

## **Together with Tenants**

### **Hexagon Housing Association's response to the NHF's consultation document.**

Hexagon Housing owns and manages over 4000 general needs homes in South-East London. This includes a diversity of tenures including leasehold, supported housing and a Co-op housing as well as general needs. We take pride in providing high quality services to our customers, and are committed to continuously improving our services. We are committed to raising the quality of our services and putting residents at the heart of what we do.

Hexagon welcomes the proposals from the NHF. Having a strong, balanced relationship with our residents has always been integral to Hexagon's mission. However it is clear that the time is right for us to revisit this relationship, and look at ways we and other Housing Associations can better meet these aspirations.

This response reflects the views of Hexagon Housing Association. There will be separate response developed by a group of our involved residents to the questions for residents and tenants. In addition via our website we have invited our residents more generally to take part in the consultation.

In response to the consultation questions;

**1) Do you think the four actions in the draft plan (accountability in the Code of Governance, creation of new tenants charter, give residents oversight of the charter, and link this more closely to regulation) are the right actions?**

We value the voice and experience of our residents, and aim to be accountable to our residents. Currently we achieve this through a number of different routes. Residents make up 4 places on our Board of 12. We consult residents around strategy and policy, and are accountable around operational performance. We await the detailed proposals around the changes to the Code of Governance; however we are in principle supportive of the idea.

We are supportive of the creation of a new charter and have made observations on the specific aspects below. However we believe that charters in themselves don't deliver change. The commitments within them need to be measurable, and linked to the wider regulatory framework if they are to be more than warm words across the sector.

Resident oversight is key to the success of any Charter. If there is a significant difference between the Housing Associations self-assessment and the lived

experience of its residents the Charter will lack credibility. This needs to be achieved however in a way this is efficient and robust.

Closer link to regulation is essential. In our response to the Housing Green Paper we expressed our support for there being a greater focus on the Consumer Standards.

Leaseholders, either shared owners or those who have fully staircased or purchased through the Right to Acquire are important customers for us. We believe the proposals should embrace them, either within the charter or as part of a stand-alone charter.

## **2) Does the Together with Tenants Charter cover the rights areas?**

The areas covered by the charter appear reasonable, and are things that any good landlord would aspire to. The challenge will be around measuring ourselves in a transparent way against these aspirations. We noted with interest the ideas for 'what' and 'how' in Appendix A of the consultation document. In some areas we do have existing robust measures that could readily demonstrate compliance with the Charter. For example the ideas suggested for 'Every tenant and resident has the right to a decent, safe home, and a good quality of service' are reasonable and achievable. However the suggestions against 'Every tenant and resident has the right to be treated with respect' would seem to fall short of the charter's aspiration and demonstrating compliance will be challenging across the sector.

## **3) Is there anything missing from the charter that you feel your residents have a right to expect from you?**

The consultation is titled 'Together with tenants.' Like many Housing Associations we have a growing group of leasehold residents. The issues of Grenfell could easily apply to leaseholders as well as tenants. Whether the leasehold experience is embraced in a single charter, or in a parallel document we felt it should be captured.

Though implicit in many of the proposed commitments a separately articulated commitment around diversity and delivering services that reflect the diverse needs of residents would be valuable.

## **4) Do you have any suggestions for how the wording of the charter could be improved or made clearer?**

We don't have any particular comments on the wording, other than those implied above, that commitments need to be measurable in a meaningful and reasonably transparent way if they are going to be used to build trust.

## **5) Do you agree that tenants and residents should have a role on reporting on your housing association's performance against the charter? Do you have any suggestions for how this could work in practice?**

Resident oversight of the charter will be essential if it is to have credibility. Hexagon currently has a number of scrutiny strands that provide reporting to our Board and Executive. Many of the areas of the charter could be evaluated in a similar way. However this dependent on the measures for compliance being clear, agreed and measurable.

**6) Do you agree that tenant and resident oversight should link to regulation?**

As described above we are supportive of there being a greater emphasis on the consumer standards in the regulatory regime. We would certainly see the threshold for regulatory intervention being lowered from 'serious detriment.' The quality of resident oversight should form a part of the Housing Association's evidence of compliance with the standards. We would suggest that how this is achieved is kept flexible to reflect the different Governance structures that exist across the sector.

**7) Do you have any further comments or suggestions to make on linking tenant and resident oversight for performance to regulation?**

Our residents have responsibilities as well as rights. We believe the charter should reflect this, and reference the reasonable expectations a Housing Association can have to those we serve. proposals do need to be flexible enough to reflect the diversity of the sector.

We are working with our residents on their response to the consultation ' questions for tenants and residents'.

**8) Size**

Hexagon Manages between 1,000 and 5,000 homes.