

RESIDENTS' FORUM  
COMMITTEE MINUTES

Meeting held on Wednesday 30th August 2017  
at Hexagon Housing Association

Present:

Paul Taylor (PT) - Chair  
Kate Stephens (KS) - Vice Chair  
Valerie Oldfield (VO) Vice Chair  
Pam Daley (PD) - Secretary  
Olga Yao (OY) - Joint Secretary

Sharon McPherson (SMc)  
Mark Banham (MB)  
Joy Worrel (JW)

Debbie Bankole Williams - Board Member  
Gaius Vincent - Resident observer  
Brian Hughes (BH) - Resident Involvement Officer  
Judith Harris (JH) - Supported Housing Manager

Absent: Fatima Ryan

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended a welcome to staff and special guests, everyone introduced themselves. It was agreed to record the meeting.

The Forum formally agreed that Joy Worrel become a Resident Forum Member.

The Chair informed the Forum that Pauline Grant would no longer be on the Forum as she has transferred to another Housing Association. Measures will be taken to find a replacement for her.

2. Apologies for Absence

Kelly Elmes

3. Domestic Abuse - Presentation by Judith Harris

Please refer to presentation notes supplied by JH.

Domestic violence includes intergenerational abuse as well as men-women abuse and same sex abuse, covers anything within family or household. Emphasis is on risk assessment and safety for the person who is affected.

Hexagon will be working with external agencies i.e. the Police, Local Authority and others who specialise in domestic abuse.

In September, all Hexagon staff will receive training.

Important to note that the trainer providing the course has worked together with JH on this policy and is an expert on domestic abuse.

The policy doesn't refer to every type of domestic abuse, due to the need to keep the policy simple.

Translation, interpretation and adaptation will be considered.

## Discussion

Q1 How will Hexagon react if one person has to move due to domestic abuse?

JH: Hexagon will work with the tenant at risk to keep them safe and provide support to seek legal advice against the other person to prevent further harm. This also applies to those who are not tenants but living in Hexagon property. Consider legal action to remove that person where evidence is available.

Q2 Is this the same for child abuse?

JH: If Hexagon becomes aware of any child abuse there is a safeguarding policy; all staff are aware of this. They report anything observed. There are two safeguarding leaders and anything witnessed is sent back to them.

Q3 Why does this policy only apply where victims are aged 16 and over?

JH: Child abuse is seen as a different category.

Q4(a) Hexagon normally renews policies every three years. A great deal of progress, including new legislation (Serious Crimes Act 2015) and Peabody's groundbreaking work, has taken place. Why has this policy not been renewed since 2009?

JH: I don't know.

Q4(b) Studies suggest victims suffer, on average, 35 incidents of abuse before reporting it. The policy explains Hexagon's response if a victim comes forward, but what training and advice will be given to repairs and gas workers, who could flag up possible cases of abuse?

JH: This will be covered in the training and the guides.

All reports of domestic abuse will be investigated, (JH was unsure if the safeguarding policy had been rolled out already, but assured the Forum a discussion had taken place).

Reminders are being given to housing staff, contractors and surveyors to alert Hexagon with any possible signs of domestic abuse.

Other comments: It was noted that there were no links on the website to the policy for residents to find information. It was felt the policy was wordy for someone experiencing trauma. It should be straightforward and to the point, directing them to such places as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Q6 The Forum acknowledged that the policy was now being reviewed.

Is this in the anti-social behaviour policy in tenancy agreements?

Who should a resident report domestic abuse to? who will they go to? The lead officer? The housing officer?

What will be the time frame of the response?

There was a feeling that the policy needed to be reader-friendly for all staff and residents. Clear definitions of domestic violence were essential in line with what other associations were doing. Lines of communication needed to be clear, e.g. which outside agencies Hexagon would work with: Police, Local Authority, Victim Support.

JH: The policy is available for anyone to read, but is not a reference for tenants. A leaflet will be made for tenants, but it will not contain details of who to contact.

Q7 A positive comment was made about having the new policy and that it was definitely needed, but it was felt it should be linked to the Safeguarding Policy as it was near enough the same.

Will all Hexagon staff be trained or is it specific staff?

JH: The training referred to all staff, i.e. surveyors or handy people. They will not have lengthy information but must report anything observed.

Q8 We have the IBR checklist, that's quite involved. Most organisations have lots of training with regards to safeguarding with abuse etc. Would Hexagon have specialised people to manage this? How are you going to work with partner organisations?

JH could not answer this question as another comment was made by a member.

Q9 A victim would not search for the domestic abuse policy at the point of trauma. People need different degrees of training. We could have a traffic light system in order to recognise when a report of an incident needed to be taken forward.

