# Tenant Board Appointment Questionnaire January 2016

Sent to all current Board Members and Directors.

All quotes have been anonymised.

## Comments, Other and Please say more

**Q.1 How should tenants apply to become a member of the Board?**

**Other, please state**

Respond to an advertised vacancy for a TBM who fulfil an advertised Job Description

*Respond to job description, as for ‘ordinary’ board members* - I think this would help improve the quality of tenant members consistently. Currently I believe we have the best group in the 7 years I’ve been with H.

Seek nominations would be my 2nd option.

Job advertised as a mailshot, with a selection criteria

**Q.2 How should residents be informed of the vacancy?**

**Other, please state**

Email should be first choice and then white mail if we have no email address.

Whatever methods would achieve wide coverage at minimal cost.

We should take care to use methods that all residents can see – email or text messages might be seen as restricting the field of candidates. Mail shot to each home would be expensive, unless combined with another mail-out.

Possibly included in the envelope Rent statements and other routine correspondence is sent in (all depts that have contact ie. CI and RI have leaflets they can inc with other items posted).

Housing Officers to mention/provide leaflet when visiting Tenants.

Recorded message from HHA customer care desk while 'on hold' for incoming calls.

HHA TA's given poster/flyers/leaflets to distribute amongst their members.

Whichever, and you need to combine several approaches, they must be seen to be inclusive, not favouring some elements or groups of tenants

Writing to each household should be the primary way of alerting people. The other methods should be supplementary as not everyone has internet access. We also don’t hold everyone’s e mail and mobile phone details, though we are working to increase the %.

**Q.3 What is your preferred method of tenant board member appointment?**

**Other, please state**

Nomination by tenants, followed by selection by interview panel

Anyone can *nominate themselves, followed by an interview* with *strict* criteria as to who can be excluded from going forward, this interview used to identify potential training needs if candidate were to be elected (this could inform future training 'offers' in order to better cultivate existing interested tenants and fill their skills gaps), followed by election.

I would suggest a *combination of selection (interview) and election*. I am not sure which way round is likely to be best (probably the vote to minimise interview numbers), but the first element could be used to bring the numbers down to, say double the number of vacancies, with 3 as a minimum, and the other approach would sort out the final appointments.

**Q.3 Please say more about why you favour this method.**

*Selection by interview panel* - My understanding of the current regulatory expectations is that the Board should have the skills and experience to govern the organisation and therefore selection needs to be based on this and not via nomination or election.

*Selection by interview panel* - Skills based and ability to question motives etc.

*Selection by interview panel* – It would increase the chances of a candidate who had a lot to offer the organisation being selected.

Residents should be a majority on the panel and a system would need to be agreed for how the panel is chosen.

This should be tried for a couple of years at any rate with a review at the end – not just one year though.

*Selection by interview panel* – It allows for an assessment of relevant skills and experience which is important for all BMs not just ordinary ones.

*Appointment* should reflect resident’s views as well as being able to undertake the job.

*Selection by interview panel* – Interview would pick the best candidate in a fair manner

*Selection by interview panel* –

1. Board members should be treated equally and the same system for recruitment should apply to avoid a two tier Board.

2. I suspect we have loads of very bright, talented, and committed residents who would feel more inclined to apply for a job they felt they could do, but who might be less inclined to participate in an election (they don’t live on an estate they can canvass, they see the outcomes of elections vs. recruitment as a bit of a lottery, etc.)

3. Lots of other HA’s successfully recruit members this way and a growing number are moving this way with good results.

4. The arguments for putting in a selection process before an election are weak. I very much doubt it would prevent residents from standing for election and it would therefore have little or no impact on the quality of people we attract to the Board. Would it have changed the election list this year for example? I suspect not. It might even put off some people from standing who should not be put off.

5. A consistent open and transparent recruitment process would be the best method of complying with the NHF Governance and HCA Regulatory Codes

6. Tenants are not on the Board to represent constituents and the current system of electing them is therefore a bit illogical.

7. Voting turnout has never been high and I am very doubtful that there will be step change in turnout.

*Selection of short-list of candidates, followed by tenant ballot*- It would allow candidates to be selected according to skills etc. but tenants would have final say on who is elected.

*Selection of short-list of candidates, followed by tenant ballot*- The Board needs to be sure that tenant members have the skills to lead the organisation, or that they can quickly gain these skills. For those that can demonstrate these skills, the tenant ballot is a way of ensuring that the successful candidate is able to reflect the concerns of residents as a whole.

