

Together with Tenants

Residents from Hexagon Housing Association present their response to the NHF's consultation document.

Hexagon Housing Association owns and manages over 4,000 homes in South-East London. A group of involved Hexagon residents met to consider their response to the questions for residents, which was captured at an especially convened focus group. Their response is submitted alongside the response submitted by Hexagon.

In response to the consultation questions for tenants and residents;

1) Do you think the four actions outlined in this draft plan are the right actions?

The resident's focus group felt that housing associations will need to ensure that their policies are linked to the charter to ensure that what is specified in the charter is delivered. The group felt that the actions were achievable, but they would need strong oversight by residents and housing associations alike. Publicity is important, and residents would need to know what the charter entails and what commitments that their landlord has made to deliver on the charter.

2) Does the Together with Tenants Charter cover the right issues?

The resident's focus group felt that the charter needed to be more detailed because as it stands the commitments in it are far too vague. All the commitments raised in the charter could be better illustrated by giving specific examples about specific cases so that residents can understand how the charter applies in practice.

An annual assessment should be carried out by residents on delivering against the charter, however this can only be done if correct data is provided by the landlord. For this to work a lot of investment and time is needed on the part of the landlord to ensure that the correct and meaningful data, reflective of the resident's experience, is what is provided.

The focus group also suggested that estate or area based information could be provided on how the landlord is performing against the charter, as this would make it more relevant to residents.

Additionally, for the charter to work it cannot just be landlords that sign up to deliver on the commitments; it must also filter down to contractors working on behalf of the landlords to deliver on these commitments too.

3) Is there anything missing from the charter that you feel you have the right to expect from your housing association?

The focus group felt that there needs to be specific reference to diversity issues, recognising the diverse needs of residents.

Communication is not mentioned as a commitment in the charter and the focus group felt that this needs to be included though out the charter.

“Safe home” which is mentioned in the charter need to be elaborated on and made clearer because this term will mean different things to different people.

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

The resident’s focus group felt that the whole charter was far too vague. It needs to be written in plain English and also specify what each commitment means to residents in a relevant way. This could be enhanced by the landlord producing videos to explain about the charter which it could then host on its website.

The use of the word “right” in terms of peoples’ rights usually has a legal context. It implies that “rights” can be enforced. However there’s no mention of how “rights” in the charter can be enforced. And how would residents expect their “rights” to be enforced when the charter is seen as a voluntary commitment for landlords?

5) Do you agree that tenants and residents should have a role in reporting on housing associations’ performance against the charter?

The focus group agreed that this was needed and recommended that this should be done by a separate resident’s involvement group rather than being added to existing residents scrutiny activities. It should be resident led and reported to the regulators and the Board of the landlord.

Joint working between landlords should be encouraged as a way of benchmarking performance on the charter.

Residents need to be informed of how and where issues can be raised and addressed where they feel their landlord is not meeting the plans outlined in the charter.

Finally, there needs to be a clear structure around how landlord performance against the charter is measured and reported, together with a possible guidance from the National Housing Federation on how this should look like in practice.

6) Do you agree that tenant and resident oversight of the charter should have a role in regulation, including providing evidence to the Regulator of Social Housing where relevant?

The focus group felt strongly that there is a role for scrutiny of the charter but it has to be different to current scrutiny activities around service delivery. Consideration should also be given to allow every resident to have the chance to feedback on how their landlord is doing against the charter.

Again, benchmarking with other landlords is important because residents would be able to assess how well their landlord is doing compared to others

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

The focus group felt that the charter shouldn't be a voluntary undertaking. The Federation needs to emphasise that if its members have signed up to the charter that they act within its parameters.

The charter can be most effective by being embedded into standard working practices of the landlord and embraced within the roles of its officers.

Ends