Q10 Residents are put off reporting difficult issues to Hexagon due to concerns about confidentiality. This is partly because some residents work at Hexagon or do internships. This issue also arises when people are encouraged to report illegal sub-letting.

Q11 It was noted that witnesses may be involved or concerned for the persons being abused e.g. a neighbour or shop manager. It was suggested that a professional body could support them, as reporting or witnessing may have a mental or physical impact on them. How would this person be helped?

JH: When a phone call is received, Customer Services find out what the call is about before the person speaks to the Housing Officer. This could be a problem and we needed to consider how we could manage this.

Could we consider a dedicated phone number for confidential reporting, as in other associations?

JH said that she would look into this.

A member was concerned that there was no clear link on the website to contact Hexagon about domestic abuse, but if closely observed was somewhere at the end of the website. Is someone going to dig for this information if they are suffering from trauma?

JH: Once we have the policy sorted and agreed then everything follows from that, and we can get the website sorted out. Hadn't looked at the website to see what it said.

Q12 Could we preview the leaflet for the residents before it goes out to them?

JH noted this.

Q13 Domestic Abuse includes financially controlling behaviour. Will the financial inclusion team also receive training?

JH confirmed that they would.

BH: The training will be available to front line staff, i.e. staff that work directly with residents. The financial inclusion officer will also be included.

Q14 A suggestion was made that since JH's position was not finalised, that it would be useful to have one person to approach, in order to ensure there was continuity, if information was requested about the policy. This would ensure that whoever was responsible, should be able to answer any questions.

JH: Clarified that she was not an expert in this area, but had enough information. She recognised two other senior officers were probably more experienced than herself. She raised concerns about being reluctant to name them in the policy as Hexagon could not commit that they would be available at any specific time, if someone were to call in to report an incident. She suggested that the first point of contact might be the Housing Officer, as they would be the ones to discuss the safety aspects with the person and if they felt it was needed would seek advice from someone senior.

A further comment was made that, taking into consideration this may not be her area, it would be best if Hexagon had one specialist person on this policy, so that for future presentations the person would have clear knowledge about the policy.

She stressed how frustrating it was when told many times that they do not know something, or will need to find out. This seems to be the culture in Hexagon from the past and is still continuing at present.

JH said she would take on board all of our points and redraft the policy. She reminded us that the training would start in two weeks' time. The revising of the policy would be delayed until the training was completed, as the trainer had said the policy was good enough. She stressed if they thought it needed revising then they would address this.

JH was thanked by the Forum for attending, and left the meeting.

It was agreed that:

JH would send an updated version of the Domestic Abuse policy to the forum members with the suggestions which arose out of the meeting.

JH would send the Forum a draft of the Domestic Abuse leaflet to look at and comment on.

JH would update the website by ensuring it was updated with the new Domestic Abuse policy once it was completed.

Answers to be emailed back to BH to forward onto the Forum.

#### 4. Resident Involvement Review from Andrew Green (AG)

The Chair asked for comments:

RF member - The Review arose from comments made in the June board meeting. We have a responsibility to go back to the Board with a review work plan. It is an opportunity to share our thoughts. We need to show how each item will impact residents.

PT said there are steps we can take to be more productive and efficient. There is a good sense of a team in this Forum. He thanked the Vice Chairs for their support and hoped that everyone would feel willing and able to join in to consolidate the Forum.

Part of what is needed is to clarify the information in our documents. At the Awayday he will offer visual guides to help us all understand what we are working on.

VO voiced her approval of PT's concept maps, noting that they would be able to incorporate ideas mentioned by SM and other members.

VO: There is an expectation from the Board & RI that everything should be communicated through the Chair. One member stressed that this is not always possible.

BH: Not all dialogue has to go through the Board, but key areas we'd expect to come through the Chair would be:

Agenda setting

Chair-approved draft minutes for circulation to the Board.

RF member - draft minutes should not go to the Board. The recommendation made by solicitors, who were employed at residents' expense, was explicitly that RF Minutes which had not been approved by the whole RF should not be circulated to the Board.

Dates will be set for a meeting between AG, and the RF Chair & Vice Chairs to discuss our responses to the Review. these will be forwarded to the Forum members, should they wish those attending to convey their thoughts.

BH clarified that the plan was Hexagon's suggestions for the Forum to agree the action plan. He suggested that we may like to vary this with reference to the meeting with AG, where we might like to involve a wider base of officers. He stressed the review was not set in stone, and that if there were any amendments then this meeting would be the good time to do this.

There was a need to be mindful that of such things as having prompt minutes and the agenda, He reminded the Forum that training is on track for this. We will continue to record all meetings.