To save on costs, we should aim to allow residents to vote via smartphone, so that only those without a phone have to be sent paper ballots.

*Nomination by tenants* - I favour this method, because it involves tenants/residents in the nomination process, but the interview panel will select the best candidate for the needs of the Board at the time.

*A combination of selection and election -* I elaborate on why I believe that TBM election should be maintained in points 8 & 10. TBM appointment should also include some selection criteria. I should however qualify what I mean by “selection”. The most important qualification should be commitment, followed closely by candidates possessing basic levels of comprehension. Aside from the requirement that the candidate successfully pass a basic English and Maths test, selection would require that candidates participate in a number of “training” sessions. These sessions could consist of induction and training / attendance at a board meeting.

On no account should election be precluded by some kind of screening process. If Hexagon staff or existing board members are aware of Hexagon residents that they feel would be an appropriate for appointment to the board, then I would hope that these residents would be encouraged to stand for election. Ultimately though the successful candidate will be determined via a democratic process.

*A combination of selection and election -* Ultimately I favour election by ballot, however as there is now the new regulatory requirement then in order to meet this HHA either has to have specific prerequisite training available for candidates to complete prior to the self-nomination, or HHA has to provide immediate training on appointment (perhaps as part of the good practice Induction training which should be provided to all newly appointed BM's), or has to develop some clear precise transparent criteria on which to 'screen' potential candidates prior to going forward for election. This is where it would be helpful to have some idea of what exactly this criteria are in real terms? The regulatory requirement is not precise so I would welcome some thought on this prior to determining the process for choosing a candidate as this info would inform the choice of recruitment process.

I'm reasonable sure that the regulatory requirement would only require HHA to demonstrate they had processes in place which it would be reasonable to expect would give them a degree of assurance the candidate has or is capable of quickly acquiring the minimum degree of knowledge to carry out the Role.

**Q.4 Which method do you prefer, if the Board favours nomination?**

**Other, please state**

None. I do not think that a resident being nominated by any other group should be included in the selection process. Residents should apply and be interviewed as any other applicant. Vacancies should be widely advertised amongst the residents by newsletter etc. to try to promote applicants where ever possible. It should be made clear that support and training will be provided to residents to assist them in becoming Board members.

Application as if for as job interview. It is a skills / knowledge based process.

And then after the ballot to create a shortlist, these people are interviewed.

The question is a little unclear to me, but as I am not in favour of elections, I probably don’t have a strong opinion about methods for seeking nominations. However, it seems an unnecessary hurdle for candidates that would add little value.

**Q.4 Please say more about why you favour this option.**

*Candidates’ election statements appear in Home News, etc. with request for nominations* - Would even the playing field for residents who may not have extensive networks but would meet the required criteria for board members

*Candidates with most nominations go forward to selection by interview.-* Candidates need to be able to demonstrate leadership skills (see above).

*Candidates with most nominations go forward to selection by interview*. - Ideally need some element of objective review of skills etc.

I don’t favour nomination, but the question forces me to choice an option.

I don’t favour nominations

I don’t really favour nominations as those who live in blocks or co-ops would find it much easier than other residents to canvass for their nominations. Nomination on its own would not be sufficient to select anyway. If we have to have nominations, it should be widely advertised on the website and in Home news.

*Candidates with most nominations go forward to election by ballot* - I think it is a good way of combining tenant input and achieving a consistently high level of tenant capability.

Consideration re *nominations from residents they know* as it favours candidates already involved, and candidates who live in areas where there are a higher concentration of HHA properties. If nominations by any resident then favours those in large households and potentially excludes HHA tenants who live in areas with less concentrations of stock or who live alone.

How would this work, would there be a two stage process with a round of nominations followed by a round of votes? Or is the nomination process only proposed in the event the final appointment is made by interview panel? - so nomination would be to determine which candidates go forward to interview.

No one should be excluded from putting themselves forward for the Role. The question is how does HHA ensure the new member already has the relevant skills required at that time by the Board or at least sufficient skills to acquire the necessary knowledge in a reasonable time frame.

**Q.5 Who should be eligible to vote, if the Board favours a ballot?**

**Other, please state**

*All Hexagon residents in any type of tenure or property* - This obviously means “named” residents

No one. As stated above I do not think that Board members should be voted onto the Board. This is democratic to an extent depending on the numbers who vote but it could show who the most well-known candidate is or the most popular not necessarily the most able to carry out the role.

Not sure we need to have a vote, there will be residents on the interview panel from the forum which has been voted for.

If we do retain elections, leaseholders and tenants should both vote (as they can now).

It would be ideal to allow all Residents to vote but as HHA doesn’t actually know who all their Residents are then this would leave the recruitment process open to abuse.

If there is a database which records who formally resides at each HHA property then this could be utilised to widen the eligibility to vote to include Residents over 18. Would require this is updated regularly.

**Q.6 Who should be on the selection panel, if the Board favours selection?**

**Other, please state**

I would favour the CEO and Chair who ultimately are responsible for the organisation. They should be supported by an independent expert in governance.

Chair of the Board; one other board member (doesn’t matter whether tenant or not); chair of either Residents Forum or Performance Review Group

A panel of the Board as with other board recruitments?

The panel should have a majority of residents. The staff member could be a director (probably Operations Director) or the CE (either but not both).

A new RI group made up of resident who are not on any other committees/RI groups. They could perhaps be trained on interview techniques and such like (increases employability). Rationale is that there are already existing relationships and cliques within the existing involved resident groups so bias based on these interactions would be challenging to avoid.

Could have a vice chair.

Must be the same group for all the interviews.

I do not think it correct to have other tenants or officers present.

**Q.7 Election statements**

**Please say more about your views on election statements**.

Have to be honest and verifiable

Statements should be owned by candidates. I think vetting of claims/experience should take place for shortlisted candidates.

Election statements should have a standard format, as for a job application. Candidates’ claims regarding committees, boards, and other relevant experience, should be verified by taking up references or other evidence.

Claims should be verified but only as would be the case in any board position application.

As stated I do not think there should be an election.

I don’t think there should be elections so have not expressed a preference

If a candidate has demonstrated leadership skills and adheres to Hexagon’s values, then there should be no need to vet election statements.

Not to be elected, but appointed so no requirement for a statement.

It would not need to be an election statement (if we don’t go for elections) but we would want to know why they want to do it and what they would bring to the role.

Vetting – only if it is to be a public document and to ensure it is not offensive.

*Do you think candidates’ claims and/or experience should be verified?* - Yes, but probably only if they get through to the second stage.

There must be easily accessible support with the writing for those who are challenged in this regard, and/or the option of making a recording or video as an alternative to a 'written' statement. This support must be mentioned in any advertising material.

Obviously the candidate must possess the skills to fulfil the role and the ability to read is going to be very necessary, however there are people for whom reading is ok but it is the writing which is challenging. Much as with a candidate who for instance has a visual or hearing impairment there would be the additional requirement for HHA to provide support for them to fulfil the role as they should not be effectively excluded due to the disability.

Statements being vetted, perhaps there ought to be 'guidelines' such as nothing racist etc and perhaps some examples of what would be considered inappropriate (sets the tone for future conduct). Vetting in principle sounds like a good idea but in practice raises the questions of who does the vetting and who determines what can and can't be put it a statement. Maybe the guidelines idea would be the way to go as then clear guidance can be given so freedom of speech is allowed but clearly offensive unsubstantiated derogatory statements wouldn’t be.

Claims/experience verified

To some extent and depends on the nature of the recruitment process, if there is a clear defined job description for particular skills (as opposed to currently just **enthusiastic, committed and willing**) then yes to some extent these should be checked. If someone says they are qualified to fill a particular skills gap on the Board then it seems it only duly diligent to ask for either some evidence to verify to be provided and presumably this is where the value of interview comes in as questions can be asked which would identify the validity of such claims.

If there is no selection/interview process and the regulatory requirement is met through a training needs assessment and the provision of said training then maybe simply having something on the application/election statement/nomination statement stating candidates may be asked to verify the claims made in their statements then I think this may act as a deterrent to any outlandish or wholly unsubstantiated claims.

**Q.8 Election of tenant board members**

**Please say more about your views on the election of tenant board members**

*Do you think the current system of tenant ballot is democratic?* - Don’t know

Not effective for the needs of Hexagon.

*Do you think the current system of tenant ballot is democratic?* - In theory, but not in practice (see comments in 3 above)

The present system favours those who know people who are inclined to vote. Only 195 out of 4200 households chose to vote in last year’s election, a percentage of 4.87%. Clearly not representative of the tenant population as a whole.

