

RESIDENTS FORUM COMMITTEE MINUTES

Meeting held on: Wednesday 10th January 2018
At HexagonHousing Association

Present: Paul Taylor (PT) – Chair (C) (Chaired Meeting)
Valerie Oldfield (VC) – Joint Vice-Chair (VC)
Kate Stephens (KS) – Joint Vice-Chair (VC)
Olga Yao (OY) – Joint Secretary (S)
Mark Banham (MB)
Shona Muwanga (SM)
Fatima Ryan (FM)

Also present:

Brian Hughes (BH) Resident Involvement Officer
Rohima Khatun (RK) Resident Involvement
Phil Newsam (PN) Finance & IT Director
Dermot Finn (DF) Resident Board Member
Denny Senner (DS) Resident Board Member
Mark Allan (MA) Resident Board Member

Apologies: Pam Daley Secretary
Joy Worrell RF Member
Ranna McArdle Resident Board Member

Absent: None

Note: Questions and Comments are made by Resident Forum Members unless initialled at the side.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD

1. Recommendation to the Board that Strategy/Policy Papers are to be made available as a Scoping Paper, alongside the Draft Policy if available, or previous Policy, at least 2 RF meetings before going to the Board.
2. When Hexagon is in the position of reviewing any activity or service, that they use the learnings from the example of Resident Involvement's Statement of Learning regarding the Residents Forum and the future of Residents Day to ensure stakeholders are involved with the decision. (Please refer to Statement)
3. Members of the Forum that have reached the end of their term, which is 3 years, shall officially stand down at the Annual General Meeting and may be re-elected for another term (3years) but not exceeding the maximum of 6 consecutive years. **After a break of 1 year, Members may stand again for re-election as outlined in the RFs Nomination and Election Process Document, but without any overall limit to number of years served.**

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made, and it was agreed to record the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence: See above

3. Value for Money – Phil Newsam, Director of Finance & IT

Phil Newsam presented a summary of the Scoping Paper Value for Money Strategy (VFM) 2018/19 – please refer to this.

Comments from this meeting will be taken back to Managers and will feed in to work plans for the VFM Strategy 2018/19, due to be presented to the Board in March. PN will write a report for the RF, letting us know how our feedback led to changes in actions.

Figures given in the HouseMark Dashboard refer to 2015/16. PN has just seen the latest figures for 2016-17, and these are similar to the 2015/16 figures.

HouseMark compares Hexagon's costs and performance with other Social Landlords. Hexagon is below the median for cost in all areas, and VFM measures agreed by the Board last year were therefore about restricting, not cutting costs. Performance however, needs improvement.

- Q1** Queried definitions in Section 1: "Economy", "Efficiency", "Effectiveness".
How is Resident Involvement (RI) measured in terms of efficiency?
- PN** Resident Involvement costs are expressed as an annual sum per property so that fair comparisons can be made between different sized HAs.
- Q2** Is the performance of larger HAs better because they have more money?
- PN** Small to medium HAs can be just as cost-effective as larger ones. Hexagon is spending on average less per property on these areas of service than other HAs in its peer group.
- Is this good?
- PN** It is good because Hexagon is not wasting money, but we also want to improve the service. We want to be in the Good Performance/Low Cost part of the matrix. We need to improve Performance.
- Q3** Is Hexagon spending less per property on RI than other HAs?
- DS**
- PN** This year, 2015-16 Hexagon spent less on RI than the previous year, but spent more the following year in 2016-17.
- Q4** 7 or 8 years ago, there were lots of community groups going on in different areas which helped make Hexagon communities more cohesive. Would you consider doing

this again, investing in it, and marketing more aggressively to encourage involvement?

- PN** This would be for RI to consider in terms of their Strategy.
If RI were high quality/low cost would that make Hexagon's reputation better amongst its peers?
- PN** We want to improve in all areas, but mainly in Resident Satisfaction. Resident Satisfaction with the Landlord is very highly correlated to Repairs Satisfaction and satisfaction with the last (most recent) repair. Satisfaction with the last repair is correlated with satisfaction overall, and therefore this is taken to be the most important indicator and is used as a measure of overall satisfaction.
- Q5** If Hexagon is unable to move directly across into the green box of Good Performance/Low Cost, is it ruled out that it moves into the yellow box, Good Performance/High Cost?
- PN** The Board has charged us with moving to the green box, Good Performance/Low Cost, not the yellow, but it's not ruled out.
- Q6** What would be the impact on rent and Service Charges?
- PN** That depends on which indicators we're using. The Dashboard, with more information, can be seen on Hexagon's website. Some services such as Estate Services would require higher costs in order to move into the green box, and this would have an implication for Service Charges.
But for Responsive Repairs, the main issue where Hexagon is not performing well is Resident Satisfaction; other indicators are pretty good.
- Q7** For Hexagon as a whole, what's the stimulus for it to move across to the green?
- PN** A lot of the indicators are about Resident Satisfaction and so we want to increase that.
- Q8** I presume more money is needed to do that. Is Hexagon ready to spend more?
- PN** Sometimes that's necessary, but not always. Sometimes it's more about keeping promises. **I've noted to consider spending more in order to move into the green or yellow box.**
- Q9** During the last Conservative government, there was an emphasis
- DF** by the Regulator that HAs were seen to be implementing VFM, and there was a threat of being downgraded in terms of Governance ratings by the Regulator if a HA was deemed to be performing poorly. There doesn't seem to be the same agenda with Theresa May's administration.
Where are we now in terms of the Regulator? When would a HA get in trouble with a Regulator?
- PN** The Regulator looked at Hexagon a year ago and and were content with VFM. They were concerned that there wasn't sufficient Management capacity and advised care not to skimp on staff.
The Regulator defines VFM as "cheap", but Hexagon does not, and never has. VFM is about outputs, satisfaction, and development of housing units.

Hexagon want to improve performance by improving Resident satisfaction with the Estates Service; with Repairs; turning voids round more quickly and improving rent collection.

Q10 Referring to Table 3.1, VFM Themes in Hexagon's Corporate Plan, why is the term "restricting" used in relation to operating costs, rather than "minimising"?

PN As Hexagon grows, we don't want costs to increase in proportion. We have allowed extra expenditure in some areas and there are targets. The same goes for "restricting" interest costs; In terms of borrowing from the bank, there is only so much can be done. Hexagon is having to borrow more and more, and therefore interest charges increase.

Q11 Why is Anti-Social Behaviour not included on the Dashboard?

PN A specific survey was not done in relation to Resident Satisfaction and ASB, so the indicator couldn't be reported to HouseMark.

Q12 The following points relate to Section 4 – Actions proposed for 2018/19, listed here as 1,2,3etc

1. Hexagon must make implementation of Cx computer system, Phases 1 & 2, a top priority; it needs to be in place for everything else to follow on, including Resident Satisfaction.
4. What is the new Customer satisfaction tool?
5. Housing Services should be added to Community Investment - they also should be able to help identify residents in need of financial help.
7. It may not suit individuals to move on, may have a negative impact on them. (If Hexagon is trying to reach a target, it may be that extra pressure is applied)
9. Please listen to the Repairs Group – they had wanted particular things from Hexagon but information had not been made available; had also requested physical input to meetings, eg by contractors.

BH Last year we were unable to provide performance information to the Repairs Group due to a technical issue. The Repairs Group decided not to meet until the information was available. Hexagon has put resources in and the Group is now due to meet end January. Re the Group's request to attend meetings between Hexagon and contractors, this has been picked up by the PRG (Performance Review Group). Following their request, a rep from each group, PRG and Repairs, will now be able to attend meetings between Hexagon and Contractors.

10. Satisfaction depends very much on good communication – between contractors, Hexagon staff and residents

12. Please expand more on the Price per Property Model

PN Currently when a responsive repair is ordered, the Schedule of Rates is consulted for the cost of a particular item. An alternative would be to pay a cost per property to a contractor who would be responsible for all of Hexagon's responsive repairs. Rather than invoicing by item, the contractor would do all responsive repairs on a contract basis. It would be a complicated procedure to set up the contact.

Comment made that a monitoring system would be needed to ensure satisfactory Standards are met.

13. Communicate not just with the Service Charge Review Team, but also with the Resident.

15. Please expand on Operating Costs

16. Prevention of Arrears for new tenancies could involve asking new tenants for their views re how best Hexagon can do this.

PN Our arrears are going up and need to be reduced. Arrears above 2.5K will now be Subject to a quarterly management review by a team including the Housing Officer and also more senior staff to see what else can be done to recoup the money.

Q13 Presumably Universal Credit will impact on Arrears – will this affect Hexagon’s overall performance?

PN The Board monitors the plan for the introduction of Universal Credit. This is in use for 350 residents who are being supported by Financial Inclusion staff if required. I’m unable to give details of the budget as it has just been agreed. Arrears will not necessarily increase due to UC, as early intervention can reduce them. There is a danger that rent collection performance will deteriorate, but Hexagon has made an allowance for that deterioration.

MA There is a new committee, the Performance Management Committee, (MA is Chair) which has discussed Control and collection of arrears at length. Andrew Green (Head of Housing Services) is planning short, medium and long term actions and for more dedicated officers and time to be allocated to this.

Q14 Can Housing Benefit be paid directly to Hexagon rather than the resident?

PN The mechanism for this is an APA, used for very vulnerable residents when the rent is paid directly to the Landlord. The Landlord can also apply for an APA for those with serious arrears. However the DWP are unable to send the schedules electronically, and the Finance & IT Department have had to request more manpower to input data manually.

Q15 Re Repairs, does Hexagon employ independent surveyors to ensure standards are met?

PN Hexagon employs its own surveyors to look at repairs above a certain value, complaints and also a random sample.

Q16 Does Hexagon use the HACT Model to measure Social Value? Re Delivering Social Value, all the points refer to employment and energy efficiency, not to any social interactions. What are the demographics of tenants re age and disability? It may be that community aspects are considered to be more relevant to tenants than employment, and that there should be less emphasis on employment.

PN Hexagon does use the HACT Model. There is nothing about bringing people together because the Board agreed to use the measures of employment and energy efficiency. The Community Investment Team take many actions regarding this and should have an analysis of who they are helping.

BH agreed to supply demographics of Hexagon tenants and to ask CIT for their analysis of who they are helping.

4. Minutes of previous Meeting 25.10.17 were approved

5. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

DS objected to part of Q2: that tenants “are obliged to follow a “Company line” in reporting to tenants” and that “Residents are really powerless and increasingly shut out.” This has not been her experience since recently becoming a RBM.

It was pointed out by a RF Member that a RBM was forced to leave the Board for not toeing the company line in reporting to tenants.

DS The RF has a vital role to play. DS and Ranna McArdle (RBM) are keen to bridge the gap between RF, and residents, and the Board; and to ensure that the RF’s views are accurately represented to the Board, and vice versa.

DF disagreed only that “tenants are powerless“. He has been involved in reviewing Resident Involvement and Empowerment Policy. In his mind, RBMs are the most important part of how Resident empowerment is achieved in Hexagon.

MA has been a RBM for just over a year and has not felt pressured to take a particular line. RBMs are in the most influential position regarding tenants within the Hexagon structure, but the RF is becoming a much more influential part of that structure, now it’s working much better. The work which VO and others did to reconstitute the RF, and the participation of its current members is really valuable and the RF is being listened to by Board Members.

BH reported that the funeral for Sharon McPherson was very well attended and Hexagon residents were present.

BH ASB Policy still not ready. Hexagon have employed a Policy Officer (part of Housing Services) who is finalising policies and the relevant Domestic Abuse leaflet.

It was requested and agreed that BH ask for the Policy Officer to bring the completed Leaflet to the RF meeting for comment.

DS suggested RF should have a stand at the Neighbourhood Events. Would like to see more diversity amongst TBMs and that there is a role for RF to bring residents up through the ranks to Board level.

RFM The intention of reconstitution of the RF was exactly that role. We have asked for dates of Neighbourhood Days so the RF can be present. We attended an event held by CIT but it was poorly attended.

RFM TBMs are not representatives of tenants, and have to represent the company, rather than Residents. Ordinary residents don’t have a direct input to the Board unless they become members of the Forum, and then it’s through the Minutes and Recommendations.

DF it’s important that the Executive are present at the Neighbourhood Events to be directly accountable to residents’ Questions.

BH The CEO was present at the first Neighbourhood Event and will be at future ones.

There was a discussion about how the RF can communicate with residents. Our relationship with the general population of residents is still problematic because we don't have direct access to them.

When we hold our election, can Hexagon guarantee to reach every resident? Home News is not necessarily read by all.

BH Yes we can. Home News has a print run of 4,200. We have 2,500 email addresses and can run a stand alone email campaign. We have a considerable number of mobile phone numbers for a text campaign.

RFM ideas included having a RF stand at People's Day which many residents attend, and putting an insert into Home News.

DS Could the RF go on the front cover of Home News to advertise the AGM?

RFM We very much need the help and support of RI in holding the elections and also in organising and holding an equivalent to Residents Day for our AGM. We will also need financial support to provide really good quality entertainment in order to ratify our constitution with as many residents there as possible.

We particularly need to reach tenants before the new EU legislation, (General Data Protection Regulations) comes into effect in May when independent permission is required by tenants in order to contact them.

BH Hexagon will support the RF on these initiatives. The new Communications Officer will undertake a publicity campaign for the RF Elections, using text, email and traditional methods.

Once the new legislation comes into force, we will need to gain permission from individual residents in order to contact them about an election campaign, so we will need to run the campaign before May.

RFM We may need to start our election process before the next edition of Home News in April. Is a postal mail-out ruled out?

BH No, a postal mail-out is not ruled out.