It was recognised that there was a need to make clear proposals at meetings and that all members should be encouraged to do so, in order to go to the board.

RF members are all voluntary; it would be helpful if there was more understanding from the Board if Minutes are not completed in time for the Board Meeting.

We are working towards become more efficient in our roles slowly and it will take time.

A suggestion was made to put a key at the back of the minutes to show what we are proposing.

We should be able to send draft minutes to the board, as long as they clearly understand that is the draft minutes they are getting.

The Chair asked if there were any objections:

RF member didn't feel we had been involved fully in this process. If we are really going to work together, then why have we not been invited to jointly write the recommendations with BH and AG?

RF member - if the purpose of the meeting is to make a decision on the recommendation, then she needs more time.

BH - this action plan was drawn from the policy that was agreed at the board, so the recommendation was taken from that policy. The board have asked for this workplan to come back to them at their January meeting, with an update so the progress column would need to be filled in, before returning to the board. He advised that changes can be made.

It was agreed that:

The Forum would send in their comments to the recommendations by AG by Friday 29th September.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting, 21st June 2017

The minutes were formally agreed.

6. Matters arising from previous minutes

VO noted that PD had sent questions on behalf of the Forum, and David Collick replied this was circulated to Forum members. David is going to compile questions and answers for the website. He was supposed to email it to the Forum, but we have not received this as yet.

VO suggested that this be followed up by BH, to which he agreed.

Matters Arising 3

BH to contact David to find out when this outstanding item will be completed and to feedback to the Forum at the next meeting.

Matters Arising 4

BH confirmed no emails were received relating to the Residents Involvement policy.

Matters Arising 5

Two people had confirmed that they would be happy to join the working party for the organisation of the AGM. They are VO, OM and JW.

Matters Arising 9

PT and PD confirmed they would be happy to volunteer to work on the Home news articles.

BH presented the Chair with the Home news cut off dates for submission of items. The VC asked for these to be emailed to the forum email address for all members.

BH to circulate the dates for the Home news and the dates for the board meeting to all members.

Matters Arising 11

VO asked BH if the Corporate plan had been circulated to the Forum BH had not he didn't think there were any changes from the draft.

Brian to send the forum the final copy of the Corporate plan.

7. Feedback from Phoenix Housing Association - KS

Exploring Other HAs

It's crucial that we the Forum connect with other tenants and residents, both within Hexagon, and with those in other HAs. As mentioned at our last meeting, PD and I spent a very informative day at a conference hosted by our neighbours, Phoenix HA & run by TPAS.

TPAS are a not-for-profit organisation, working with both tenants and landlords, supporting them in working together effectively. Connecting with other organisations means we're able to learn from

their good practice, to find out what really works, helping us to save time and be more effective in communications with our own residents.

While it's important that we get to grips with policies, strategies and issues pertinent to Hexagon, it's also vital that we keep abreast of the wider political landscape and changes in national policies affecting social housing. Joining TPAS can help us do this.

KS proposed that the RF join TPAS at a cost of £100.

Discussion re membership cost: KS will confirm TPAS membership cost is £100. If it is not possible for the RF to join as a Resident Group, then we will need to revisit higher membership cost for Hexagon as a whole at our next RF meeting.

Proposed that RF request Hexagon to pay for RF membership to TPAS at £100.

Decision: the Forum took a vote, 7 agreed, 1 abstention.

Due to insufficient time, the presentation about Phoenix HA was omitted.

KS proposed that we invite two people from Phoenix Housing Association to our next meeting in October, to share their experience of communicating and involving residents.

7 agreed 1 abstention.

Kate to invite a resident and staff member from Phoenix Housing Association.

#### 8. Away Day Proposal

KS: There is no date as yet but the forum will be notified as soon as possible.

#### 9. Board minutes report back

MB had attended the board meeting and requested the feedback be sent by email to all Forum members.

#### Matters Arising 14

VO - To send the feedback to all forum members by email.

VO - To email highlighted points from the Board meeting minutes for Forum members to read

She reminded members that we need to consider incorporating a section in our pre-meeting to discuss certain items and accept certain information from these minutes, to help us with the aims of the Forum.

#### 10. A.O.B

A suggestion was made to have a look at Octavia Housing Association because they thought they were similar to our association in the number and the make-up.

KS: the point was to look at other housing associations and not just Phoenix.

PT: KS was researching this Housing Association from a Resident Involvement point of view because it has a glowing record for performance. Octavia being the same size was irrelevant.

PT introduced trial Facebook and Twitter accounts, offered as a way of communicating with residents.

Observers to the next Board meeting: to be confirmed.

Next meeting Wednesday 25th October 2017

Chair ended the meeting at 9:20pm.