I think it is essential that there is a tenant vote as part of the process, but the present system is open to cronyism, or advantageous for tenants in large properties.

If there is an election process there should be a minimum number of voters for it to be robust, so we would have to improve the involvement from tenants.

Not essential as long as anyone has an opportunity to apply and there is a fair assessment process as for any board member.

Problem is that so few residents vote – hence suggestion that aim to use smartphone- friendly voting.

But election statements do tend to favour those with political skills, and I don’t think that political skills are the same as leadership skills. So maybe the election statement should be about what they have achieved in other roles (in the widest sense) and how these are relevant to Hexagon.

As stated. I believe that all reasonable steps should be taken to support the capacity of residents to apply and then serve on the Board but I think this has to be by ability rather than by election.

Elections are not important. Current system is democratic but it is expensive and inefficient as we get a very low response rate (even when we have sent out a dedicated on its own voting paper).

Benefits are not worth it in my view. Other landlords including those we visited do not give all their tenants a vote (only some who have positively signed up as members or those who are involved tenants as I understand it.)

In principle it is democratic IF all Tenants are eligible to vote, there is also the question of the wider resident base which consist of more than just the formal tenants, however if ALL tenants are eligible to vote (rather than just one per household) then residents will be in principle be eligible to vote if they are added to the tenancy agreement (much like registering to vote).

As to the question if the current elections are truly 'democratic' then I would have to say no as the definition would require a larger proportion of the eligible voters to vote (same could be said of the present Government). So in terms of the democratic element of the TMB recruitment I feel it is important that some attention is given to how to encourage more people to vote. I feel it is HHA improves its databases of customer contact details (and utilises this) as well as broadening and modernising its approach to communicating with Residents particularly in this digital age.

Tenant Board Member elections exist at Hexagon for a very good reason. Successful appointees do not represent any constituency, or indeed do they represent residents – instead TBMs serve organisational accountability.

Democratic accountability is essential to ensure housing association service delivery. Democratic elections engender resident empowerment above resident involvement and emphasises a “citizen” rather than “consumer” approach to tenant participation at Hexagon. I am concerned at the level Hexagon’s board accountability. In order for any organisation to flourish it has to been perceived as transparent, responsible, and ultimately accountable. Accountability is about the processes through which an organisation makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities. It should be apparent that Hexagon’s main and most important stakeholders are its tenants. Historically, new Hexagon tenants were asked if they wished to be shareholders. That process unfortunately does not exist anymore. New Hexagon shares are now issued via board membership appointment. The two residents who annually attend Hexagon’s AGM may be perceived as an anachronism but their determination to remain, despite the entreaties they have received to step down indicates that they understand the importance of accountability. If the current system of TBM election is abolished and replaced with a system of selection determined via the organisation, any semblance of Hexagon accountability would vanish. The board would only be accountable to its shareholders, namely themselves.

**Q.9 Who should be eligible to stand as a tenant/resident board candidate?**

**Other, please state**

Unsure about this one

Tenants named on their tenancy and resident leaseholders

Tenants and leaseholders should be able to stand. We should start calling them Resident Board member anyway as we try to limit the use of the word “tenant” to those occasions when the legal meaning is significant. “Resident” is more inclusive of leaseholders, shared owners, licensees…

To ensure there is no room for misunderstanding from the options, I believe all ‘named’ residents, whatever form of residence they have, should be entitled if aged 18+

Realistically only Tenants on tenancy (is this even checked?) as it would be preposterous to allow any resident to be a BM but not allow them to vote. I do feel that if the role was open to all residents then this might garner more interest and engagement in the election process. Does there exist a list/record/database of residents residing in properties? Perhaps only those residents formally recorded as residing in the property could be included in both the candidacy and the voting. (so it would be verifiable)

**Q.10** **Which of the following should candidates possess to ensure compliance with NHF Code of Governance?**

**Other, please state**

I am very much against the idea of testing candidates in maths and English. This proposal has been to the Board a number of times in the last five years and thankfully always rejected. It is demeaning and patronising.

Willing to promote Hexagon’s values, and to adhere to the code of conduct

I DON’T THINK WE CAN BE RIGID. We want as much as possible at the time of recruitment to the board, but can also take into account people’s apparent ability to learn. The communication view is based on the fact that there can be 20 people round the table and there can still be communication difficulties if someone only has a quiet voice.

