social Behaviour, Building Communities, Hexagon Help, Responsive Repairs, Stock Improvement and Transfers.
- 4.1.3 **Get Involved and Make a Difference** – an annually produced leaflet which sets out a range of ways in which residents can shape the services provided, and describes the level of influence and time commitment which each activity involves. The responses to the leaflet are then held on a database which is later used to send invitations to residents to take part in their preferred activities
- 4.1.4 **Service Standards** – in consultation with residents’ focus groups, Hexagon has developed a set of key service standards covering all areas of the housing service.
- 4.1.5 **Equality & Diversity Policy** – the key objectives of the Equality and Diversity Strategy are embedded within the Resident Involvement policy. We seek to meet the needs of our residents by offering a wide range of options for residents to engage with us. We will monitor the impact of involvement activities and take steps to engage with groups of residents who are underrepresented within the general profile of involved residents, such as young residents.
- 4.1.6 **Community Investment Strategy** – Hexagon’s Community Investment Strategy sets out how we will build on assets already existing in local communities, including the skills of individuals and the capacity of community groups. The objectives which the strategy sets out to achieve are distinct from those in the Resident Involvement policy: the Community Investment Strategy is geared towards building capacity within local communities, and improving the life chances and quality of life of our residents. Community Investment has different outcomes to those of Resident Involvement and is not linked to residents influencing or improving service delivery.

However, in meeting the objectives in both the Community Investment Strategy and the Resident Involvement Policy the Resident Involvement team will work more closely with the Community Investment team in delivering initiatives such as events and training for residents.

5.0 Policy Objectives

- 5.1 This policy has been developed in partnership with residents at the Residents Forum and demonstrates the importance of involvement in influencing and improving the services we provide. The objectives of this policy are:

- an inclusive approach to involvement;
- ensuring that there are a variety of different opportunities for residents to influence the services they receive, and at various different levels
- developing innovative methods designed to increase the opportunities for residents, including those from under-represented groups, to become more actively involved in the scrutiny of Hexagon's services
- enabling training opportunities that will empower residents to be involved in improving homes and their communities
- delivering resident-led scrutiny which demonstrates Value for Money for both residents and the organisation

5.2 This policy establishes the basis for ensuring that Hexagon has resident involvement activities which support effective resident scrutiny for the purpose of improving services and creating accountability within a framework of co-regulation. Developing this further, two key approaches underpin the policy objectives, which are:

- ensuring accountability – expanding resident scrutiny activities which help to ensure that we work in a transparent manner that will support residents to hold us to account
- improving services - develop the menu of options for residents to become involved and which facilitates opportunities for regularly shaping and reviewing the service.

6.0 Menu of Involvement

6.1 Hexagon has long held a cultural commitment to place resident involvement at the heart of a range of strategic and operational activities. This has been supported by a menu of options for involvement which offers residents the ability to choose how they wish to be involved.

6.2 Hexagon offers a range of ways for residents to become involved at a level which suits them. We want to attract involvement across the general resident base and from different age groups, ethnic backgrounds and geographical areas. This will help to ensure that the services provided meet residents' needs and priorities.

6.3 The ways in which residents can get involved are set out in the next section and have been developed with residents as their preferred means of being involved. However, we are always open to new ideas and innovative ways of involving residents.

7.0 Involvement Activities

7.1 **Tenant Board Members** – Hexagon encourages residents to consider whether they have the experience, skills and confidence to seek a place on the Board. Board membership allows residents to have a direct say regarding decisions concerning the strategic direction of the housing

service at the most senior level within Hexagon. Membership onto the Board is open to all Hexagon tenants, and all tenants are annually invited to consider an opportunity to stand for election onto the Board.

