

RESIDENTS FORUM
COMMITTEE MINUTES
Meeting Held on: Wednesday 25th October 2017
At Hexagon Housing Association

Present:

Paul Taylor	(PT) – Chair (C) (Chaired meeting)
Valerie Oldfield	(VC) – Vice-Chair (VC)
Kate Stephens	(VC) – Vice-Chair (VC)
Olga Yao	(OY) – Joint Secretary (S)
Pam Daley	(PD) – Joint Secretary (S)
Mark Banham	(MB)
Shona Muwanga	(SM)
Fatima Ryan	(FR)
Joy Worrel	(JW)

Also present:

Brian Hughes (BH) Resident Involvement Officer
David Collick (DC) Property Services Director
Dermot Finn (DF) Resident Board Member
Ranna McArdle (RM) Resident Board Member
Denny Senner (DS) Resident Board Member
Gaius Vincent (GV) Resident Observer
Pat Fordham (PF) Phoenix Housing Association Ambassador & former Chair
Yvette Hinds (YH) Phoenix Membership Officer

Absent: Kelly Elmes

Apologies: None

The Chair informed the Forum that Kelly Elmes is leaving the Forum due to personal circumstances.

The Chair also informed the Forum that Sharon McPherson had sadly passed away. BH said that Hexagon will be attending the funeral.

GV proposed that an article be placed in Home News about Sharon's work for Hexagon; all members agreed.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD

- 1. That all future Minutes of Forum are placed at the beginning of the Board Papers.**
- 2. That Hexagon research and compare the environmental impact of building new properties versus that of acquiring and restoring existing ones.**

Item 1 Report on Phoenix Housing Association and Comparison with Hexagon

Pat Fordham, Phoenix Ambassador (PH)

Pat gave an outline of the formation of Phoenix, originally from former Council stock. She emphasised:

1. TPAS had been enormously helpful
2. The inspiring example of other Tenant-led Has and Co-ops.
3. Going to every tenant, door-to-door to garner support
4. Keeping every promise made
5. Working with, and supporting the existing Tenants Associations

Phoenix is a Housing Association where tenants are making the decisions at every level , in co-operation with an excellent staff. Tenants form a majority on the Board; it is written into the Constitution that posts of Board Chair and Vice Chair must be held by tenants. The shareholders of the company are tenants and tenants are encouraged at every opportunity to become shareholders.

YH **“It’s not us and them, it’s us and us; we work together; we are one.”**

Yvette Hinds, Membership Officer (YH)

Tenants being the Company Shareholders in Phoenix is a key means for them to guide the HA, and ultimately keep the Board accountable. A new scheme called “The Gold Club Scheme” was introduced for shareholders. This provides some incentives to be both an active shareholder and a responsible tenant.

Once they have signed in to the scheme, they are automatically given £5.00 in gift vouchers. During the year, if they keep their rent account in credit, or have an Agreement in place to pay arrears, they receive £5.00. If they pay their rent by direct debit or standing order, they will receive £8.00 to £10.00. Also, if they allow the gas service to be done, then they are given £10 for the first appointment. Leaseholders who pay their charges up to date, or have an independent gas service and receive a CP12 receive £10.

There are many other ways that Residents are empowered at Phoenix: Communications Group, the Board, the Gateway Committee, and the Link organisations for instance. Not everyone gets so actively involved, so it’s important that we continue to have other events to reach out to residents, such as the annual Diversity Day, Phoenix Festival Day, the Phoenix in Bloom Competition, and a host of other activities such as our grape-growing to wine-making project.

From the moment Phoenix began, every effort has been made to ensure that residents are involved. Residents are invited to any training, conferences, and most Away Days that we have. They’re also involved on interviewing panels in the recruitment process. Phoenix run a Job Club every Tuesday to help residents write CVs, and staff members provide interviews to enhance performance. Job searches are also of course supported.

Older people who haven't had an internet for a long time are particularly supported. On Wednesdays there is a "Digital Club" where residents who have had little experience with laptops come to get support on their use. Phoenix have launched "Go Online Digital". We have been given 12 iPads which have been pre-programmed so they can access the internet etc. These are lent to residents on a library basis, (part of a pilot scheme funded by Mayor of London).

YH hoped that the ways Phoenix had involved residents would encourage Hexagon to explore these means to empower and involve residents.

Social Return on Investment:

This is measured by using a model based on material provided by HACT (Housing Associations' Charitable Trust). Phoenix events are so popular that we gauge how many of the attendees are our residents and how many are from the wider community. Both counts contribute to our Social Return.

Family and Youth Work are particularly important for social value. We have groups for mothers and babies, and at an event called "Chit Chat Change" children have the opportunity to go camping, climbing, good food and fun, as well as networking and bonding for them, and sometimes their families too.

Awards:

In its 10 years, Phoenix has won many awards; for community achievements, tenant engagement, and for 2 years running, we have won the prize for best non profit organisation to work for. We were also given a gold star rating in 2017 for Investors in People. Contractors as well as staff participate in earning these awards.

Phoenix Academy:

This is a 10 week course that Phoenix runs for residents of staff of any HA. Attendees learn about social housing generally, and Phoenix's history and role within it.

KS asked if Hexagon Residents could attend.

YH said that they can attend individual classes or the whole course.

Costs: £30 per session per student

£25 per session per student for 5 or more students

£20 per session per student if attending the full programme

Questions from Forum:

Q1 How do you engage young people?

YH We have a Young Makers Agency; making use of our award-winning community building, The Green Man. We co-operate with schools, but the kids decide what we explore. Lately we have concentrated on singing, music and playing instruments. Our café has provided opportunities for youths to bake and prepare meals; we aim to find a way of providing whatever ideas the young people come up with.