I am not in favour of a test of numeracy and comprehension. It would be very off-putting to many candidates and some may fail because they are poor at tests although in reality would turn out to be good. If a BM really “did not get it” after being on the Board for some months, we should have mechanisms through their appraisal for persuading them that this is not the role for them.

On the “other” I think if we advertise, a person specification would have quite a lot more on it than this list, though at this stage I have not provided all the detail.

It would be extremely helpful to have some more detail as to what *exactly* a candidate is expected by the NHF to possess, presumably in the absence of clear guidance then this is open to interpretation? Perhaps directly contacting the NHF to seek greater clarity on this could be valuable – what would be deemed as non-compliance in the event of an investigation, and what would be deemed as a desirable minimum level of skills and abilities in order to have complied.

HHA should then offer (or signpost) training which allows the opportunity for all Residents/Tenants to achieve possessing the skills/abilities to become a candidate.

In my mind there is a difference between what might be ideally desirable skills/abilities in a TBM (prior knowledge and experience with forming strategy, understanding risk, and finance experience), and what is required to meet the regulatory requirement.

A TBM appointee would ideally fulfil part of board skills matrix. In reality Hexagon resources should be invested in appropriate levels of TBM training to ensure that new appointees are able to contribute to strategic areas such as risk, regulation and finance. I would recommend that part of this training be a prerequisite for residents who seek to be elected. This requirement would illuminate the functions and roles that a board member is expected to perform. In contrast to an appointed board member who may possess years of experience from climbing the corporate housing career ladder, TBMs are able to lend far more valuable insight - the TBM will have experience and perspective gained from living in the communities and housing that Hexagon strategic policy affects.

**Q.11 Which of these statements do you agree with?**

**Please say more about the options you have chosen.**

All of the options should be offered but not made compulsory

It’s important that the prospective candidates get a good feel for what the role encompasses

We could have several candidates so the training they got before being recruited would necessarily have to be limited. (cost/timing etc.)

I very much hope that the interview panel will be willing to appoint candidates who show potential. Obviously this would not happen with ‘ordinary’ board candidates, who would be expected to be up to speed on appointment. New TBMs who showed potential should be given intensive training, and they should commit to giving the time to this as a condition of appointment.

Additional training will depend on requirements in each case

Candidates should have a clear idea of what is involved, which can be gained at the information session and by attending a board meeting. It does not seem fair to require candidates to attend Induction before they have been appointed.

Training for potential candidates should be tailored to their individual needs.

I don’t think tenants should be asked to jump over any significantly higher hurdles than any other Board member. I would be pretty confident that an application followed by interview and references should be sufficient to get good people on the Board. Once appointed they should of course attend induction and training tailored to meet their needs.

As indicated in my previous responses, the areas I’ve selected in the above question would serve to test candidate’s level of commitment and this is what should make up the selection element of a process that included both selection and election.

As occurred during the fight to secure universal suffrage, the elite always argued that the issues confronting the state were too weighty for ordinary working man (and indeed all women!) to be able to cogitate. Applying the same rationale to elected Hexagon board members would be equally noisome and patronising. Without doubt, Housing associations face many tricky issues over the next five years. The provision of an adequate level of training will ensure that elected board members are as able as the “unelected” majority on the board.

**Q.11 Other training or information you think might be helpful for prospective candidates:**

Workshop could polish up any of these skills which may be rusty.

Training course would give context for the Role undoubtedly covering conduct, good practice, and greater appreciation of what is expected from a Board, additionally would likely enable new TBM's to feel more confidence in their role earlier on in their term of service. - Also any candidates who attend these courses will potentially be able to contribute what they have learned via involvement with the RF.

The information session I went to wasn’t really very informative, I could've gotten the same info via email. I attended the information session the first time I put myself up for election and was grateful I wasn’t required to attend again for the second time.

I believe that the first time under the new rules people should stand as they are. Those that have shown this interest but not been elected, but have shown promise or prospective abilities should be invited to attend training sessions in the relevant areas of deficiencies to help them next time to improve their chances. Over a period of time this would build a pool of people whose skills have been developed. Some may opt to go onto the Tenants’ group to learn more in practice about how Hexagon operates and input into the company through another channel, thereby enhancing their skills for a future election.

**Compiled by Rosalind Watson January 2016**