- 7.2 **Performance Review Group (PRG)** - a resident-led group who assess and challenge the housing performance across a range of areas including responsive repairs, rent collection, voids management, gas servicing and complaints handling and who put forward recommendations for improvement to service managers and to the Board.
- 7.3 **Repairs Group** – a group of residents who scrutinise, challenge and review performance and value for money in the responsive repairs service. The Group focuses primarily on contractor performance in the delivery of the service and meet regularly with the managers from Hexagon and the contractor to review performance. The Group receives recommendations from the Performance Review Group who, in their role of a scrutiny panel, may periodically request that the Group assess areas of the repairs performance in greater detail. In turn, the Group reports to the Performance Review Group. The Group also provides resident input into the procurement process for repairs contracts.
- 7.4 **Resident Inspection** – a group of residents who have been trained in assessing service delivery and who carry out an in-depth evaluation to a service area. The inspectors examine the processes by which the service is delivered, and how well that delivery stands up against policy and service standards. The findings from the inspection result in the production of an improvement action plan which is reported to and monitored by the directorate.
- 7.5 **Estate Grading** – small teams of residents who periodically inspect the communal areas of blocks and estates and assess these against the Estate Service Standards. The findings are then reported to Housing Services who devise an action plan for improvement to the estates. Based on the findings, each estate is graded as Gold, Silver or Bronze and published on the estate which has been graded as well as in *Home News*.
- 7.6 **Annual Report Group** – a group of residents who convene specially to prepare and scrutinise the forthcoming Annual Report to residents. As well as advising on the look and design of the report, residents also assess how the service has performed against key service areas over the preceding year and how the service has provided value for money.
- 7.7 **Tenants & Residents Associations** - an active way for residents to get involved in the housing and environmental issues within their local community. The associations are recognised and supported by Hexagon but are independently run by a democratically elected residents' committee. Residents associations who become recognized are entitled to receive an annual grant from Hexagon to cover the costs of their work.

Residents Associations work to improve their neighbourhood and bring local people together. Their main focus is to engage in dialogue with Hexagon and influence decisions that affect their neighbourhood. Hexagon supports the work of resident associations and will work in partnership with them to ensure that they operate in an inclusive way and that all sections of the community are actively encouraged to participate

- 7.8 **Feedback in Care & Support Services** - residents of the Care and Support services are encouraged to attend house meetings at each home. These are held on a regular basis and both residents and staff can contribute to the agenda. Topics under discussion will relate to issues which affect that home and may be raised via a Suggestion Box which is available in each home.

Feedback Forums are held every two months. These differ from the house meetings in that residents from all 3 services are invited to the Forum to collectively share their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Feedback Forums provide an opportunity for residents to contribute on issues such as accommodation, support services, planning annual events and activities in the homes as well as accessing community facilities. Issues raised by residents at the Feedback Forum are then actioned by managers. The Feedback Forum is facilitated by the Resident Involvement Team and does not have any input from staff working in the homes. This allows residents the freedom to raise “sensitive” issues that they may prefer not to raise in the presence of staff.

As well as house meetings and Feedback Forums, residents are able to give feedback as part of one to one support planning sessions where they meet with their keyworker to review progress and plan objectives for the future.

- 7.9 **Estate Champions** - residents who regularly inspect the communal areas of the estate or block where they live and report issues to Hexagon as and when these arise and need attention.
- 7.10 **Focus Groups** - residents who are invited to take part in small discussion groups to give in-depth views and opinions on a particular service. Focus groups allows for residents to influence the direction of specific services by way of their experience-based feedback which are fed into service reviews or policy reviews
- 7.11 **Readers Panel** – a panel of residents who review the design, layout and content of *Home News* the quarterly resident’s magazine. The Panel also made recommendations to the Editorial Board on items to be covered in future issues of the magazine. Through the work of the Panel, residents work in partnership with Hexagon to ensure that information is conveyed in an accessible and understandable way

- 7.12 **Reality Checking** - a large group of residents who feed back to us on their experiences when they have occasion to report an issue over the phone. The feedback is then used to assess the quality of the service provided from the initial point of contact right through to when the issue has been resolved.
- 7.13 **Residents Day** – first initiated in 2007 and staged each year since, this is an event which is open to all residents. Residents plan the programme and venue for the event as well as suggesting activities for younger residents.

This event presents an opportunity for residents to find out more about Hexagon services, talk about the issues that matter to them and meet senior staff and contractors to find out how we can work together for benefit of residents.

- 7.14 **Residents Design Group** - residents review the design plans of new schemes being delivered as part of the development programme. Residents draw on their own experience of living in a new-build scheme to suggest where modifications need to be made to the design plans, particularly around the internal layout and to the communal areas
- 7.15 **Residents Forum** – allows consultation with residents on stock-wide issues relating to policies and service delivery. The Forum meets with managers to make recommendations that influence policies and procedures and to help ensure that the service is accountable to residents. The committee of the Forum are annually elected by all Hexagon residents.

8.0 **Co-ops and other Managing Agents**

- 8.1 Hexagon has maintained long standing arrangements for some of its stock to be managed by other independent organisations, most of whom are housing co-operatives. As at 2014, the percentage of Hexagon stock which is managed by agents is just under 10%. The housing co-ops are a group of independent, already-existing organisations who have entered into an arrangement with Hexagon to manage the housing service in those properties where Hexagon tenants live. Hexagon remains the landlord and the tenants become members of their housing co-op and meet regularly to manage services such as rent collection, repairs, allocations and estate management.
- 8.2 Hexagon will continue to develop a close working partnership with the managing agents and will provide support and regularly monitor their performance and continual improvement in the delivery of the local housing services.
- 8.3 We will hold an annual event for agency-managed residents to come together to discuss policy related issues of relevance to residents who are co-op members. This event has become known as the Co-op

Seminar and gives an opportunity for agency-managed residents to engage directly with senior management in Hexagon on their areas of concern

9.0 Supporting Resident Involvement

9.1 There are a number of ways in which Hexagon supports resident's involvement. These include:

- providing a range of involvement activities so that residents are able to get involved in ways which suit them
- providing dedicated staff who facilitate the development and delivery of the involvement activities
- providing timely information so that residents can be properly equipped to take part in involvement activities
- delivering training to increase residents knowledge and skills to facilitate their involvement
- attending, on request, at resident-led meetings
- providing shopping vouchers, travel allowances and contributions towards child care expenses for residents who attend meetings at the Hexagon office
- providing support to the co-ops who manage Hexagon's stock by making available advice, information and training which will assist the co-op in its work
- annual grants to support the work of local residents associations
- reporting in *Home News* on how involvement activities have made a difference to ensure that all residents are informed about resident involvement activities
- ensure that an introduction to residents involvement is routinely provided for all new staff joining Hexagon

10.0 Future areas of work

10.1 This policy outlines how Hexagon currently provides opportunities for residents to shape service provision and scrutinize performance. In addition, and throughout the life span on this policy, we will seek to develop involvement activities further in response to the scrutiny agenda and in response to residents' aspirations to shape the service.

10.2 Areas of the service which will be explored for further residents involvement include, but are not limited to:

- procurement – establish the good work which residents achieved as part of a procurement group for the 2014 responsive repairs contract across all contracts for resident-facing services
- anti-social behaviour – explore the setting up of a sub-group of the PRG to regularly scrutinize how we deal with reports of anti social behaviour
- financial inclusion – in partnership with the Community Investment

Team, set up a panel of residents to review letters and publicity relating to welfare benefit changes

- digital inclusion – following suggestions made by the Residents Forum, we will explore ways of setting up online forums or social media platforms which extend opportunities for residents to engage with Hexagon. This will be used to particularly engage with younger residents
- environmental sustainability – set up a group of residents to be known as Green Champions who will be trained to provide information and advice to the wider body of residents on energy efficiency in the home

11.0 Equality and Diversity

11.1 Hexagon is committed to encouraging and extending involvement across the whole of the resident base, and our approach to involvement is rooted in equality of opportunity for all and for respecting the needs of our diverse communities in how we deliver the service.

11.2 It is the aim of this policy to ensure that all Hexagon residents have the opportunity to participate fully in the range of activities on offer. We will design involvement activities that are inclusive and accessible for all residents. To this end we will continue to increase the range of involvement activities to appeal to all sections of the resident base with the aim of involving as many residents as possible

11.3 We will therefore monitor the profile of those involved to ensure it is reflective of the profile of Hexagon residents as a whole. Each year we will report on the diversity profile of residents who have engaged with involvement activities throughout the year and compare this profile to those of the wider resident's base within Hexagon. This exercise will help us to pinpoint sections of the Hexagon population who may be under-represented in the involvement activities, and we will target those sections when recruiting to involvement activities for the year ahead.

12.0 Monitoring and Review

12.1 This policy will be reviewed in conjunction with residents during the fourth quarter of 2016/17 to assess its effectiveness and relevance to the Corporate Plan objectives

12.2 Throughout the lifetime of this policy we will carry out an annual impact assessment of resident involvement activities which will capture the outcomes of each activity and how it has helped to make a difference to the Hexagon service.