RFM Ideas for obtaining permission from residents included:

A tick box for new tenants;

Bringing up the subject during any Communications between Hexagon and residents, eg when contacting residents repairs and following up with a tick box form to complete and return.

6.Feedback from Brian Hughes

Visit to Phoenix (Please refer to Report)

RFM comments: welcome two meetings per Strategy but it was the RF that asked for this during various meetings with Board Chair and also Andrew Green to enable adequate discussion before input to the Board.

Also need Scoping paper for any New policies eg Customer Contact Strategy. The Acting Chair used to ask presenters for key questions ahead of RFMeeting.

Caution in focusing on only part of the Strategy.

Proposal:

Recommendation to the Board that Strategy/Policy Papers are to be made available as a Scoping Paper, alongside the Draft Policy if available or previous Policy at least 2 RF meetings before going to the Board.

Agreed unanimously.

BH Residents Day Cancellation – Learning Outcomes (Please refer to Report)

Failure to see RF as a Stakeholder in Residents Day.

Need to ensure involvement of all Stakeholders including RF at early stage when a resident event and replacement activity is being reviewed.

There was failure to pick up that RF wanted to be involved in Neighbourhood Events. One has been held, but RF have made it clear that they want a stall at Neighbourhood Events and will be invited in future.

RFM In future, VFM should be assessed over a longer period than 2yrs, as was done for Residents Day.

BH Resident should have asked for an Agenda item at the preceding RF Meeting.

RFM The learning from this is very valuable and could potentially be used not only in relation to residents groups but also staff members.

Proposal for Recommendation to Directors Group:

That when Hexagon is in the position of reviewing any activity or service, that they use the learnings from the example of Resident Involvement's Statement of Learning regarding the Residents Forum and the future of Residents Day to ensure stakeholders are involved with the decision.

Agreed unanimously.

7. Updates

AGM Working party Minutes will be emailed to RFMs.

Home News – been delays to them meeting but will feedback to next meeting.

Defer Away Day till recruited more members.

TPAS Membership Chair will email password to RFMs.

Appraisals end Jan/beginning February – Members have both paper and digital versions.

Members will be contacted.

Membership recruitment – once VO stands down end February, there will be 4 places. Aim to start recruitment process as soon as possible. Will be designing a leaflet and poster to go out.

8. Observers to the Board Report

Resolutions were made to the last Board Meeting 28th December.

The RF Minutes were at the beginning of the meeting and this worked well, and RBMs voiced our concerns re empowerment.

There has been no Environmental impact Assessment of building new properties versus acquiring and restoring existing ones. There is currently no funding for refurbishment. A request was made for a report to look further into this. **It was requested and agreed that the RBMs report back to the RF.**

RF Members to next Board Meeting 30th January: PT and FR. (The Board Chair urged PT to attend Board meetings as much as possible.)

Change to RF Constitution item 31 to remove the overall limit to RF membership of 9 years. The purposes of this are to:

- Ensure that members with skill and experience continue to be able to serve on the Forum
- Help ensure continuity and a fuller membership
- Avoid permanently disqualifying some residents

We consider that the election process would be the safeguard against permanent cliques on the Forum, along with Appraisals.

As the current Constitution has never been ratified, it is understood that changes can be made at a regular RF meeting rather than an AGM or Special General Meeting.

Decision taken to make recommendation to the Board in view that the RF Constitution has not yet been ratified.

Proposal (alteration in bold):

Recommendation to the Board that Members of the Forum that have reached the end of their term, which is 3 years, shall officially stand down at the Annual General Meeting and may be re-elected for another term (3years) but not exceeding the maximum of 6 consecutive years. **After a break of 1 year, Members may stand again for re-election as outlined in the RFs Nomination and Election Process Document, but without any overall limit to number of years served.**

Agreed unanimously

9. Any Other Business

KS attended Housing Minister Consultation on 7th December and will circulate the letter since sent to attendees by Alok Sharma. He has now been replaced as Housing Minister after just 208 days in position.

Also recently attended Housing Conferences – there is a groundswell of dissatisfaction and protest concerning large scale mergers and development of non-social (so-called “Affordable”) Housing.

KS will circulate news from them and also of HARA (Housing Association Residents Action)

MA Government Online survey for HA tenants for input to Green Paper. Takes a few minutes to complete. KS will circulate to RFMembers.

BH asked to email it to active members.

RH Home News – looking for Guest Editors who will have the chance to write and comment on submitted articles at 1st draft stage and later. It will involve 1 Meeting with the Communications Officer and the rest will be by email. Expressions of interest welcome from Forum Members. PT expressed interest.

Date of next meeting: 28th February

Meeting ended 9.15pm