Q1a There was a comment about older people's needs

PF We are building 60 "extra care" homes for our older residents with care needs. This has the additional benefit of freeing-up homes with multiple bedrooms for younger families. We aim to provide care or sheltered housing for our own residents as they get older.

Q2 A comment was made about Hexagon that tenants are specifically excluded from Hexagon's AGMs and that the remaining tenant shareholders have been pressed by the CEO/Company Secretary to give up their shares.

Only Board Member are given shares now; even the minority of tenants on the Board are selected before election, and obliged to follow a "Company line" in reporting to tenants. Residents here are really powerless and increasingly shut out. Any tenant seeing Phoenix's activities and facilities, as some of us have, and your commitment to retaining social rent housing, would want to move from Hexagon to Phoenix.

How can we move Hexagon to where you are in structure and tenant rights?

PF Fear holds people back. When we took over, Officers' biggest concern was "those tenants are going to be in charge of us". Staff had worked within certain parameters for years, and had become institutionalised by them.

Q3 You provide many buildings, facilities and activities that our HA does not. "Why, how do you pay for all this?"

PF & YH Our tenants decide how the surplus from their rents is spent, and the money comes largely from there; although we do also develop new properties.

We do get a lot of help from our contractors as well. Lottery Funding has been significant where we are restoring listed buildings for community use. The Lottery has also contributed to other, smaller projects.

Q4 Hexagon has reduced its total number of Social rent tenancies in order to maximise growth through building new properties. Are you letting your new homes and re-lets at social rents?

PF Phoenix is increasing its number of Social rent homes overall. Some specialist new homes are at higher Affordable rents.

Q4a Tenants don't often realise that many HAs are, like Hexagon, reducing the number of Social rent tenancies of the kind that most of our residents are familiar with.

PF We are affected by the Right to Buy legislation but we have negotiated the return of equivalent capital receipts.

BH Could you tell us more about the Gateway Committee's role?

YH It is a group, along with the Local Link groups, that is there to shape policy, influence key involvement events such as the Company AGM, Diversity Day, and the Phoenix Festival, amongst others, and to promote the exercise of shareholders' rights and responsibilities.

It enhances the tenant perspective available to the Board, and membership of it and other groups provides key training for potential Tenant Board Members.

Item 2 Sustainability Strategy

Revised Strategy presented by David Collick, Property Services Director

Q1 The Strategy does not seem very adventurous; is it pretty similar to the existing one?

DC It has not changed radically. We are working on 3 dimensions:

1. What we are doing with our properties
2. What our people, both Residents and staff, are doing
3. What our Partners, contractors are doing, and how we can work with Local Authorities and others.

Q2 Can you give us more detail re the work on homes

DC There are 700 homes with SAP rating of below 65. These are mainly older properties, and we are looking at cost-effective fixes for these.

Q3 An often ignored, but very important source of CO₂, i.e. dust, noise and traffic disturbance, and other environmental damage is caused by building new properties. There are many studies available from UCL, LSE etc which compare the impacts of new-build versus restored homes. What assessment has Hexagon made of the relative impact of buying and restoring existing properties instead?

DC No such assessment has been made.

A discussion ensued about whether Hexagon's mission is to build new homes for whatever rent, or to maintain and create homes only for social (approx 30% market) rents.

ML Although the latest Corporate Report to Tenants suggests social tenancies are being replaced by "Affordable Rents", they are now being substituted by "London Living Rents"

DC We did buy 7 existing properties for Brickfield evacuees.

Q 4 Has every home been rated for SAP?

DC 99.5% have been.

BH Hexagon is reaching out to tenants by recruiting Energy Champions to train neighbours to use energy more efficiently in the home.

- Q5 One would expect everything in this strategy to have been already implemented. Where is the innovation? Hexagon owns a lot of rooves. What about solar panels and any associated grants?
- GV In the past, Housing Associations that borrow to build had not wanted to access ECO and other schemes as this would have counted as borrowing and therefore impacted their covenants etc. Hexagon has been in that situation.
- DC Hexagon will investigate a recently promoted scheme for solar panels.
- Q6 Could Hexagon do a bulk-deal with a green energy supplier for tenants?
- DC This would be difficult.
- Q7 Could we look at other sources of funding, as Phoenix seem to do?
- ML Perhaps something should be in the Strategy to explore other sources of funding.
- GV In past consultations tenants have been very keen on measures to increase biodiversity around their homes. It would be good to flag this up more in the Strategy.

Item 3 Previous Minutes approved with minor correction.

It was agreed to highlight any formal recommendations to the Board and to ask that Forum minute placed higher up in the order of the Board Papers.

It was noted that the next Forum Meeting will be too close to the Board Meeting, so bullet points will be sent instead.

Item 4 Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

- a) Domestic Abuse Leaflet will be ready in draft form by 3rd November
- b) The ASB Policy will be forwarded to the Forum
- c) The results of the email consultation on the Resident Contact Strategy will be sent to the Board.
- d) A full page is being prepared by the Forum subgroup for the next Home News.
- e) Away Day venues are being researched.

Item 5 Observers to the Board Report

After some confusion about the status of the Forum, KS asked for clarification about the January Review of the Forum at the Board. Is there any threat to the Forum's continued existence?

ML, as Vice Chair of the Board, made it absolutely clear that there is no threat to the Forum's existence.

Any Other Business:

PT secured approval from the Forum for the creation of social media channels and a mailing list for Forum purposes.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm